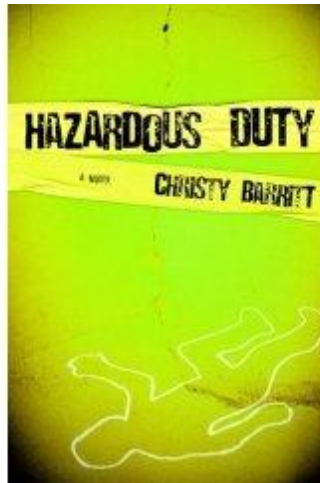


# **Hazardous Duty**

**By Christy Barritt**

## **Bible Study Packet**

By Kathy Applebee



*Hazardous Duty* is available from your local book seller and from Amazon.com.

# **Hazardous Duty**

## **Materials overview**

To group members

Welcome. This packet is to assist you and your group as you read *Hazardous Duty* and meet to discuss the book, how it connects with your life and the scriptures. As you read, if you notice something you want your group to talk about jot down a note and page number on the bookmark. You may want to look at the questions about the section you are reading before you read.

If you are using this material solo, you can use the discussion questions as journal prompts or as a personal Bible study.

Group leaders/facilitators:

This is presented as a 4 session Bible study but you should adapt to your group's needs and desires. You may or may not get to all the questions. You may or may not read all the scripture references (although I strongly suggest you read all the passages written out). This is a tool to help generate fruitful discussion, not a detailed road map. Your best preparation for leading the group is to pray about it. God promises to give us wisdom if we ask in James 1:5. You may want to open your study with a prayer that includes God giving all of you wisdom as you meet and talk.

The comfort level of your group will dictate how much of the focus is on Gabby and other characters from *Hazardous Duty* and how much is on the lives of the individuals in your group. It is natural to be more comfortable talking about someone else's problems, thoughts and feelings than one's own in a group one does not know well. Do your best and encourage others to do theirs to make everyone feel welcome but not forced to share. Establish some ground rules everyone is comfortable with such as what stays in the room and what can be shared outside of the group.

Free secular lesson plans on *Hazardous Duty* and *Suspicious Minds* are available on the Teachers Pay Teachers website at <http://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Store/Kathy-Applebee/Products>

Visit the Fools for Christ website at <http://mysite.verizon.net/vze4p7te/foolsforchrist/>  
For royalty free Christian drama skits including "Writing Mysteries Can Be Murder" based on *Hazardous Duty*, the first book in the Gabby St. Claire mysteries series.

**Book: Hazardous Duty, by Christy Barritt**

Day/Date of my next meeting \_\_\_\_\_

Pages I need to read by my next meeting: pg. 1-65

As you read write a couple of questions to ask your group at your next meeting. Try to make them OPINION questions, such as “Why do you think...”, or “How did you feel when...”, or “What would you do if...”.

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Connecting with others:

Sierra claims animals are not pets but animal companions. (pg 39) What do you think about that statement? Sierra is adamant about animal rights. Where do you fall on that continuum?

On page 27 Gabby thinks that sometimes responsibilities dictate one’s life; you just have to make the best of what you have. What responsibilities was she talking about? Did she choose to take these responsibilities on or did circumstances force her? Share how a responsibility in your life dictated an action you took or a choice you made. How did it turn out?

“Turning lemons into lemonade.” is one way of describing how one can take a bad situation and make something good come of it. Share a situation where you saw this happen.

Gabby “stores stories” about Jesus, creation and the flood are as valid as those about Santa and the Easter Bunny. What do you think she means by this statement? Where do you store them?

Connecting with God’s Word:

During the reign of King Xerxes Jews were an enslaved people, second class citizens at best. Think about the treatment of African Americans prior to the Civil War (and for sometime thereafter). What was life probably like for a Jew at that time? Socially, politically, economically?

