

Morningsong

Chapter Seventeen:

1. Adam has decided that Mona needs “time to focus on family, to be alone with God.” But he longed to talk to her. “His finger hovered over her speed-dial number a dozen times a day, indecision tearing at him...”

Are there times when it is good to give people space? Are there times when it is more important to break the silence? Ask the person what he or she wants? How do you decide?

2. Construction work is going on next door to Mona’s store, and she wishes she could escape the pounding and the noise. But it is her home, and there is no escape.

Is there something that goes on in your home you’d like to escape – but can’t? How do you deal with it?

3. Harold wants Mona to head to the beach house for some time alone while he gets to know Ellen a little better. She worries he’s doing too much. But he tells her, “I guess you should tell you the truth after all. It’s a gift to me to have your sister and Hallie coming. That’s the part you don’t see. They can’t get here too soon, as far as I’m concerned.”

Sometimes we think people need us to do more than they actually do. In the process we can take away two gifts – the gift of time we might have given ourselves, and the gift of joy others feel by giving or doing for others.

Are you able to let go and let others give and do things for you?

4. We don’t always know how people feel inside about the things they want to give and do. Did it surprise you that Harold was so anxious to have Ellen and Hallie come? Is there anyone in your life whose feelings you may not truly understand?

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5. We are beginning to realize as the book continues that Harold is ill with something others do not expect. But he is busily doing God's work anyway, and at the end of chapter seventeen "The sounds of pounding echoed above his head, and he smiled."

What kind of strength does it take to live days full of joy and meaningful work despite any circumstance? Read Philippians 4:11-13 as you consider your answer.

6. Where are you on that kind of joy journey? Are you better in some circumstances than others?

7. Pick one circumstance in your life where you would like to have joy and contentment. Write it down and decide on some steps you can take to move in that direction.

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Chapter Eighteen:

1. Teenaged Hallie has a lot of insight when it comes to her aunt and her mother. She watches both of them as they struggle with their personal issues. Hallie says, "This entire family is crazy, and it appears I'm stuck with them for the rest of my life."

Do you ever feel this way about your family? Have you seen God do a work in your family, even in their "craziness?"

2. We are all difficult to someone. Read Romans 8:14-28, keeping in mind that you are God's child and so is everyone else. Now think about these questions. Is someone "difficult" for you? Would anyone say you are difficult? Why? Is there anything you should consider working on?

3. Hallie continues her conversation with God, saying, "Okay, God, I said I am only giving her fifteen minutes, and I meant it. So this will have to be short. I figure it's Your fault I'm awake, so You were probably hoping to hear from me."

Do you think God has ever awakened you in the night because He wants to hear from you? If so, is it possible that is the only time He is able to get your attention? Why or why not?

4. Thinking He wants to talk with her, Hallie says, "I'd tell you how messed up my family is, except I know You know. You watch us mess Your world up every day and know what we're going to do before we even do it, but You love us anyway. Learning You were that kind of God kind of blew my mind – knowing You know how much I hurt inside and actually care about me. Mostly I'd thought You were like my dad, in some far off place, occasionally picking up a cell phone when You were really more interested in everything else in the universe."

How do you imagine God in His relationship with you? Read Isaiah 55 for a taste of the truth about God's love for you. Write God's promises in these Scriptures with God speaking to you directly by name as His child.

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5. What has made you shape your view of God? Is it an accurate view as far as you know? Why or why not?

6. Read Isaiah 43:1-4 and think about your answer in question 5. Does your answer sound like the God in this Scripture? Why or why not?

7. Hallie continues her talk with God, saying, “So for the past few days, You’ve locked me in a stare-down, and I guess You’ve won. Pastor Cunningham tells me I’m learning early what it means to love like You – to keep giving to imperfect people when they break your heart. I thought forgiveness was something I was going to do once, but I guess the truth is that it means that every day I have to die to a thousand things in myself. I don’t get to live my own life anymore.”

What do you think it means to “die to a thousand things in myself”?

How do you think dying to a thousand things in yourself relates to forgiveness?

8. Mona wonders alone, “But why had God let her live and taken Stacy, a child? It was a question that had exhausted Mona’s thoughts on sleepless nights and had stalked her in waking hours, overtaking her at the sight of a mother and daughter or at the sound of a child’s laughter.”

Sometimes we must admit we can’t figure out God. So what do we hold onto? What do we do?

9. Mona continues talking with God, “It’s brought me here – to my knees, to a wrenching awareness of how desperate I am without You. The pain has shown me who I am when You tear

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away the trappings of my self-sufficiency, and it's ugly, Father. You knew it was ugly all along, and maybe that's why You loved me enough to bring me here."

