

Morningsong

Chapter Twenty-one:

1. Ellen’s behavior has changed dramatically since leaving rehab. She “had gone to church without comment, not even insisting that they sit in the back row...and she had offered an actual smile...”

Read Isaiah 43:18, 19. New things are being done in Ellen’s life. There is a way being made for her in the desert. She hasn’t quite fully committed herself to God yet. Do you believe God is committed to her? Why or why not?

2. Amazed by the changes occurring around her, Mona begins to compile a list of praises.

Sometimes when circumstances around us seem to be changing faster than we can keep up it is helpful to “put ourselves on solid ground” by thanking God for His blessings. Read Philippians 4:4-9, then write a list of some of your blessings on the lines below.

3. “God had stirred things while Ellen was at Fairhaven, and she could see the changes – changes in Ellen and changes in Hallie. They were small things, really, like the effort she saw in Hallie’s eyes as she made polite conversation with her mother...”

Hallie is guarding her heart. This is not a bad thing when someone who has hurt you is in the early stages of recovering and reaching out to you. Proverbs 4:23 says, “Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.”

What do you think the process for learning to trust and letting down some of the walls guarding our hearts should be? Have you encountered this experience in your life?

4. Sometimes change is counted by days or even hours. Are you able to take your thanks to God down to that level? Describe a situation in which you did this or are doing this now.

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5. Ellen has planned a special trip with Mona, with the things Mona loves in mind. But Ellen is so used to being afraid of rejection of others she immediately assumes Mona doesn't like the idea. She throws up a defense wall and tries to protect herself from the sting she thinks is coming by saying, "Oh please. And why would you want to be with me? You've spent most of your life embarrassed that we're in the same family..."

Is there someone who has misjudged you when you had good intentions? Have you misjudged someone? How could Mona have avoided this misunderstanding by getting more information before drawing a conclusion? Read Proverbs 18:13 and apply this Scripture to your answer.

6. "We're here because I'm starting over, and I need to say that to people around me and draw a line in the sand. I need to make a fresh start somehow, and you're the first person I've chosen to do that with. I'm scared to death to walk back into my daughter's life and try to figure out how to start all over in a town where everybody knows your business. But I have to try, and I have to come home to do it...and I'm asking you to help me.

When we make big changes in our lives we understand what has happened inside us. But others don't have the benefit of looking inside of our hearts and minds. Instead, it takes people time to accept the changes in us as real. Have you experienced a big change in your life or in someone else's life? What was it like?

7. Mona knows how good and powerful God is. She wants to share God with Ellen right away. But Ellen is not ready for that. Ellen says, "Maybe we could work our way up to the God things later, Mona. I can't go there now."

Do you think it is okay to work up to "God things" gradually? Why or why not?

8. Hallie thinks she knows her mom very well. She assumes her mom must despise Harold's home and everything in it because they are not good enough. But she is beginning to be baffled by her mother's acceptance of a new life.

How well do we really know our mothers? Do we see them as individuals, or our view of them as "mom?" How do you see your mother? Has she surprised you?

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9. Ellen is out, and Mona wonders how she would handle it if Ellen slipped and started drinking. “It would be naïve to think that Ellen’s walk into sobriety would be an easy one – for Ellen, for Hallie, for Harold, for any of them.”

How could Mona prepare herself for a possible slip up by Ellen and still encourage and support Ellen’s recovery?

10. Mona takes her moments while Ellen is out to pray. “Father, help me learn how to love her...Give me the vision to see who she is in You...” Read John 15:9-17. How can we learn from Jesus’ example of love?

Do you believe God can help you love someone? Why or why not? Is there someone you could love more? Ask God to help you and see what happens.

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Chapter Twenty-two:

1. Harold remembers the joyful way his wife and daughter felt about God. “They’d both believed God had hung the moon in the sky because people needed beauty beyond what they could reach to give them hope and dreams. Minnie had found that beauty in God, even after the cancer had come.” Their faith was a joy and a strength to them, just as God longs for it to be for each of His children.