Xerxes throws a 180 day party to show off not only his power and material wealth but also his wife’s beauty. When Queen Vashti refuses to answer his summons, she is deposed. His advisors propose something like a beauty content to determine who the next queen will be and Xerxes agrees. Read Esther 2:5-18.

5 Now there was in the citadel of Susa a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin, named Mordecai son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, 6 who had been carried into exile from Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, among those taken captive with Jehoiachin king of Judah. 7 Mordecai had a cousin named Hadassah, whom he had brought up because she had neither father nor mother. This girl, who was also known as Esther, was lovely in form and features, and Mordecai had taken her as his own daughter when her father and mother died.

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- If life was bad for Jews in general, what might life have been like for an enslaved war orphan? Mordecai may have felt like Gabby. He was responsible to bring up his orphaned relative. We don't know from the Biblical account exactly how he felt about it; we know only what his actions were. Before reading the next passage brainstorm different attitudes Mordecai may have had about taking on responsibility for his cousin. What would be the pros and cons of accepting responsibility for her? Would it have dictated his life? Then read on.

8 When the king's order and edict had been proclaimed, many girls were brought to the citadel of Susa and put under the care of Hegai. Esther also was taken to the king's palace and entrusted to Hegai, who had charge of the harem. 9 The girl pleased him and won his favor. Immediately he provided her with her beauty treatments and special food. He assigned to her seven maids selected from the king's palace and moved her and her maids into the best place in the harem.

- If you were Esther how would you have felt when you found out you were being sent to the king? Resentful? Excited? Abandoned for a second time? After you arrived and won everyone's favor what might be running through your mind? Making lemonade out of lemons?

10 Esther had not revealed her nationality and family background, because Mordecai had forbidden her to do so. 11 Every day he walked back and forth near the courtyard of the harem to find out how Esther was and what was happening to her.

- What insight does knowing Mordecai checks on Esther on a daily basis give us?

15 ...Esther won the favor of everyone who saw her. 16 She was taken to King Xerxes in the royal residence in the tenth month, the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign.

17 Now the king was attracted to Esther more than to any of the other women, and she won his favor and approval more than any of the other virgins. So he set a royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti.

Verse 19 tells us although she was now queen, Esther continued to follow Mordecai's instructions as she had done when he was bringing her up.

- Taking Mordecai's advice seems to have worked out great for Esther. Despite her new position and power she continues to do as Mordecai instructs. How does this strike you? Odd? Foolish? Wise? If you don't know the rest of the book of Esther, predict what her life will be like? Will it be a "and they lived happily ever after" or something else?

In Acts 16 Paul and Silas run afoul of a crowd after casting a demon out of a slave girl. Read verses 23 to 34. After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. 24 Upon receiving such orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

- If you had just been beaten and thrown in prison, what would you most likely be doing?

25 About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. 26 Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody's chains came loose. 27 The jailer woke up, and

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when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. 28But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!"

- Paul keeps a man from committing suicide rather than run for his life. How do you explain that?

29The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. 30He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

31They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household." 32Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. 33At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized. 34The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole family.

- How did Paul and Silas make lemonade out of being beaten and put in prison? What would you be willing to do or go through to bring Jesus and someone you care about together? Another person you have never met? Someone who treats you badly?

Connecting with yourself (Pray and ponder):

- How has God helped you make lemonade out of lemons?

**Book: Hazardous Duty, by Christy Barritt**

Day/Date of my next meeting \_\_\_\_\_

Pages I need to read by my next meeting: pg. 66-129

Connecting with others:

