

Morningsong

Chapter Five: Let's Talk About It:

1. Adam has fallen in love with Mona. It is sometimes scary for him because earlier in his life he lost his wife to terminal illness. His mind begins to wonder if there is something wrong with Mona that she isn't sharing. Doubtful ideas begin to set in. But Adam "refused to let the idea take root. Mona wasn't Julie."

Do you let your past experiences with others color your present experiences? Sometimes our experiences can be very helpful in judging the present. But sometimes our negative experiences lead only to fear and doubt that are not valid. Has there been an experience that has caused you to share less of yourself than you would like to if you weren't doubtful or afraid?

2. Adam surprises himself by thinking about Mona being with him *forever*. "The word carried weight. He'd tested his strength beneath it once before, and it had almost crushed him."

It can take great courage and faith to step out and risk being hurt again in order to love. If you have had a negative experience – even one with someone you are sharing life with now – can you find the courage and faith to conquer your fear? Could it be worth it?

3. In Adam's life "A lot had changed in the past three years since Julie had died, and a lot more since he'd met Mona. He hadn't seen any of it coming, the good or the bad. And as much as he'd planned in his life, God always seemed to come up with an alternate route, sending him down roads he'd never have chosen."

Adam's experience is not unique. God chooses many routes for us we had not planned on taking. Has this happened to you? Were you able to see His wisdom later? Read 1 Corinthians 2:9. Does this Scripture give you any guidance or comfort?

4. Despite his hesitancy to embrace it fully, Adam knew for weeks that he had come to love Mona. He knew "The time had come to face it or let it go."

Sometimes it seems easier to let the decisions in our lives hang in limbo instead of facing them. Have you struggled with making a big decision? What finally made you face it? Did you know that if you can ask the Holy Spirit to intercede for you to help you determine God's will? If you are unsure, or afraid to take action read Romans 8:27 and ask for help.

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Chapter Six: Let's Talk About It:

1. As the doctor spoke to Mona about Ellen's grave condition "new realizations pressed down until the weight of his words felt as if they would crush her to the floor." Thoughts of what *could* happen raced into her mind. But Mona knew "The only thing she could do was press ahead, to pray, wait, and give whatever strength she had to her sister and to Hallie."

It is not always easy to "decide" to press ahead, pray, wait and give for the sake of others. Can you think of a time when you were able to respond that way? Where did you find the strength and resolve to do it? Philippians 3:7-14 offers encouragement and inspiration for anyone facing a spiritual struggle. Read these verses and see if they can help you in any way at this time, whether you are facing big things or small things.

2. As the doctor continues to speak to Mona she grows impatient and speaks tersely to him. She quickly apologizes, and later prays, "Dear God, I'm lashing out at people who are trying to help, and this has barely started. Where's the strength I'm supposed to feel? Hallie needs me, Ellen needs me, and I barely have strength to stand on my own."

Does this prayer sound familiar to you? When have you had to face something that made you feel drained of all strength when it had just begun? How did you handle it? Are you facing something now? King David faced many struggles, and left us inspired words of God to help us. Read Psalm 21. Write part or all of these words on a card and memorize them this week.

3. Mona must now tell Ellen's former husband what is happening. She doesn't expect him to act any differently than he has always acted. "Phil had always found a way to put himself first while parading in false benevolence."

Do you know someone like Phil? What do you do when you have to interact with that person?

4. Phil's "inability to truly care for his family had fired a rage so deep in Mona that she'd struggled to rein it in. For years, she'd told herself it was a righteous anger, that she was entitled to it. Then after Stacy's death, guilt had crushed her, and she'd struggled with her own desire to run, to shut down, to hide from pain. In those dark days, she'd found something of herself in Phil.

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Are you able to look for the deeper reasons for a person's negative choices? Can you do the same for some of the choices you have made? Are you able to have compassion, though not necessarily excuse, those choices made by you or others? Read 2 Chronicles 6:29-30 for some insight as you answer.

5. Mona wondered if someone had told her pastor about her feelings for Phil, because his message of forgiveness seemed to be spoken directly to her. She remembered his words: "Because of the Holy Spirit in us, we are never stripped of our power to care for others and the freedom to choose what to do with our anger. We're always called to forgive out of the forgiveness we've received."

Is there someone you know you must forgive? Write out the words of forgiveness you would speak to that person.

6. Mona was convicted of her anger and pride where Phil was concerned. But he laughed and turned away. She had to forgive him again for responding to her as he did.

People don't always respond in Godly – or even polite – ways. But in every situation, regardless of how someone responds, we must always live with ourselves. Are you able to act the way you believe God would want you to act, even if the person reacts in a negative way?

7. As Mona prepared to make her call to Phil she was forced to pray again. "God, You know sarcasm and a whole lot of other ugliness are on the tip of my tongue right now because You know every word I've already thought and will think."

God does know our every thought and motive. This can be a great comfort. It can also make us feel uncomfortable when we are tempted to sin. But it is not a sin to be tempted. When do our thoughts move from temptation to sin?

