

## Discussion Questions

1. In Chapter 1, Eliza's quick prayer is not answered as she wished, so she figures her prayer went unheard. Has there been a time in your life when your prayers felt ineffectual? Why do you think God answered Eliza's prayer as he did? How should you approach your prayer life? (Romans 8:28-29, Psalms 66:17-19, Hebrews 11:6, James 4:2-3, 1 John 5:14-15, John 15:7)
2. In Chapter 3, Will fears Eliza will reject Irena Lightfoot's help because of her disfigurement. Is there a particular quality about people that makes you uneasy in accepting their help or being in their company? Consider 1 Samuel 16:7a and Romans 12:16. What is the root of your discomfort?
3. In Chapter 4, as co-workers, Eliza and Will clash over job methodology. Consider Colossians 3:23 and Romans 12:18. If you have co-workers whose personalities and/or work approach differ from yours, what can you do to make your work environment a peaceful, positive place? What works and what doesn't? Is it more important to get along or be productive?
4. In Chapters 5 and 6, Eliza tries to discern Axel's character through others' opinions. Boaz got a full report about Ruth before allowing himself to become romantically attached (Ruth 2:11), and reputation is sometimes an important consideration (Acts 6:3, 1 Timothy 3:7, 5:10). In light of Eliza's discoveries, should she have called things off? As a woman of the 1880s, do you think her decision was sound? What are the dangers of trying to discover a person's reputation?
5. In Chapter 8, I'd originally written Everett's speech on capturing thoughts as though Christians can defeat their sin nature with willpower and the clever use of tactics—but Paul failed to completely conquer his own sins (see Romans 7:15-20). Do you approach life more by trying to earn God's acceptance, or by asking for and receiving His forgiveness and depending upon His enabling? (Philippians 2:13, Luke 10:39-42)
6. For most of history, a woman's quality of life depended upon the quality of her marriage. In Chapter 10, Eliza is struggling between two men who have caught her interest—one who'd proposed and possessed the store she wanted along with some nice-sized flaws; and another she'd only just met, felt attracted to, but who'd not offered her any promises. Consider Genesis 2:18, 1 Corinthians 7:8-9 and 2 Corinthians 6:14. What are the most important considerations for marriage; a man's character, his spiritual condition, security, or mutual attraction? If you were Eliza's friend, how would you advise her? Would you advise a modern woman differently? Why?
7. Have you ever been uncomfortable with someone your loved one got engaged to? What did you do? What were the repercussions of your choice? What would you advise others to do in a similar situation? Should you tell someone you think they've made a mistake?
8. In Chapter 13, because of circumstances, Eliza and Will are both tempted to give up their dreams. Have you ever given up on a dream? How do you know when to bail on a dream and when to keep striving for one despite setbacks and disappointments?

9. At the end of Chapter 17, Will is miffed at Silas for a sin he realizes he also commits, but in a different manner. What flaws in others push your buttons? Why? According to Colossians 3:13 and Matthew 7:3-5, how could you gain more understanding when faced with a person who tries your patience?

10. Has anyone ever kept information from you that when it came to light, you felt betrayed like Will did in Chapter 17 when Eliza kept her store a secret? How do you get over it? On the other hand, have you ever withheld information from a loved one for fear of hurting their feelings? When is it right to do so?

11. In Chapter 20, Eliza begins to realize her dreams are steeped in selfishness. Will's dreams seem doomed to remain derailed because of his selflessness. Are you more like Eliza or Will? When does pursuing a dream become wrong? Can being too selfless cause problems for others?

12. When I heard of the condition epidermolysis bullosa, which the baby in Chapter 22 has, I struggled with its unfairness, and I'm still not sure why God would allow such a disease to exist. After 9/11, Billy Graham was asked why God allowed such a terrible thing to happen. He quoted 2 Thessalonians 2:7 and essentially said evil was a mystery and that he didn't know. What is your answer for the reason terrible things happen to good people? How do you keep your faith when terribly unfair things occur? (Other verses to consider: Genesis 1:26-27, 31, 2:16-17, 3:4-6, 17-19, Matthew 23:37, Romans 5:12, Romans 8:18-23, 2 Samuel 12:22-23, Revelation 21:4)

13. At the end of Chapter 23, Will helped the undeserving Axel. How involved are you in helping people that need Christ's love the most? What holds you back from helping the "unlovely" or the "unworthy"?

14. In Chapter 24, Will realizes that physical healing wasn't the most important thing he was doing. Have you ever expected God to work one way in your life but realized in retrospect that he'd used you for another purpose? What should you consider before advising someone who doesn't feel successful? (Psalm 1:1-3, Mark 8:34-37, Matthew 6:25-33)

15. In Chapter 25, Nancy reminds Eliza that God warns, even promises, Christians will face hardship in this life. How do you endure hardship? What have you learned or attained during hardship that you wouldn't have gotten any other way? Is fear of hardship driving your choices today? What might staying comfortable rob you of? (James 1:2-4)

16. Have you ever done something foolish in the eyes of the world for love of another, as Eliza did by selling her store for Will's medical tuition? How do you know when someone's situation is worth the sacrifice? Consider what God gave up to save sinners. (Philippians 2:3-8, Romans 5:8, 1 Corinthians 1:18) In light of His "foolish" sacrifice, how should we live?

17. What character did you enjoy most in the story? Which character did you feel the most connected to? Did any of them make decisions you wouldn't have? Why?

18. What message did you take away from the story? What did you like the most about the story? Is there anything you'd have changed? What?