- Chapter 9 opens with Harold explaining why he didn't tell Gabby he had a criminal record. What responsibilities does a job applicant have to bring up pertinent but potentially negative information about themselves if the interviewer doesn't ask? Do you think he should have told her? Would you have told her? Why or why not?
- Have you ever held back information from a friend, associate, boss, parent, anyone but wish you had not later on? What was the outcome of the situation? Have you even been like Gabby, the one who may have been betrayed by someone's failure to share information? How did you handle it?
- Sierra says Gabby is too hard on her boyfriends but Gabby sees it as self defense, a necessary evil to protect her from the heartache her mother went through. Knowing what you do about Gabby at this point, do you agree or disagree with Sierra? How do you find a workable balance between vulnerability and self disclosure?
- Gabby feels it was nice for a change to let Riley have control of a situation because she has spent much of her life being strong. (page 72) What are the pros and cons of letting someone else be in charge? Who if anyone would you trust to be in control of portions of your life? How big a portion? How long?
- Compare and contrast Jeremiah 10:23 (I know, O LORD, that a man's life is not his own; it is not for man to direct his steps.) with the closing lines of poem, *Invictus* (By William Ernest Henley 1849-1903).

I am the master of my fate:  
I am the captain of my soul.

- How does one find the proper balance between what appears on the surface to be two extremes?

Connecting with God's Word:

Putting God in charge of your life can be a scary idea. Back to Queen Esther from our last discussion. In Esther chapters 3 & 4 we find all Jews are about to be exterminated. Esther faced a dilemma. She might be exempt from the death sentence since she has obeyed Mordecai and not told anyone she is a Jew. As the Persian Queen she could possibly get help from her husband to stop the genocide. Mordecai, her cousin, urges her to go into the king's presence to beg for mercy and plead with him for her people. Read Esther 4: 6 – 16.

6 Hathach (Think Esther's private bodyguard) went out to Mordecai in the open square of the city in front of the king's gate. 7 Mordecai told him everything that had happened to him, including the exact amount of money Haman had promised to pay into the royal treasury for the destruction of the Jews. 8 He also gave him a copy of the text of the edict for their annihilation, which had been published in Susa, to show to Esther and explain it to

her, and he told him to urge her to go into the king's presence to beg for mercy and plead with him for her people.

- What is probably going through Esther's mind at this point?

9 Hathach went back and reported to Esther what Mordecai had said. 10 Then she instructed him to say to Mordecai, 11 "All the king's officials and the people of the royal provinces know that for any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned the king has but one law: that he be put to death. The only exception to this is for the king to extend the gold scepter to him and spare his life. But thirty days have passed since I was called to go to the king."

12 When Esther's words were reported to Mordecai, 13 he sent back this answer: "Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. 14 For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?"

- At this point if you were Esther, what would you do? Why?

15 Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: 16 "Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish."

To make the long story found in Esther 5-10 short, Esther succeeds in saving all the Jews and Mordecai is promoted to the number two spot in the Persian government. Her bravery did not cost her life and did save the Jews. But... the happily ever after ending was not a sure thing. In what situation would you be willing to risk your life and say "And if I perish, I perish."?

- How is Esther putting her life in Mordecai's hands like us putting our lives in God's hands?

(The complete poem can be found at

<http://forum.quoteland.com/1/OpenTopic?a=tpc&s=586192041&f=099191541&m=3561938372&r=3161978372#3161978372>)

Connecting with yourself (Pray and ponder):

- How much of your life is under God's control? How comfortable are you with that? Where would you like control to be?

**Book: Hazardous Duty, by Christy Barritt**

Day/Date of my next meeting \_\_\_\_\_

Pages I need to read by my next meeting: pg. 130-180

Connecting with others:

- Respond to Gabby's quote on page 138 "Church...just another empty pursuit as people try to find meaning in life." She sees church as a means to fill a void not unlike a service club or in self-destructive drinking or doing drugs.
- What gives meaning to people's lives? What would you consider empty pursuits? What specifically gives meaning to your life? What wouldn't you want to change that is meaningful? What would you change to add more meaning to your life?
- Being in office means power and prestige that some people would kill for. Gabby suspects that is motive enough for Michael Cunningham, a powerful rich man, to murder his wife and make attempts on Gabby's as she gets too close to the truth. (page 135)
- Do you agree that gaining power and prestige is a motive for murder? What would you be willing to kill for? Who or what would you be willing to die for? Besides Jesus, who might be willing to die in your place?