8. Mona said "...in the past fifteen minutes alone I've given God a hundred reasons to be too embarrassed to claim me, but for reasons that boggle my mind, He claims me even when I mess up."

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Have you felt that God would be too embarrassed to claim you? Do you believe He really does claim you as His own, even when you mess up? Isaiah 1:18 shows just how willing God is to forgive and restore His children when they turn back to Him for forgiveness. Read this Scripture and imagine God speaking to you in a gentle, loving voice. Confess your struggle to Him on the lines below, and follow your confession with words of thanks for forgiveness.

9. When Hallie finally speaks to her father she decides not to tell him what has happened. Instead she tells him she's helping with pie-baking, and only called to ask when he was coming home. He tells her, "Can't come home now, Hal. Everything I've worked for these past eight years at the company has brought me to Paris for these meetings....I shouldn't tell you this, but Heather's shopping for a Movado watch for you. How could it get any better than all that?"

It's obvious Hallie needs her father, and not a watch. What do you think is really going on in her father's mind as he relates – or doesn't relate – to his daughter?

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Chapter Seven: Let's Talk About It

1. Mona has mistakenly taken a call meant for her sister Ellen. She fails to identify herself immediately. Hearing this, Elsie advises Mona, "Woman, don't go playin' fast and loose with the truth. Call him back and set it straight. Keepin' secrets is the best way to tell someone they can't be trusted."

Is there a secret you need to set straight? Or has someone kept the truth from you, causing you to mistrust that person later?

2. Sometimes we hear accusations against us in our thoughts and they are not always the truth. Mona thinks she has deceived Adam, and feels guilty. Do you think she deceived him? What were her intentions? Revelations 12:10 says Satan stands accusing us day and night. Does he use this tool of doubt and destruction effectively on you? How?

3. Over the years Mona had built defenses against letting others get close to her. Many people build those defenses for a variety of reasons, including a past hurt, fear of getting hurt, and fear of the intensity of their own feelings. Do you think defenses are helpful? Do you have them?

4. It is clear by the long list of things she "had to do" that Mona was avoiding calling Adam to tell him the truth. In what ways does avoiding difficulty hurt us? Does it ever help us? What is your tendency – facing, or avoiding?

5. On the day Ellen came out of her coma Hallie chose to tell her how she really felt. She was honest about her anger and how Ellen's drinking had affected her. And she also told Ellen she loved her, but would not continue to enable her drinking by covering and cleaning up for her. In other words, Hallie followed through on the boundaries she had decided to set, and spoke the truth in love. What do you think of Hallie's choices?

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Ephesians 4:15 says that speaking the truth in love we will in all things grow up into Him who is the Head, that is, Christ. Are you able to speak the truth in love? How do you feel about boundaries?

6. Is there someone in your life who you enable to continue in a harmful behavior? Or is it possible that someone is enabling *you*? In either case, what should you do?

7. So many painful things had happened in Hallie's life. She began to feel anger and doubt about Who God really is. She considered whether or not He was a sadist or a liar, or someone who truly forgives people who screw up. Does God allow us to doubt and question Him as Hallie did? Have you had those same kinds of feelings about God?

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Chapter Eight: Let's Talk About It

1. Mona's love and care for Ellen is met with insecurity, jealousy and anger. Ellen even accuses Mona of taking advantage of the opportunity to "steal" her daughter. In doing so, Ellen tries to take the focus off of herself and place it on Mona and Hallie. Why do you think she would do this? Do you think she really believes the things she said to Mona?

2. Mona responds to Ellen with truth. Where Hallie was concerned, Mona asks, "Has it ever occurred to you, Ellen, that Hallie isn't another one of your possessions – that she isn't something you have – that people couldn't possibly take her away from you like cash from your wallet? Love doesn't work like that."

What does Mona mean when she says "people couldn't possibly take her away?"

3. When Hallie speaks to Mona she sounds somewhat disrespectful. She is also disobedient, and is making her own choices about where she is going and who she will be with. How should Mona deal with Hallie under these circumstances?

4. Hallie does not want to see her mother. She believes she has said all she wants and needs to say. Should the adults in her life insist upon her seeing Ellen? Why or why not?

5. In American culture older people are often discounted. Their advice is largely ignored. When Harold tells Mona he would like to talk to her and offer options and advice she is anxious to hear it. She glances at her father's diaries and realizes it has been a long time since she had an older man care about her. How do you perceive the wisdom of older people? Is there someone older in your life? What does God say about older people? Read Proverbs 1:1-9 as you answer.

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6. Things seem to be getting more and more messy for Mona. Now Adam has come to pick her up, and the truth is even more unclear. If you could advise Mona, what would you say?

7. Life for Mona, Hallie, and Ellen seems to be nearly impossible to navigate. If you were praying for each of them, what would you say in your prayers? Use Ephesians 3:14-21 as a guide for your prayers for them.
