

## ***Not a Sparrow Falls* Discussion Questions**

Discuss Mary Bridget/Bridie Washburn. The story is written in the tradition of "prodigals." The key to the biblical story, though, is that the son eventually returns, out of his own volition, home. Does Mary choose to go home? Why does she feel so strongly, as she says on page 15, that home is "a lifetime away"?

Secrets and appearances are very important in the book. Mary hides her past. The MacPherson family hides the truth of Anna's death. Both put on the appearances of stability and health. How do these eventually fail and reveal the pain and hurt inside?

Another key element of the book is the effect one life can have on another. Discuss the way in which Mary's grandmother helped to save Mary and the role Mary played in Samantha's life. What does this say about how we should interact with others?

Alasdair is a complicated, willful character. Discuss his reactions to his wife's death and the subsequent actions of his church. How could he have handled them better? In what ways did he uphold his duty as a father? How did he fail?

One of the key issues that troubled the church elders was Alisdair's overloaded schedule. They felt he was failing to shepherd his congregation. Yet, pastoring changes, especially in large churches. How do you see the role of pastors? Should they be teachers? Counselors? Fund-raisers? Can we demand that they fill every role?

The men and women in the story--including Alasdair, Lorna, Mary and others--are blessed with near-audible and miraculous leadings from the Holy Spirit. Discuss your own prayer life. Do these occur? How do you discern God's leading in your own life?

Discuss the events that led to Mary's running off with Jonah. Why do you think Mary doesn't attempt to track down any of her siblings who were taken away by social services?

Many of Mary's impressions of the MacPherson household are based on appearances (see pages 102-103). How much can you judge of a person or a family by their house or personal appearance? Why does she spend so much time and effort fixing, decorating, and rearranging the house? (p. 193)

Memories of Anna continue to haunt both Alasdair and Samantha. Talk about any experiences you have had with depression or knowing others with the disorder. How do the church and family sometimes fail to reach out adequately to

those who suffer depression? Could Anna have been saved? How would this have changed Samantha's life?

Discuss Samantha. What is her core need or desire? What is the best thing Mary does for the hurting girl?

In Alasdair's discussion with his old mentor, the word "Ichabod" comes up (p. 189). Does the Spirit of the Lord ever really depart from us, or is it we who turn away from Him? How do we "get back" the Spirit of the Lord?

Mary reminds herself that the only reason she's at the house is for Samantha's sake (p. 198). Does her friendship with Alasdair cause her to fail Samantha?

It is evident that Mary has made some poor choices in her life and those choices have led her into a lifestyle of sin. There can be a deeper sin, though, in feeling that what we've done is so awful that it can never be forgiven. Discuss how pride can keep us from God's grace. (focus on p. 221-222)

Mary's past does come back to haunt her in the guise of Jonah, when he is released from prison. How does his appearance force the truth to come out?

To which character do you most relate?

What are the most important lessons learned by Mary? By Alasdair? By Samantha?

Discuss the important concept, "You can't out-sin the cross."