Connecting with God's Word:

- Gabby feels powerless about several aspects of her life. Name a couple? Do you ever feel that way? About what?
- Read what Paul has to say about being powerless. Romans 5: 6You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. 7Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. 8But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Do you take it personally when you hear Christ died for you?

Gabby and David (the one who faced Goliath) have a lot in common. They are young and both face "giants".

- Do you have any other parallels connecting the two of them? How are they different?

Gabby's situation with Michael Cunningham has a lot in common with David's, when Saul wanted him dead. 1Samuel 18, 20, 24 & 26 has the details but the following account will hit the high points.

1 Samuel 18:5 Whatever Saul sent him to do, David did it so successfully that Saul gave him a high rank in the army. This pleased all the people, and Saul's officers as well.

6 When the men were returning home after David had killed the Philistine, the women came out from all the towns of Israel to meet King Saul with singing and dancing, with joyful songs and with tambourines and lutes. 7 As they danced, they sang:



"Saul has slain his thousands,  
and David his tens of thousands."

8 Saul was very angry; this refrain galled him. "They have credited David with tens of thousands," he thought, "but me with only thousands. What more can he get but the kingdom?" 9 And from that time on Saul kept a jealous eye on David.

- Has anyone ever had a jealous eye on you? What happened?

10 The next day an evil spirit from God came forcefully upon Saul. He was prophesying in his house, while David was playing the harp, as he usually did. Saul had a spear in his hand 11 and he hurled it, saying to himself, "I'll pin David to the wall." But David eluded him twice.

- Does Saul have reason to be jealous? Do you think David intends to take the kingdom away from Saul? Although this is an extreme case of jealousy, envy can divide friends, families and even churches. When have you seen the destructive powers of jealousy?

David's best friend is also Saul's son. When he tries to reason with his father on David's behalf his father blows up at him. Read on.

1 Samuel 20: 30 Saul's anger flared up at Jonathan and he said to him, "You son of a perverse and rebellious woman! Don't I know that you have sided with the son of Jesse to your own shame and to the shame of the mother who bore you? 31 As long as the son of Jesse lives on this earth, neither you nor your kingdom will be established. Now send and bring him to me, for he must die!"

32 "Why should he be put to death? What has he done?" Jonathan asked his father. 33 But Saul hurled his spear at him to kill him. Then Jonathan knew that his father intended to kill David.

Jonathan helps David escape. Think about how David must feel at this point. He has only done good for Saul, yet Saul wants him dead. Samuel has told him he will be king, yet David is running for his life, living in the desert. Doesn't sound much like a regal existence, does it?

\*What would you advise David to do at this point?

David could have rationalized that taking Saul out before Saul murdered him would simply be doing God's will. After all – God had promised to make him king in 1 Samuel 17. Instead, when given the opportunity to kill Saul easily, David spares his life. Read on.

1 Samuel 24:8 Then David went out of the cave and called out to Saul, "My lord the king!" When Saul looked behind him, David bowed down and prostrated himself with his face to the ground. 9 He said to Saul, "Why do you listen when men say, 'David is bent on harming you'? 10 This day you have seen with your own eyes how the LORD delivered you into my hands in the cave. Some urged me to kill you, but I spared you; I said, 'I will not lift my hand against my master, because he is the LORD's anointed.' 11 See, my father, look at this piece of your robe in my hand! I cut off the corner of your robe but did not kill you. Now understand and recognize that I am not guilty of wrongdoing or rebellion. I have not wronged you, but you are hunting me down to take my life. 12 May the LORD judge between you and me. And may the LORD avenge the wrongs you have done to me, but my hand will not touch you.

- What would you have done if you were David? Have you ever left it to God to avenge a wrong done to you?

Saul appears to make things right with David but just two chapters later he is hunting David down, intent on killing him. Once again David passes up the opportunity to exact his own revenge.

