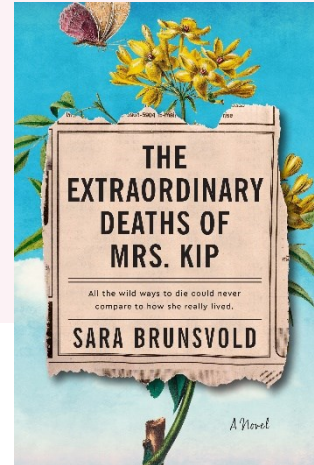




LEADER'S GUIDE

THE EXTRAORDINARY DEATHS OF MRS. KIP BY SARA BRUNSVOLD



"You said the mark of authentic love is dying a thousand deaths to self. I get now what you meant by that because I watched you live it out."

AIDYN KELLEY

THEMES

Surrender

Grief

Loss

Sacrificial Love

Friendship

Dying to Self

New Life

HEADS UP! (TRIGGERS AND DELICATE TOPICS)

Terminal Cancer

Infant Death

Vietnam War and Refugees

CHARACTERS

Mrs. Clara Kip is a 79-year-old patient living out the remainder of her life at the Sacred Promise Senior Care hospice centre after recent scans revealed an aggressively metastasised cancer in her abdomen. Clara dreams of the life she never lived in Sao Paulo with her late husband and other extraordinary things (mainly an extraordinary death), yet accepts the Lord's assignment for her at the Hospice. Mrs. Kip is a woman of great faith, wisdom and experience. She lives and breathes Jesus, and her confident hope in Him urges her to love others. Her ultimate goal in life is to share God's promise of new life with everyone.

Aidyn Kelley is an aspiring big-shot journalist whose pride and overconfidence almost ends her career. Although she promotes a confident exterior, underneath, she is quite timid and deeply desires acceptance and recognition. Aidyn is quick to judge others, and most of what she does is for self-preservation. As she begrudgingly spends time interviewing Mrs. Kip, she learns not to judge a book by its cover and grows in her faith.

Jimmy is a young staff member at the Hospice who loves Jesus. He has a gift of working with and comforting the dying.

Rosario is the head nurse at Sacred Promise Senior Care Hospice. Upon discovering Mrs. Kip's journals and the newspaper clip of Mrs. Kip and Mai, she contacts her friend Bella Woods at The Star Newspaper, hoping to have the story re-told.

Rahmiya, Aidyn's best friend and colleague, is a loyal companion and source of encouragement. She is a needy friend who provides Aidyn with a humble opportunity to learn to love others more selflessly.

STORYLINE

Aidyn Kelley works for Kansas City Star Newspaper as a cub journalist. She is impatiently awaiting her first big story break, and she gets herself in a pickle when she compares her university success and accolades to 'real world' success. She almost loses her job when she goes above her boss' head to send a self-promoting email to the company's head editor. She is reprimanded for her prideful attitude and out-of-line behaviour.

Given the seemingly humiliating task of writing an obituary, Aidyn begrudgingly takes herself to the Sacred Promise Senior Care Hospice centre to fulfil her duty and redeem herself. She soon learns, however, that Mrs. Kip is more than meets the eye, and this task is secretly an opportunity to prove her worth as an investigative journalist.

As Aidyn interviews Mrs. Clara Kip, who has recently moved into the Hospice care facility after a terminal cancer diagnosis, she slowly unpacks the mysterious life of a woman who is nothing short of extraordinary yet claims to be exceedingly unimpressive.

As Mrs. Kip's story unfolds, Aidyn realises it as a story of unimaginable loss, grief, and anger, which was redeemed by the astounding transformative power and love of a God who makes all things new. Not only that, but Mrs. Kip's friendship with Mai Khan, a Lao refugee, becomes the big-break story Aidyn has been searching for. As Aidyn grows to love Mrs. Kip and pursues the history her life is tied to, she begins to learn that living a life that embodies sacrificial love is a life that dies a thousand times to self. Not only is this the most extraordinary way to live, but it's also the most extraordinary way to die.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS & TALKING POINTS



1

Q. Who was your favourite character from 'The Extraordinary Deaths of Mrs. Kip'? Why?

TALKING POINTS

These are some reasons we may feel connected or drawn to a particular character;

- We may feel empathy or sympathy for their circumstances.
- We may share similar character traits or personalities.
- We may share similar desires, hopes, or dreams.
- We may have made similar mistakes or poor decisions in our own lives.
- We may like or dislike particular characters because of our experiences with others.