Do you believe God lets us get to places in our lives in order to take away trappings like self-sufficiency? If so, are there any trappings God works on in you? What are they? How hard are they to face?

10. Mona was "sorry she struggled to be thankful, to embrace the good things she'd overlooked in the pain and the gift of the pain itself."

Are you able to see pain as a gift? Why or why not? Have you experienced this in your life?

11. The chapter ends with Mona taking comfort that no matter what the outcome of her walk to the pier she knew "God knew her heart..."

Are you able to take comfort that whatever happens, whatever anyone thinks, God knows your heart? Why or why not? How could believing this help you in difficult circumstances?

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Chapter Nineteen:

1. Hallie finds her late grandfather's diaries, and decides to search for some clues as to why her mom struggles so much. She searches the pages on and around the day her mother was born. The pages are blank. "The truth hit, in phrases and images and in the things not written as much as in the things she read. The words that had been too painful for her mother to ever speak. She'd never heard her say them. Yet the truth was there."

Is there pain in your family passed down from another generation? Is that pain yours? Whether yours or that of another family member, describe it.

2. Can you develop a deeper understanding – and possibly compassion – as you look into the reasons for someone's behavior? Does understanding of it excuse it? Why or why not?

3. Read Exodus 20:6. How do you think this Scripture could apply to the generational pain of sin?

4. Hallie reads on and realizes "Her grandfather had looked for strength at the bottom of a bottle. He'd never found it. Anger spilled off the pages – anger and emptiness."

Ellen must have seen this in her father. Why do you think she ended up taking the same path? What could change this cycle?

5. Mona is drawn to the tower at Gilead to pray. Is there a place that draws you? Where do you go to be alone? Where do you go to be with God? Is there more than one place?

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6. Mona tells her friend Dan, “Our family could use another man of God praying for us right now.”

Does it help you when you know someone is praying for you?

7. Mona marvels at her young friend Dan and his spiritual depth and decisions. “She couldn’t help but think his mother was blessed.”

Have you ever felt like other people have families that seem more spiritual than yours? Have you wondered why some kids are “good” and some are not? Is it parenting? Wiring? Other? How must we react, whether the circumstances are ours or someone else’s?

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Chapter Twenty:

1. As Ellen left rehab she “had made up her mind to be positive about going to Stewartville. Grateful, even. She knew real gratitude would be hard work. She was used to the other kind — superficial smiles and trivial phrases that rolled off her tongue. It had been a long time since she’d felt gratitude for anything real. But fourteen days at Fairhaven had tweaked her perspective on a few things.”

Read Psalm 25 and write what you think God is revealing to us through King David about being humble and being grateful.

2. Ellen realizes, “As the days had unfolded and other people’s stories had surfaced, glimmers of gratitude had poked through to the surface of Ellen’s soul. The counselors had fanned them, but they’d been blunt. As long as she saw herself as a victim, she’d continue to live as a victim.”

What does this mean? Is there a personal meaning for you?

3. Ellen realizes, “Running from the truth had been destroying her. And the only way to face the truth would be to face herself, change or die trying.”

Are you running from any truth? Is there anything you need to face? Or have you in the past? Describe your situation and how it did – or could – change you by facing it.

4. Ellen “...chose change in tiny steps...” Is it possible to choose change in tiny steps? Are there times when large steps – or a combination of tiny and large steps is appropriate?

Is there anything in your life where some changes need to be made? How will you make them?

5. As Ellen prepares herself to stay with Harold after rehab she “...braced herself for the judgmental eyes and coldness of her father. She’d prepared herself for condescension and the

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veiled tolerance of a man hoping to prove his spirituality by taking in someone he could mold into an image of himself. She'd expected assessment and arrogance, but she was wrong."

Why do people see Christians in the way they do these days? Read what God has to say about how Christians should think and behave in Romans 12. Applying these Scriptures, how can we change the negative image of Christians today by making changes in ourselves?

6. After they arrive at Harold's, Hallie's friend Cara asks Ellen to play Christmas carols on the piano. Ellen agrees, saying, "I'm sure I'd have to work hard to play anything well, much less beautifully, but I'm willing to try. That's the reason I'm in Stewartville. I'm here to learn how to do things better after a long time of doing them lousy."

Can people really change? If so, how do they do it?

7. Mona, the aunt who loves her niece so much and often worries about what will happen to her realizes, "God had given Hallie a true friend, someone willing to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with her and help pull her through the hard times."

Read Proverbs 18:24. Is there someone you know who could use a friend like that? Do you need a friend like that? Ask God for a friend for yourself or someone you care about. Write your prayer below.
