



LEADER'S GUIDE

MILES FROM WHERE WE STARTED BY CYNTHIA RUCHTI



"Did God intend to answer her prayer and give her husband back to her, or answer her prayer and make her strong enough to find joy in singleness? Did she have the faith to believe life could be good - eventually - either way, that dawn would come and go whether she received the answer she wanted or not?"

MALLORY DUNCAN

THEMES

Broken Relationships Faith Marriage Health Rejection Travel Second Chances

HEADS UP! (TRIGGERS AND DELICATE TOPICS)

Family Violence and Neglect Marriage Breakdown

CHARACTERS

Mallory is a newly married young woman who has a heart for God and at-risk-teens. She is navigating faith, trust, and dependence on God as her marriage falls apart. Very driven, organised and consumed by her work at Hope Street, Mallory has a gift of being able to effectively communicate with young, troubled kids.

Connor, Mallory's husband, is a workaholic with an internal battle raging in his head. The 50-50 chance of inheriting a genetic disease, which took his brother's life, makes him feel inadequate and hopeless at almost every task set before him, including his marriage. Because of this, Connor's default position in life is to assume the worst, complain and give up. Yet something about the small seed of faith he has encourages him to maintain a speck of hope, and that is all God needs to change a life.

Judah, a troublesome, at-risk teen with a saucy 'I don't care' attitude, attempts to navigate his way through life with an air of aloofness and a false representation of stupidity. Being quite bright, he hides his true character and painfully suffers from a deep-rooted sense of rejection as his mother chose a "wife-beater, kid beater" over him.

STORYLINE

On the cusp of their first wedding anniversary, Mallory and Connor find themselves on the verge of separation. Mallory has prioritised her work with at-risk teens at Hope Street, and Connor is fearful that his 50-50% chance of inheriting a genetic disease will ruin Mallory's life. Connor decides it's best to end the marriage before he 'destroys' their lives by becoming sick.

An impossible situation arises when Connor's business is at risk of failing if he doesn't take a 3,000-mile road trip across America in a tiny teardrop camper. The trip is sponsored by RoadRave, a dream client of his and a company willing to invest significant finances into the Troyer & Duncan company. The catch is that he needs Mallory to tag along while collecting video footage of the trip and pretending to be a happily married couple.

Though it seems the situation could not possibly get any worse, Judah, an at-risk teen dealing with intense feelings of rejection, is thrown in the mix and tags along for the journey.

As the unexpected trio navigate the 3,000-mile journey together, they come across 'wisdom characters'. These characters share their testimonies and stories, pouring life, hope and wisdom into both Mallory and Connor's lives. Mallory and Connor both begin to wonder, perhaps it is not too late to save their marriage after all!

As the distance travelled increases and tensions flare, Judah decides he has had enough and runs away. This causes a series of events in which God works together for everyone's good, despite Connor breaking his leg during a daring rescue at a waterfall and Mallory temporarily giving up on Connor altogether.

The camping trip wraps up, and Connor and Mallory, through God's grace and faith towards one another, decide to hope for better things and reignite their relationship. Connor comes to terms with the fear and heartache the genetic disease has had on himself and the family. He gets his test done, which proves to be negative, and Mallory bravely agrees to re-locate with Connor and follow God's plan; 'A path carved for us by a creative imagination bigger than our own'.

Judah becomes an important person in their lives, and through witnessing both Connor and Mallory's faith grow, he decides that he also believes in a God after all. The story ends as a new chapter begins - *Miles From Where They Started* - yet precisely where God intended all along.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS & TALKING POINTS

1

Q. *Miles From Where We Started* is a novel about journeys, both physical and spiritual. What is the most challenging - yet rewarding - spiritual journey you have been on yourself?

TALKING POINTS

Allow a space for women to share about their challenging yet rewarding spiritual journey. This may be a nice opportunity to share your 2-minute testimony or a significant journey you've been on yourself to get the conversation started.

- You may like to direct a question at someone specifically such as "What do you think of when you hear the word journey?". This will encourage conversation yet not force anyone to share if they are shy or unwilling.

Answers may vary and could include;

- Finding Jesus.
- Enduring a season of trial or suffering which brought me closer to the Lord or others.
- Big life changes such a marriage, motherhood, death of a loved one.

2

Q. Many wonderful people cross paths with Mallory and Connor during their adventure. These characters profoundly impact their lives, beliefs, and values. Can you think of a time when God placed someone in your life, very intentionally, with a similar impact?

TALKING POINTS

Answers may vary and could include;

- New relationships (spouse, friend, mentor).
- A pastor or church leader.
- A stranger who showed you kindness when it was desperately needed.

You may also like to consider whether these relationships were brief and only for a short season or whether they became life-long relationships.

3

Q. The phrase 'opposites attract' is a familiar one, and it rings true in our lives. Mallory and Connor seem to fit this mould, yet depending on their perspectives, their differences can result in strife or balance one another out. Why do you think God often draws opposites together?

TALKING POINTS

You may like to begin the conversation by discussing the differences between men and women in general and encourage the women to list some.

Common differences can include;

- Deep conversation vs light-hearted conversation.
- Task orientated vs go with the flow.
- Open with feelings vs hiding feelings.
- Optimism vs pessimism.

You may like to discuss how these personality traits can bless each other—for example, left to their own devices, a task-orientated individual may become like 'Martha' and miss out on what is truly important while getting 'all the things' done. A go with the flow individual may never actually plan or settle for an idea before forming a new one. These two personality traits are designed to balance each other out in a healthy way.

