

## The Year of Goodbyes and Hellos

By Kelly Irvin

### Discussion Questions

1. Kristen loves her husband and daughters, but she's also dedicated to helping her patients survive a deadly disease. She's trying to balance family and career. Do you think it makes a difference that she's an oncologist and her patients depend on her for survival? Are there times they should take precedence? Is it harder for women than men to balance career and family? Why or why not?

2. How do you feel about Daniel's decision to move out when Kristen forgets their anniversary? Do you think he's justified in feeling shortchanged by her dedication to her patients? Should he have returned home when he found out Kristen's patient died that evening? Why or why not?

3. Put yourself in the shoes of Maddie and Brielle, who often can't rely on their mother to be there for them in times of small or even big crises. How would it make you feel? Does a "higher calling" profession serve as an excuse for sometimes abdicating from parental duties?

4. Do you agree with Matt's wife's observation that a spouse can be guilty of an "emotional" affair even though it hasn't reached the physical-affair stage? Why or why not? Would an emotional affair hurt more? Do you think men and women see these two affairs differently? How so? Did Daniel "cheat" on Kristen with Pilar?

5. Were you surprised Sherri was the culprit who had the affair that ended her marriage to Chance? Did it seem out of character to you? How did she change and grow as a result of this grave error in judgment? Do you think Chance should've forgiven her and taken her back? Would you, if in a similar situation with your spouse?

6. If you received a cancer diagnosis (or if you have received it), how did you think it would change your approach to day-to-day living? Or would it? Why do you think most people don't realize that time is finite and live accordingly until they or someone close to them dies "too young" or receives a terminal diagnosis? Is there value in the philosophy of "live every day as if it's your last?"

7. The "power of positive thinking" and "mindfulness" receive a great deal of attention in the treatment of difficult, deadly diseases and traumatic injuries. Do you believe positive thinking has an impact on how a person's body reacts to treatment for illnesses and severe injuries? If so, why?

8. Throughout the story, Kristen and Sherri banter over where and how they want their cremated ashes spread. Does their light-hearted treatment of this difficult subject surprise you? Why do you think they handle it this way? Do you think it's healthy? Why or why not?

9. Sherri's faith dictates that she will receive complete healing in heaven, if her cancer treatment is unsuccessful here on earth. Even so, she prays God will heal her so she can have more time with the family she loves. There's a saying, "everybody wants to go to heaven, but nobody wants to die." Do you think the desire to live longer, to be healed, shows a lack of faith? Why or why not?

10. Kristen and Sherri suffered the same losses as children, the same traumas, but Sherri grew in her faith. Kristen lost hers. Why do you think people react differently in these sets of circumstances? Why do some become closer to God, while others push away?

11. Do you think it would be natural for Kristen's faith to shrivel even more when Sherri dies? Instead she's asking questions about prayer. She's contemplating going to church. Does that surprise you? If you were in her shoes, would you react the same way or differently?

12. Were you surprised Kristen gave up her job as an oncologist to work treating women at a nonprofit health clinic? Do you think she made the right choice? Explain.

13. Were you surprised Daniel forgave Kristen and agreed to renew their vows? What would you have done in his shoes? Explain.