2

Q. "I want an extraordinary death", Mrs. Kip declares. What did you enjoy most about this unusual storyline? Could you relate to Mrs. Kip's desires?

TALKING POINTS

Many of us desire to leave a legacy. As Christians, we should desire that legacy to be more about Christ – and what He has done in our lives – than ourselves.

Mrs. Kip wanted people to remember one thing about her;

"There's only one thing you need to know about me. It's the only thing I want anyone... to know about me... I want it to be known that I did my utmost to leave in my wake the love Jesus first gave me. I came to trust him later in life than most, when I was thirty-six, after many years of being angry at him for all he had taken away from me. But he is a God of new life, Miss Kelley. A God of rescue and redemption. Always has been, always will be... Even when it cost me something dear, I loved. No effort in Jesus's name is ever wasted".

3

Q. Mrs. Kip is a 'fixer'; a person who sees a problem and feels compelled to solve it. How does it make you feel when you can't fix something?

TALKING POINTS

'Fixers' can become consumed with problems that they feel they ought to fix. Unable to rest, they need to find a solution to feel at peace;

- Mrs. Kip couldn't fix John's death, leading to anger and frustration at God.
- Anger builds up when we can't fix the situations we find ourselves in, especially when we don't have the tools to deal with the emotions.
- The tools we need [Jesus, the Bible, and Christian fellowship] don't "fix" anything yet recalibrate our understanding as we can learn how to carry grief as a shared burden with our Saviour.
- When we learn to take our pain, suffering, grief and need to fix unfixable things to the Lord, we can rest in His sovereignty and experience supernatural peace.
- Although things may seem "unfixable" on this side of heaven, Jesus will right every wrong – fix every unfixable thing – in eternity.
- We also have Christian hope that those unfixable things can and will be used for God's glory and our good.

4

Q. Aidyn struggles with pride and selfishness, which seems to be exacerbated by her career ambitions. How does Mrs. Kip help her to grow?

TALKING POINTS

"The essence of survival in a newsroom is appearance. It is everything. It is reality even if it tells a lie";

- Aidyn comes to the Star Newspaper as a high-achieving and well-recognised journalist from her prestigious university. She becomes unsatisfied in her rookie position and tries to prematurely self-promote in an industry where you start from the bottom up and put in the hard yards.
- Her entitled attitude shows when she's given the mundane obituary task and complains to her best friend that it's beneath her.
- Aidyn struggles to live out her Christian faith in the secular workplace and worries about others judging her.
- When Aidyn's email is rejected and Woods gives her a harsh talking to, she becomes overwhelmed with self-doubt and negative talk but tries her best to remain cool, calm, and busy to project an air of self-respect; but on the inside, she's mortified.
- As Aidyn speaks with Mrs. Kip, and takes the time to get to know her, she realises her mistakes. Slowly, she allows the dying older woman to minister to her heart.

5

- Mrs. Kip's life (experiences, grief, and faith) teaches Aidyn powerful lessons about resilience and relying on God; "I keep my eyes always on the Lord. With him at my right hand, I will not be shaken" Psalm 16:8

Q. How does Mrs. Kip's understanding of God change throughout the story?

TALKING POINTS

Then;

- "Why would a supposedly merciful God leave her alone? He wasn't the kind of God she wanted for herself. Ever".
- Clara spent her days angry, grieving and drinking scotch in Johnny's favourite armchair, pinning for the life they'd dreamed of together.
- In her grief, a friend suggested she get a job at the hospital, and she worked alongside nurses caring for newborn babies; "the babies saved me".
- Her newfound career gave her hope and purpose.