4

Q. On page 77, Mallory describes the peace she experiences when she begins to accept that it is God's will for her to go on the road trip. Have you ever submitted to a request from God even though you did not want to do it?

TALKING POINTS

Philippians 4:7 "Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ."

- God's peace is supernatural; we cannot experience peace during hardship apart from Christ.
- The peace which Jesus provides does not take away our sorrows or miraculously make us happy about our suffering, yet provides comfort through the journey.
- Peace has power over fear and anxiety.
- Peace is a fruit of the Spirit.
- God's supernatural peace is similar to our hope and joy in Christ in that despite our circumstances, even during trials and suffering, we are called to hold onto it.

5

Q. Mallory and Connor's approaches to Judah are very different. Mallory knows how to love and support at-risk kids, while Connor is impatient and quick to judge. Over time, Connor learns how to interact with Judah and shows a willingness to get to know him, even breaking his leg to 'rescue' him at a waterfall. The trajectory of the relationship changes as Connor begins to expect the best of Judah instead of assuming the worst. Why is it that we often live up to the expectations of others?

TALKING POINTS

When we grow up being told who or what we are (outside of God and the truth), it can warp our view of ourselves;

- If someone treats us as if we have no value as a young person, we may believe them – especially if the person saying this has influence over us or plays a significant role in our lives.
- It has been said, 'We accept the love we think we deserve'. This often sees individuals entering into destructive relationships purely because they feel undeserving of healthy love.
- Suppose no one expects anything from us except being naughty/misbehaving or a disappointment, it's challenging for the human Spirit to find the motivation to try and change that perspective and break that mould, so instead. In that case, we may 'live up to it'.

Contrary to the world, our faith tells us we are beloved children of God, forgiven, chosen, God's workmanship, fearfully and wonderfully made, never alone (and so much more!). Because we are loved, encouraged and built up within our relationship with our Heavenly Father, we are more inclined to strive to achieve this. We do fail as we are imperfect – yet we have a beautiful goal to reach, and it inspires the best from us.

6

Q. Have you ever found yourself facing a health crisis? Could you relate to Connor's anxiety of becoming a burden to others?

TALKING POINTS

Answers may vary and could include;

- Struggling from temporary illnesses such as gastro, mastitis, colds and flu's and we may have felt like a burden to others by requiring care.
- Women are often the caregivers, and role reversals can be challenging and uncomfortable for us.
- We may have been unwell and desperately desired someone to care for us but received little or no help.

- Our church families should be instrumental in providing care – trying to meet the physical needs of those who are unwell, experiencing a crisis or celebrating a new baby.
- Other women may have experienced a life-threatening crisis such as cancer. Allow these women to share their stories.

If a woman in your group is currently enduring a health crisis, prayerfully consider whether this question would be appropriate to discuss.

7

Q. Waterfalls are a theme story, and throughout the trip, the trio stops at many of them. A waterfall is a mighty display of God's glory and significantly shows His power. However, water can also symbolise new beginnings. Why do you think the author incorporated this theme into the journey?

TALKING POINTS

Biblically water may represent;

- New life and baptism.
- Birth/fertility.
- Miracles (water to wine, Jesus walking on water).
- Purification.
- Destruction of evil or conquering enemies (flood/exodus).
- Living water; God's faithful and lasting provision for His people.

8

Q. Which character or quote in the story had the most profound impact on you? Maybe you could relate to the character or their circumstances?

TALKING POINTS

You may like to compile a short list of quotes you found profound from the story and a new reasons why. For example;

"She walked as deliberately as she could towards Jesus. I didn't lose her, eventually I gave her away, from my hand to His" (Slade, page 134)

- Relationship with Jesus is intentional; a daily walk and daily surrender.
- We do not 'lose' believers when they die; we simply pass them into the loving hands of their creator.
- Our trust and belief in Jesus impact death and our response.
- Do we truly trust God with our loved ones? Do we believe heaven is a better place and rejoice that our dear ones are there?

9

Q. What is your favourite verse or line from Connor's song 'This Is Not How Our Story Ends'? (p341)

TALKING POINTS

You may like to read Connor's song on page 341 a couple of times and make some reflection notes; you can also read the song out loud to the group.

For example, "I promise you, love, that though riddled, regretted, With hope, this is not how our story ends."

- Promises of a brighter future.
- Endearing term 'love', now a Christ-like sacrificial love for one another.

- Admission of regret, an acknowledgement of failures and hurts.
- Future Hope, a trustworthy hope because of Jesus and new beginnings.
- Connor and Mallory can look forward to a future with God, his peace and joy.

10

Q. How did you feel about the outcome of Connor and Mallory's story? Do you think it was believable? Are you sceptical that God could work a miracle in a broken marriage and change a person's heart in this way?

TALKING POINTS

Depending on a woman's relationship with God, her past experiences and/or current circumstances, answers may significantly differ;

- Be sensitive to those who have suffered through a divorce and allow them to share healthily. They may regret that their marriage could not be restored, which is a delicate topic for them; this may also cause scepticism to see relationships restored in the future.
- Women may have experienced the restoration of a marriage or broken family relationships and have personally seen God's miracles to restore people into right relationship.
- The Trinity is our perfect example of a loving, self-sacrificing and giving relationship which is our role model as Christians.
- Jesus died so that we might be restored into right relationship with the Father through repentance and the forgiveness of our sins. God calls us to forgive all people and seek restoration with others where safe to do so.



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 whatsapp chat group etc.) to keep connected and engaged throughout the month.

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