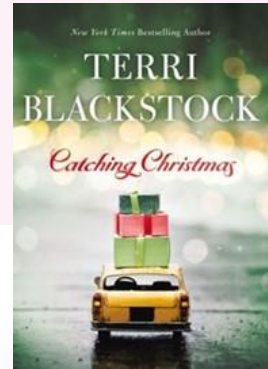




LEADER'S GUIDE

CATCHING CHRISTMAS BY TERRI BLACKSTOCK



"This time with Callie hasn't been wasted. My life is changed from knowing her. It's changed from knowing Sydney. It's changed from brushing against Jesus, who orchestrated a do-over for me."

FINN PARRISH

THEMES

Faith

Changing Perspective

Redemption

Happiness/Joy

Assumptions

HEADS UP! (TRIGGERS AND DELICATE TOPICS)

Death

CHARACTERS

Miss Callie is an elderly grandmother with one living relative; her granddaughter Sydney. Callie is a boisterous, fun-loving, and passionate Jesus follower. She lives her life through a lens of hope, joy, and faith.

Sydney Batson is a first-year law associate who is desperate to see her career thrive after accumulating immense debt and pouring countless hours of her life into this dream. Sydney struggles with the ethical dilemma of 'winning' the case and keeping her job versus doing what is right and losing everything, as well as the added burden of caring for her quickly fading elderly grandmother.

Finn Parrish is a cantankerous Cab driver. Struggling to make ends meet and holding onto pain and heartache from his past, he believes himself a coward. Living from this broken place, he unknowingly deprives himself of joy, healthy relationships, and many other good things.

STORYLINE

Cab driver Finn is unexpectedly stuck chaperoning an elderly, wheelchair-bound, Miss Callie around during the holiday period. Certainly, not the way he anticipated spending the holiday season, he simply cannot

refuse; after all, Miss Callie reminds him of his mother, whom he neglected in the final days of her life as he struggled to come to terms with his pain. Finn begrudgingly picks up Miss Callie day after day, anxious for an income to make ends meet - yet assuming, with her dementia, she will not even be able to pay the bills. At the same time, he wonders who on earth would neglect their elderly grandmother in this way. Miss Callie, despite her health, shows herself to be a sassy, joyful, and fun-loving lady. She is not fearful of entangling strangers in her tornado of schemes to see her granddaughter in the company of a good man for Christmas - especially when she sets her sights on Finn. As the lines blur between cab driver, carer, and friend, Finn truly is flabbergasted at the situation.

Sydney, Miss Callie's only living relative and granddaughter, does not make a good first impression on Finn. She is the one person supposed to be caring for Callie. Instead, she's prioritising her hotshot attorney job over her sickly grandmother. As the two butt heads, miscommunicate, and then come together over a common good - Miss Callie - they begin to enjoy one another's company, re-evaluate the situation, retract harsh judgements, even falling in love.

When Callie dies on Christmas Day, Finn wonders what he and Sydney have in common and is incredibly fearful that she will realise he is a coward and leave. But Callie hasn't only introduced Finn to his new love Sydney but has also shown him the love of Jesus. Finn and Sydney navigate the funeral preparations, and he realises he wants to get to know 'Callie's Jesus'.

As the funeral ends, Finn's prayers are answered as Sydney runs lovingly into his embrace. They begin a new life together, one centred around Jesus and full of hope and possibility. Callie has left a mighty legacy, and it seems that her tactics were ordained by the Creator of the world used to bring two lost souls together, and most importantly, to Himself.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS & TALKING POINTS

1

Q. Finn, Sydney, and Miss Callie have incredibly different personalities, their traits ranging from grumpy and pessimistic - to sassy and joyful. Which character did you relate to the most and why?

TALKING POINTS

Some reasons we may relate to a particular character could be;

- Empathy/Sympathy
- Pity
- Similar character traits
- Similar circumstances
- Similar desires, hopes or dreams
- Similar mistakes made in our own lives
- We may like or dislike particular characters

2

Q. Finn begins judging Sydney before he has even met her. Being in his shoes, it is hard to imagine how someone could be so seemingly 'careless' with their elderly relative. Have you ever been too quick to judge another person's circumstances or actions? Why do we tend to do this?

TALKING POINTS

Some of the reasons we tend to judge others and their circumstances and/or actions may be;

- We believe we would make "better" decisions than they have.
- We believe the worst about them or believe their intentions were wicked.

- We believe their behaviour is sinful and deserves judgement.
- We have a lack of empathy towards the individual.
- We might use the situation to gossip about them.
- Their actions cause us to feel anger or frustration.
- We have been hurt or offended by another's decisions.