I Samuel 26: 7 David and Abishai went to the army by night, and there was Saul, lying asleep inside the camp with his spear stuck in the ground near his head. Abner and the soldiers were lying around him.

8 Abishai said to David, "Today God has delivered your enemy into your hands. Now let me pin him to the ground with one thrust of my spear; I won't strike him twice."

9 But David said to Abishai, "Don't destroy him! Who can lay a hand on the LORD's anointed and be guiltless? 10 As surely as the LORD lives," he said, "the LORD himself will strike him; either his time will come and he will die, or he will go into battle and perish. 11 But the LORD forbid that I should lay a hand on the LORD's anointed. Now get the spear and water jug that are near his head, and let's go."

David calls out to Saul, trying to convince Saul he is a loyal subject because he has once again spared his life. David's not only trusts to bring about his kingship but is willing to endure great inconvenience so it will happen with God's timing.

- Was David crazy or faithful? What would you have done if you were David? Perhaps Ananias thought about David when God sent him to talk to the Christian Enemy #1, Saul of Tarsus. Saul had vigorously persecuted Christians before he met Jesus and became one himself. Nevertheless when Ananias was sent by God to talk to him, he went knowing it could mean his death.

Paul after his conversion wrote the following to the church in Rome:

Romans 12: 18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. 19 Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. 20 On the contrary:

"If your enemy is hungry, feed him;  
if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.  
In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."

- Does it sound like something David could have written? Why or why not? Can humans treat their enemies this way or does it take supernatural strength? Paul may have been influenced by Jesus' teachings on how to treat one's enemies. Read on.

Luke 6: 27 "But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. 29 If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic. 30 Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. 31 Do to others as you would have them do to you.

- Where do you draw the line between being a doormat and turning the other cheek? When should a person turn the other cheek? When not?

32 "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' love those who love them. 33 And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' do that. 34 And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' lend to 'sinners,' expecting to be repaid in full. 35 But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. 36 Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

- Besides people in the Bible, have you ever known anyone who lives by these principles? What is their life like? Do you or could you embrace this lifestyle? Why or why not?

Riley cautions Gabby not to confuse life with God. "God gives us a choice on how to live ...and we screw things up. Therefore we have a lot of ugliness...the truth is, when bad things happen, God grieves over them just like we do." (page 156) Can you imagine God grieving? What would God be sad about?

The earliest account of God's grief is in Genesis 6:5. The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. 6 The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain.

- When have you felt like your heart was filled, completely full, of pain? What caused such hurt? How did you react? What brought about comfort?

We know of one incident when Jesus cried. John 11: 32 read When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

33 When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. 34 "Where have you laid him?" he asked.

"Come and see, Lord," they replied.

35 Jesus wept.

36 Then the Jews said, "See how he loved him!"

- Jesus knew in just moments he would be bringing Lazarus back from the dead. The weeping would be replaced by amazement and glory to God. Why do you think Jesus cried? This is the only account of Jesus crying but perhaps you can imagine him crying at other times. What are some other places in Jesus' life that he might have been moved to tears? Do you think he ever cried for people today? For you?

Connecting with yourself (Pray and ponder):

- What gives your life meaning?
- Who or what would you die for?

- How does God experience pain that fills his heart affect you?

**Book: Hazardous Duty, by Christy Barritt**

Day/Date of my next meeting \_\_\_\_\_

Pages I need to read by my next meeting: All of them! (180-240)

Connecting with others:

- Chapter 27 (page 182) finds Sierra wearing tiger ears and an animal print leotard locked in a cage to protest the treatment of circus animals. Do you think she is brave, committed or needs to be committed to a psychiatric facility? Have you or a friend done something like that before? For what reason would you do something like that?
- Page 195 Riley asks Gabby where she believes she came from. Gabby has no answer. If Riley asked you, how would you respond?
- Respond to Einstein's quote on page 223 "Science without religion is lame and religion without science is blind."
- Mildred tells Gabby she and Harold have placed their situation in God's hands. (page 193) Is that the same as giving up? Does it mean to not care about the outcome? Can you continue to work on a situation and have it be in God's hands at the same time?
- Once Veronica reunites with Riley she can't wait to get him out of Norfolk. She plans to make him fit into her "perfect little life." A friend of mind once cautioned "taking someone to the altar isn't the same taking something to a seamstress to get altered." How much change should one partner reasonably expect before marriage? After the wedding? Should they be up front about their expectations before saying "I do."? How wise is it to get married and hope for the best your mate changes afterward?

Connecting with God's Word:

The lab tech (page 223) tells Gabby the universe is fine tuned to our existence. Even a slightly different physical make up would preclude human existence. She states that the orderliness of creation is evidence of God.

Compare to Isaiah 45:18

For this is what the LORD says—

he who created the heavens,  
he is God;

he who fashioned and made the earth,  
he founded it;

he did not create it to be empty,  
but formed it to be inhabited—

he says:

"I am the LORD,  
and there is no other.

- Drag out some information lurking in the back of your brain from science class. In what ways has God fashioned the earth to be inhabited? (If you need a cheat sheet for this one I suggest the Answers in Genesis website, specifically <http://www.answersingenesis.org/docs/510.asp>, or <http://www.answersingenesis.org/Docs/399.asp> )

Read Romans 1:20 For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

- When you look at something man made, a piece of art, a building or an item of clothing, what can you tell about its maker? When you look at the vastness of creation (the Grand Canyon, our solar system) what can you tell about God? When you look at tiny details of creation, a baby's fingernail, atoms, DNA, parts of a cell, what can you tell about their creator?
- What are some of God's invisible qualities? How do these tie in with faith which according to Hebrews 1:1 is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

Mildred says there is a purpose for Harold's wrongful arrest. (page 193) What do you think that could be?

Read Romans 8:28 written by Paul, who endured harsh conditions, wrongful arrests and nearly died several times for being a Christian. "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

- Compare Paul's statement with Mildred's. Are they both talking about the same thing? Do you agree or disagree with them and why?

Mildred expresses faith, concluding that in this world we will have difficulty but since it is a passing phase, she looks toward heaven, her true home, rather than what she is enduring with Harold's arrest.

Hebrews 11 is the Faith Chapter of the Bible, giving example after example of courageous people who lived by faith, not by sight. The first 12 verses talk about Abel, Enoch, Noah, and Abraham. Read verses 8 – 10 & 13-16.

8By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. 9By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. 10For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

- Think about a time you spent a few days away from home – maybe at a camp, on a vacation or away at school. How does the amount of time you will spending living in a place correlate with how deep you send your roots? How does viewing earth as a temporary pit stop and heaven as home change your perspective on uncomfortable or difficult circumstances?

13All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. 14People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. 15If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. 16Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

- Do you think Mildred would find comfort in this passage? Why or why not? If you were Mildred, what would you be thinking as you read the following two scriptures?

James 1: 2Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. 4Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

- Can you think of a time when you stuck something difficult out and it paid off?

1 Peter 1: For a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. 7These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. 8Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, 9for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

- Mildred, Peter, James and Paul (if he is the author of Hebrews) all connect trials & faith. Considering Paul was singing at midnight in jail (Acts 16), the three of them link trials and joy. Think about marathoners or triathletes crossing the finishing line. Despite a grueling race, they throw their hands up in triumph and their faces radiate joy as well as exhaustion. Consider a mother, who after hours of hard labor, holds her newborn for the first time, sweat and smile intertwined. Have you ever felt that way? Describe the situation and your internal feelings and thoughts.

Connecting with yourself (Pray and ponder):

- The lab tech (page 223) asks Gabby if she believes a tree is as significant as a person. Gabby realizes she does believe that at times and the thought depresses her. What do you believe? Where do you find your significance?