Read Isaiah 26:8, 9. Do you see God this way?

2. In making quiet plans for his future Harold marvels how the details have come together. “God wasted nothing – a prayer, a word, a chord of melody.”

Sometimes well-intentioned people use the Scripture Romans 8:28 as a “quick and simple answer for those who are suffering. But the Scripture is meant to reach us in a much deeper, personal way. Read Romans 8:28 and recall a time when God used a situation for good in His work and your life.

3. Mona is still continuing to learn about the changes in Ellen. For so many years Mona could predict Ellen’s behavior, and she has misjudged her sister based on her history. Ellen responds to Mona’s assumptions, saying “Tonight you’re going your way and I’m going mine, and in the morning we’ll see who owes who the apology.”

It is hard to let our old experiences with others go, particularly if they have been bad. Is there anyone in your life who has changed for the better or for the worse? How are you responding to the change?

4. Have you ever made a dramatic change in your life and found yourself frustrated when others didn’t see the “new you” right away? If so, what was the change, and how did you handle the reactions of others?

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5. Adam had been waiting for the right time to tell Mona he loved her. And it had taken a lot of mental, emotional, and prayerful processing. “He cradled her face in his hands, and he knew the time was right. “Because I love you fiercely, devotedly, totally, and I couldn’t live another week without telling you.”

There comes a point when we “just gotta say it.” Is there something you have been waiting to say? What is stopping you?

6. Mona has been in a bit of denial about her feelings after her accident. “Whether or not I wanted to admit it, I was angry and bitter after my accident. I let my battered body and my complicated life define who I was. I let myself believe I was damaged goods.”

Is there something in your life you would rather not face? Are you in denial? Do you believe you are damaged goods? Why? What can you do to change your outlook?

7. As she begins to see herself more like God sees her, Mona begins to have a more positive perspective on the future, saying, “...I’m passionately committed to becoming the woman God created me to be, even when I know I sometimes mess things up.”

Could you honestly say you are passionately committed to becoming the woman God created you to be? Why or why not? Can you accept that you will not be perfect on this earth? What is your plan for beginning ?

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Chapter Twenty-three:

1. As the chapter begins, Harold has asked her to help him quietly as he prepares his future arrangements. Ellen is initially overwhelmed, having just come from rehab, and not feeling very strong yet.

Could helping Harold help Ellen grow stronger? Why or why not?

2. Ellen's tears begin to flow as she considers Harold's request. "When her tears came, they were tears for Stacy and Phil and her father and Lynn and Minnie and for all the pain she knew she'd never understand. But beneath the grief, peace beckoned in gentle whispers."

Pain can be stored up in us like garbage needing to be taken out. Many of us are so "strong" that we refuse to take out or pain, grieve, and heal. Is there pain inside of you that needs to be taken out? Pray about your answer, then write it below.

3. For a long time now Ellen has been receiving anonymous notes that tell her she is being prayed for. She is surprised to find out the person is not Mona. "She reached for the notebook that sat in the center of the table beneath Harold's Bible and flipped it open. Her eyes scanned names and notations as she thumbed for an empty page. She spotted her name and her eyes froze. It was followed by a Bible verse, then Hallie's name and another verse."

Who are you praying for? Who is praying for you? In either case, it is important to be intentional in both praying for others, and knowing that others are praying for you. Read Galatians 6:2 and Galatians 6:9. Think about how the Scripture applies to lifting others and their struggles up to God. Then write the people you will commit to pray for on the lines below. In addition to those names, write the names of at least two people you will ask to pray for you consistently.

4. Even as we grow most of us slip into old "security" patterns from time to time. Ellen has a bottle of vodka in the basement after she left rehab as a security measure in case she thought she needed it. But Hallie discovers it and springs her discover on Ellen in a surprise statement as she turns to leave the room. Ellen cries after her, "Stop! Please stop. Hallie, can we talk for just one minute? Go put down whatever you're trying to hide, just please don't walk away."