There are many more reasons why we are quick to judge, yet the Bible tells us we must;

- Judge not or we will be judged (Matthew 7:1).
- Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God through Christ has forgiven us (Ephesians 4:32).
- Not gossip because it is sinful (2 Corinthians 12:20).
- Forgive one another so that we will be forgiven (Luke 6:37).
- Quick to hear and slow to speak (James 1:19).
- Speak evil of no one, avoid quarrelling, and be courteous to all people (Titus 3:2).

3

Q. As the story unfolds, Finn learns that his quick judgements were unfair. What is the consequence of harsh or quick judgements?

TALKING POINTS

The consequences of harsh and/or quick judgments are often;

- Misunderstanding
- Miscommunication
- Misinterpretation of the situation

Before we make assumptions, we should remember its important too;

- Try and understand both sides to the story.
- Do not project 'what we would have done' onto the situation.
- Offer grace and support to those who we believe have made poor decisions.
- Acknowledge we are all only human and make mistakes.
- Acknowledge that we all have limitations.
- Always assume the best of people.
- Correct out of love for the individual.

4

Q. "When I raised questions like that as a seven-year-old kid, my mom got impatient and told me I was being disrespectful. But I really wanted to know. Eventually I stopped caring..." (p168)

Here we are given insight into little Finn, who asked his mother questions about the Creator God and baby Jesus from a place of wonder and genuine curiosity - yet he was reprimanded and not answered. Why is it so crucial to always answer little one's questions about the Lord with patience, humour, and grace?

TALKING POINTS

Jesus loved children, and we ought to love them as unique and created image-bearers of the one true God;

- Jesus said, "Let the little children come to be and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 19:14).
- Children are a gift and a reward from the Lord (Psalm 127:3).

How can we practically love the children in our spheres of influence? (They may be our own biological children, godsons or goddaughters, spiritual children, adopted children);

- Train them up in the way that they should go (Proverbs 22:6).
- Do not provoke your children (Ephesians 6:4).
- You shall teach them to your children (Deuteronomy 11:19).
- Tell your children of it, and let your children tell their children, and their children another generation (Joel 1:3).

The best way to love someone is to share the good news of Jesus with them. This includes the patient love and training of our children in the ways of the Lord so that they may grow to know, love, and cherish Him as we do. Just as we would invest time in sharing the gospel with adult friends and family, we should do the same with little ones, especially those already asking questions and seeking answers.

5

Q. Have you ever been in a situation like Sydney, where you've been expected to compromise your beliefs and values to "win"? What did you choose to do? Can you empathise with Sydney's decision?

TALKING POINTS

Allow space for women to share some of their own struggles of choosing between right and wrong or having to compromise on their beliefs. You may like to share a personal story of your own if there is a reluctance to share or ask a few questions to prompt some discussion, such as;

- What compromises are we often tempted to make these days?
- What are some things which the word would tell us are okay, yet we know in our hearts as Christians are not okay?

Some responses to Sydney's choices may include;

- She was in an extremely difficult position with an impossible decision to make.
- She did the best she could with what was given to her.
- She made the wrong decision.
- She may regret her decision for the rest of her life.
- She did the right thing; her career is important.
- I do not know what I would have done in a similar situation.

Have a respectful conversation, allow differing opinions to be heard and remind everyone that even those who make mistakes, or what we believe to be 'poor' decisions, deserve love and compassion. We are equipped to do this because God first loved us.

6

Q. "There's a lot of laughter during the meal, and I remember that first day I had to drive Callie. Never in a million years would I have expected to be here today, enjoying every second." (p205). Can you share a time in your life when God did something unexpected?

TALKING POINTS

Encourage the women to share a joyous experience of God's unexpected blessing. Answers may vary and could include;

- The salvation of a loved one (family or friend).
- The provision of a new job or career.
- A new direction for your life (study, career change).
- New friendships or relationship.
- Unexpected material blessings (home, finances).

7

Q. "Thank you for including me in this beautiful Christmas, Miss Callie," I whisper. My tear falls onto her wrinkled cheek, and I wipe it away with my thumb... "And thank you, Jesus, for giving me a second chance" (p216). Miss Callie, her joyful spirit, love for the Lord, and her kind heart profoundly impact Finn. What changes do you notice in Finn's personality as he suddenly decides that he wants to know Jesus?

TALKING POINTS

Finn at the start of the book is;

- Pessimistic, Cantankerous, and Grumpy.
- Catastrophises situations.
- Burdened by guilt over his response to his mother's death.
- Judgemental and quick to speak.
- Believes the worst of others.
- Unfriendly
- Just trying to make ends meet.