Now;

- Clara accepts God's sovereign plan and will for her life; "Not my will but yours God".
- Despite her pain, Clara learns that God is the "God of new life". She allows Him to sanctify her through her suffering and minister to others through her pain, always remembering that nothing is wasted with the Lord; "But hard things usually end in the biggest blessings".
- Although Clara's lifelong dream of going to Sao Paula and caring for orphans never comes to fruition, Clara maintains an eternal perspective; "The grave is not my final home. I want to live as if I believe that. By God's grace, I will live because I was a giant mess, and he rescued me from it all. Because of him, my view of this fleeting life changed. He gave me a new vision".

6

Q. Mrs. Kip loves to learn about people and their stories. As she observes Charles, she sees "clues of unspoken stories. Stories she might earn the right to hear". Why is it so important that we take the time to hear people's stories?

TALKING POINTS

"Sometimes you have to find the tender spot in someone's heart. What would motivate them into action? What commonality do they have with the person in need of help? I searched for tender spots then used them to coax the people to compassion".

Taking time to listen to and love others creates a safe space to share the love of Jesus but can also meet practical needs, encouraging others towards acts of kindness and compassion in return;

- "She [Clara] helped him forget he was widowed and dying. The tender worship of companionship. A hard art to learn".
- "I've seen loneliness kill faster than cancer. She's [Clara] giving him a gift that medicine can't provide." - Jimmy.
- "It may not sound extraordinary to some people, Miss Kelley, but we should never underestimate the life-changing gift of friendship." (The story Mrs. Kip tells Aidyn about Joshua).
- "To the inexperienced or fearful, his reaction may have been reason to drop the pursuit. But to Clara, it meant something quite different. A pained body with a broken spirit tends to recoil when the hand of grace first finds its wounds." It's not always easy to befriend those who are difficult to love. But the Lord calls us to it and equips us for it.

7

Q. Aidyn quickly disregards Mrs. Kip as an uninteresting but necessary solution to her work problems. When she discovers that Mrs. Kip played a role in helping to rescue Mai's children from Lao during the civil unrest, she realises her mistake. Discuss.

TALKING POINTS

Many of us are too quick to judge and disregard others as uninteresting. It's important to remember each person is made in the image of God, has a unique journey and has inherent value. Aidyn, instead of dismissing Mrs. Kip as a burden, begins to understand that she has wisdom and life experience to share. One of Mrs. Kip's favourite sayings is, "that's gold. Write that down";

- Aidyn is far too quick to disregard Mrs. Kip as old and irrelevant. She becomes intrigued when she realises that Mrs. Kip's story is far from ordinary and actually a journalist's dream!
- Over time, her interest in Mrs. Kip becomes personal instead of professional.
- "She [Aidyn] shook her head, bewildered, and looked up at the woman who had lived the words. That woman, now spindly and vulnerable, had once helped reshape the city's cultural dynamic. A woman who hadn't fought a war or influenced the law of the land or won a major game, but rather, with quiet courage and immeasurable compassion, had helped ensure that refugees were not left to their own devices. The everyday woman who befriended and loved complete strangers, who stood in the gap of two clashing cultures not ready to wholly trust each other".

8

Q. "In her years... she had learned that where there is pain, there is a calling. A duty. And a great and wonderful commission". Can you share a time when your pain has been the tool used to share the gospel with someone?

TALKING POINTS

Throughout the novel, Mrs. Kip is continually seeking those she can serve and share her faith with;

- "Tell me, honey. Do you know Jesus?" (Mrs. Kip boldly shared her faith with her taxi driver).
- Mrs. Kip uses her situation in the Hospice as an opportunity to pray with and for the unsaved who are near to death.
- Mrs. Kip helped to change the culture of a city simply by stopping to comfort a mourning mother; "it all began because Mrs. Kip, intimately familiar with pain, once stopped amid her daily rush to comfort a grieving mother and unwittingly found herself in the centre of world history".

9

Q. Elvis Presley's "As Long As I Have You" was Clara and Johnny's song. Do you and your husband have a song?

TALKING POINTS

Many of us have a favourite song that reminds us of our beloved. If there are single women present, you may like to include special songs between siblings, parents or friends.

10

Q. Who is your Mrs. Kip?

TALKING POINTS

It may be a mother, grandmother, spiritual mother, godparent, extended family member, friend, pastor, mentor – or we may be desiring a "Mrs. Kip" figure in our lives. If so, pray for provision.



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