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Ellen has chosen to make herself vulnerable instead of defensive. She has chosen to be humble instead of prideful. Read Ephesians 4:1-8 and apply the Scripture to the questions that follow.

How good are you with vulnerability and humility when an occasion calls for it? Think honestly and write your answer below.

5. Related to the question above, when someone else becomes vulnerable and humble in a situation involving you, how do you respond? If another person is defensive or prideful how do you respond?

6. “Ellen hadn’t been able to take her eyes off her daughter as she spoke. She searched for words that could somehow convey the enormity of the shame and failure that clawed at her—something profound or memorable or sincere enough to express the flood of remorse coursing through her, but she knew nothing she could say could measure up to the pain she’d inflicted on her daughter.”

Shame is a powerful emotion. It is used by Satan to accuse us long after God has forgiven us. Is there something you are ashamed of from your past? Are there constant memories reminding you and “shaming you?” Read Hebrews 10:5-18. Apply this Scripture as you write those “shaming memories” below, and decide whether God has forgiven you or not. If He has, whose voice continues to shame you?

7. Harold has now reached the stage where he is hospitalized and in his final hours. Mona struggles inside herself. “How had she missed it? How had she been so blind to a loved one slipping away right before her eyes?”

There are times when our loved ones don’t want us to see something that is going on in their lives, and they hide it for reasons of their own, as Harold did. Mona may not have seen what was happening because Harold didn’t want her to. Is there anyone who has died or made decisions in his or her life you feel you “should have seen?” Is it possible the person did not want you to?

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Chapter Twenty-four:

1. As she recounts Harold's past few months, Mona wonders at how life can change so quickly. She thinks about her own life and health. Her doctor had called to tell her "he suspected (she) might be having TIAs and he was worried that (her) brain was warming up for a stroke."

Harold chose not to stop living just because he was facing dying. Have you ever considered how you would respond if God chose to let you or someone you love pass away before you felt ready? Write how you think you would choose to respond (or have responded) below.)

2. Related to the question above, if you have not responded in the way you would like to the death of a loved one, write how you would like to change your response from here on out.

3. Harold knew his illness was terminal, and that painful treatments would not end the outcome. "He chose to shorten his stay with us by a few months because he knew the price of the struggle."

Do you agree or disagree with Harold's decision? Why?

4. Whether Harold chose treatment or let his illness take its course a little quicker he still needed to get his life in order and make his final arrangements for the sake of those he loved. Is there anything you need to do to be ready for any moment God might call you home? Decide on a plan and write it below, with a date to act on it.

5. Ellen had slipped and was drinking a little. She had found it was just too much to handle on her own, and decided to go back to Fairhaven for a while. Then, she thought, if she "came back from Fair Haven strong enough, a program like the one at church would be the extra hand she'd need. And maybe people in Stewartville, in Greenville, alma, Middleton, and Stanton could use an accountability group, too."

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Ellen is choosing to be accountable to others, then to help others when she is able. How do you think Ellen might be helped by helping others?

6. As the chapter ends, Mona finds “her prayers changed – no longer pleas for what God should be doing, but praise for what God had already done, was doing, and promised to do.”

Did you know that the Holy Spirit actually intercedes for us with the Father for needs and situations in our lives? And did you know you can ask Him to do just that when you aren’t sure what to pray? Read Romans 8:26, 27. Write a prayer asking the Holy Spirit to intercede for you regarding a situation that is weighing on your heart.

7. Finally, “Mona’s eyes began to open to new gifts that had surrounded her all along – even the gifts of sorrow and pain – and she began to weep.”

Have you experienced pain in your life that turned out to be a gift all along? Describe your gift below.

8. One of the central themes of this chapter is that we can trust God, even when things seem to be going very wrong. Read Proverbs 3:5, 6. Write this Scripture on the lines below or on an index card and place it where you will see it often.