

Shepherds Abiding

by Jan Karon

Discussion Guide

Shepherds Abiding, by Jan Karon (Viking, copyright c 2003), invites readers to enjoy a visit to the fictional town of Mitford as Christmas approaches. The novel tells the story of Father Tim who discovers a beaten up nativity scene and seeks to secretly give it new life in time to give as a Christmas gift to his wife, Cynthia. Other residents of Mitford share his secret and come to his aid while also tackling their own challenges as the holiday approaches. Their stories reflect the true meaning of Christmas and how small miracles occur when you have faith in Jesus and each other.

Permission is granted to reproduce this discussion guide.

Chapter 1

This chapter introduces some residents of Mitford and their busy lives on an October day.

1. Share why you have selected this book to read. Have you read other Mitford books?
2. Give your first impression of the town of Mitford.
3. How did residents respond to the rainy October day? How do rainy days make you feel?
4. What sights and sounds of fall does the author include?
5. Describe the character of Father Tim and some details about his life in Mitford.
6. Name a nice touch to detail that you appreciate that makes Mitford real.
7. What do you imagine the Happy Endings store to be like? Describe HopeWinchester.

Chapter 2

This chapter includes Hope receiving a proposal and Father Tim buying the nativity.

1. Share a Christmas tradition, like a manger scene, you look forward to each year.
2. What pros and cons did Father Tim consider before purchasing the manger set?
3. Share a time when you debated a Christmas purchase. How did you feel after the decision was made?
4. Discuss Hope's situation and how she felt about it.
5. What do you enjoy most when you visit a bookshop like Happy Endings?
6. What happened in this chapter that gave you a good and warm feeling?
7. Share a Christmas memory that was triggered by reading this chapter.

Chapter 3

This chapter begins with Uncle Billy considering what to give Rose for Christmas. Hope and Father Tim each have a secret. The Mitford Crud strikes town residents.

1. What thoughts and issues were on the mind of Billy Watson as this chapter begins?
2. List and discuss some of the problems involved in the manger restoration.
3. Who knows Father Tim's secret so far and how did they learn about it?
4. Why did Hope tell Father Tim she had a secret, but not the secret?
5. Discuss how God is a natural and daily part of the lives of Mitford residents.
6. Discuss the advice given in this chapter: Worry about nothing. Pray about everything.
7. What's it like to be sick and try to go about your regular day? Give your thoughts about how the Mitford Crud was handled.

Chapter 4

This chapter includes a letter from Hope to Mrs. Mallory and the Main Street Grill photo contest.

1. Explain the Main Street Grill photo contest and subject matter.
2. What role does prayer play in this chapter?
3. What do you think of the letter Hope wrote to Mrs. Mallory?

4. How does it feel to write and mail an important letter?
 5. Do you have a favorite Bible verse like Philippians 4:13? Share how a Bible verse can give you strength.
 6. How did Hope feel and what did she do while waiting for Mrs. Mallory to reply?
 7. Give an update on Father Tim's progress on restoring the manger scene.
-

Chapter 5

This chapter begins with the start of Advent and includes the annual Advent Walk. Father Tim decides to quit writing essays.

1. Share how Cynthia and Father Tim observed the start of Advent. Do you have an Advent traditions?
 2. What feelings did Father Tim have about his essays? Why did he quit?
 3. Give your impression of Father Tim's and Cynthia's marriage. What holds it together?
 4. Describe the annual Advent Walk. Would you like to participate? Why?
 5. How can you tell that Mitford residents are Christians?
 6. Discuss how Father Tim's restoration project is touching the lives of others.
 7. List the ways that this chapter told elements of the Christmas story.
-

Chapter 6

This chapter details the progress and a setback for the restoration project. Hope continues to wait for a letter.

1. Give an update of Hope's situation and feelings as she continued her waiting.
2. Discuss the progress and the setback on the restoration of the manger scene.
3. Share a time when a Christmas project occupied your thoughts and hours.
4. List some of the ways that this chapter brings Advent to life.
5. Have you ever tried to keep a Christmas secret like Father Tim? Share your story.

6. What do you admire most about Father Tim?
7. Why would you like to live in Mitford? What appeals to you about the town?

Chapter 7

This chapter looks at the lists we make around Christmas time along with holiday planning. Father Tim visits Hope House.

1. How is Father Tim feeling as this chapter begins?
2. Discuss the different types of lists people make around Christmas time.
3. Share your impressions of Father Tim's visit to Hope House.
4. What's the feeling in Mitford as Christmas approaches?
5. Share something that captured your imagination from reading this chapter.
6. What lessons are there in this chapter about preparing for Christmas?
7. Share how Mitford residents count their blessings, past and present.

Chapter 8

This chapter begins with Father Tim's e-mails; later he ministers to Lew Boyd.

1. How were the e-mails that Father Tim received almost like Christmas cards?
2. What were Lew Boyd's issues? How is Lew like many people?
3. What did you appreciate about Father Tim's conversation with Lew?
4. What lessons about being busy can we learn from Mitford residents?
5. Give some examples of how Father Tim ministered to others in this chapter.
6. How did Mitford residents feel about the Grill closing? What did they plan?
7. How did Father Tim feel about everyone stopping by his workshop?

Chapter 9

This chapter opens as Christmas Eve arrives at Mitford. The manger is unveiled.

1. How did Father Tim handle Dooley wanting to change his name?
2. Share your reaction to the letter that Hope wrote to Louise.
3. What thoughts did Father Tim have on his mind as Christmas Eve arrived?
4. Describe Cynthia's reaction to the gift of the manger scene.
5. Share your memories about picking out a Christmas tree.
6. Give some illustrations of Father Tim's wisdom or his faith.
7. Discuss the sights and sounds of Christmas that came alive to you in this reading.

Chapter 10

This chapter wraps up our visit to Mitford and begins with Billy Watson's Christmas.

1. What did you enjoy about Billy Watson's Christmas with his wife, Rose?
2. Discuss the feelings that Lew Boyd had on Christmas morning.
3. Share some of the Christmas morning images that touched you.
4. Name some lessons we learn about God from Hope's words and deeds.
5. Discuss how Christmas was observed at Hope House.
6. Share your feelings on how this book ends.
7. How did you like this book? What did you gain by reading it?