Finn at the end of the book is;

- More optimistic.
- Desires happiness and good things for his life.
- Redeemed and free from his guilt over his mother's death.
- Believes there is good in others.
- Has hope in Jesus.
- Has hope for his relationship with Sydney.

8

Q. On page 239, Finn and Sydney listen to Callie's tapes. She says, "I'll be tickled to be with Jesus. We'll be catching up. Well, I will. He already knows all about me already, but I want to know every little thing that he's done since He left this earth. I'm going to ask lots of questions" p(239).

What is one question that you cannot wait to ask Jesus when you see Him face to face?

TALKING POINTS

Answers may vary and could include light-hearted questions;

- What have you been doing since you left earth?
- Do you have a favourite animal or tree?
- Do you have a favourite worship song?

- Why did you make spiders/snakes/bugs?
- What did dinosaurs really look like?
- How did everything begin?
- When/how did you decide to make creation?

Or more serious questions;

- How many people did I impact for the kingdom of God?
- Why did you make humans, knowing we would fall into sin?
- Why did you allow ___ circumstance to happen to me?

9

Q. On pages 259-260, Finn admits his shortcomings and heartbreaking response to his mother's illness and death. Sydney responds with compassion, yet he is still so ashamed and fearful that he begins to allow doubt and fear to creep back in again. It is not until Sydney comes running towards him and kisses him that he realises his prayers are answered and "maybe I really am what's best for her" (274). As the Lord answers his prayer, Finn gains some healing and self-worth again. He finally believes that he can offer someone something good, despite his past mistakes.

Describe a time in your life when God redeemed a mistake or regret.

TALKING POINTS

Allow space for women to share a time when like Finn, their past mistakes were redeemed through God's grace. You may like to begin the conversation by sharing an experience in your own life or use some further talking points to encourage conversation;

- Have you ever experienced a relationship breakdown (perhaps a marriage, friendship, or with a family member), that you have been able to use to support or encourage another with, having endured a similar heartache yourself?
- Have you let someone down, only to be able to provide help to another in the future?
- There is nothing too broken that God cannot fix, and this includes us, our relationships, our sin, mistakes, and regrets.
- All sin has consequences, yet when we repent and turn our hearts towards God for forgiveness, He can use our mistakes for His glory, our good, and the good of others.

10

Q. "As I drive home, I pray that God will work it all out for Sydney. This whole praying thing gets easier every time I do it. I feel like I'm getting to know Callie's Jesus a little better, even though I'm doing all the talking. But he speaks volumes in the way he listens" (p250). Prayer is a journey itself; it's a way we give praise and express deep gratitude, how we share our desires, hurts, and longings, how we develop a relationship with and talk to the Lord.

How has your prayer life changed over the years? Was it always easy? Or were some seasons hard, uncomfortable, awkward?

TALKING POINTS

New Christians may feel the following while discovering prayer;

- Scarred or unsure.
- Uncomfortable or awkward.
- Reluctant to pray out loud or in front of others.
- New to prayer, but excited and passionate about it.

During trials and suffering, sometimes prayer can become;

- Difficult; we feel discouraged and might not want to pray (this is exactly the times we ought to pray fervently).
- Non-existent; We may feel angry at God, blaming Him for our circumstances, unimpressed with His timeline on things, and therefore we make ourselves unable to connect with Him in this way.
- Full of unbelief; in God and His promises and goodness.
- A lifeline, the only way we get through the tough times.

During times of blessing and abundance, prayer can become;

- A regular way to give thanks, express gratitude and connect deeply with our Heavenly Father.
- Forgotten as we enjoy our season of abundance and blessing without giving God the gratitude he deserves.

Together, make a decision to continue to pray during all circumstances, asking for breakthrough, healing and salvation for others - all the while always giving thanks, praise, and glory to the Lord.



ADDITIONAL NOTES FOR LEADERS

Discussion questions from the author are available at the back of the book. You may like to encourage your group to reflect on these questions before your monthly meeting and keep a reflective journal to record their notes. These questions will allow your book club sisters to examine the text before the meeting. As the month progresses, you may like to discuss these through your group's online platform (a Facebook group/ messenger or what's app chat group etc.) to remain connected and engaged throughout the month.

You may also like to direct the group to the "Author Note" section for further exploration of the themes such as changing perspective, gratitude, and happiness. Perhaps encourage the members to keep a gratitude journal for the following month and share the outcome at the next meeting.

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