

# UNHALING: ON GOD, GRACE AND A PERFECTLY IMPERFECT LIFE

## DISCUSSION GUIDE

From her full and rather chaotic life, Elise has chosen incidents (some humorous, some poignant) where God can be found in the “everydays.”

### *Mnemonia/ Joanie Time/ Polaroids and Prayers/ Joyful Cooking*

These stories explore the mystery of memories—what we remember (and what we don’t), how we remember, sharing our memories.

***Mnemonia:*** On a scale of 1-10, how good is your memory these days? What is your earliest memory?

***Joanie Time:*** Did you grow up in a family where memories were often shared?

***Joyful Cooking:*** If you could name one food (good or bad) that evokes the strongest memory for you, what would it be, and why?

***Polaroids and Prayers:*** How do you feel about the statement: “in some mysterious way, we are still every photo ever taken of us”?

### *Skydiving/ Learning to Be Driven /A Slight Change of Plans*

These essays talk about the control—or lack of control—we have over our lives.

***Skydiving:*** How adventurous would you say you are? When was the last time you took a big risk?

***Learning to be Driven:*** How much does being in charge matter to you? What would your life look like if you truly let God be in the driver’s seat?

***A Slight Change of Plans:*** Are you more comfortable with a set plan for your days, or do you usually end up “winging it”? Does the unknowable future excite you or fill you with dread?

### *Piano Lessons/Exercising My Options/Cluttered*

If you had to rate your efforts to improve yourself, what would your score be? What would God’s score be for you? Would you say you have your priorities straight? These are the questions discussed in these three stories.

***Piano Lessons:*** When was the last time you tried to learn something new (language, musical instrument, sport) as an adult? Did you beat yourself up for not doing that something perfectly?

***Exercising my Options:*** What is an area in your life you know you should improve, but just don’t? Where does caring for your body fit into your life?

***Cluttered:*** Which of your possessions would you have the hardest time giving up? Would you consider yourself a pack rat or a tosser?

*Birthing/ A Blooming Shame/ Rage Against the Machine/ Adventures in Missing the Mark*

These essays explore our struggles: to recognize God's presence, be open to receive His help, discern the right way to live in relationship with Him—and with one another.

*Birthing and A Blooming Shame:* How tough is it for you to accept help? Can you think of a time you made a mess of things because you tried to go it alone?

*Rage Against the Machine:* How wedded are you to technology? If computers and cell phones disappeared tomorrow, would you be devastated or relieved?

*Adventures in Missing the Mark:* Do you consider yourself on, or off target when it comes to reading other people? What qualities of Jesus do you find the toughest to emulate?

*Our Latest Move/Ready or Not/ Under the Weather/ Nervous*

These stories talk about the steadfastness of God—a God with us wherever we live, taking us home when we've learned life's lessons, with us in sickness and in health, reassuring even a nervous wreck.

*Our Latest Move:* Talk about a time you felt God's presence when you were far from home. Where is "home" for you?

*Ready or Not:* Do you believe God wants to "catch" us when we're most ready for Heaven? Why or why not?

*Under the Weather:* What was the sickest you've ever been? Do you tend to think of God as an actual healer, or just a comforting presence?

*Nervous:* How has worry affected your life? Are you always (or ever) able to trust that, in God, everything will be all right?

*Timeless/ Sheer Perfection /Vineyard Heaven*

These stories talk about various concepts of Heaven.

*Timeless:* Describe Heaven as you would have as a little child. Describe Heaven now. How do you think you will know your loved ones?

*Sheer Perfection:* Have you ever had a day on earth that felt like Heaven to you? What made it feel that way?

*Vineyard Heaven:* Are you happiest at work or at play? If you could choose a place on earth that felt most like Heaven to you, where would it be?

*Fallen Logs and Fishing Boots/ Carving Out/ Working*

Here are images of God as an artist, molding us through our toughest life experiences...and a reflection on the value of all kinds of work in shaping us too.

*Fallen Logs and Fishing Boots and Carving Out:* When you think of God at work in your life, do you think of him as a painter, or a sculptor? Where in your life do

you need to be carved out? How have your most difficult times shaped your personality? At what point in your life did you change the most? What brought on that change?

*Working:* What was your first job? Your worst job? What, to you, is the value of suffering and hardship?

*Hamster Love/ The Antichaperone/ Tikkun Olam/ It's all Good*

These stories talk about our changing selves, and God's role in those changes.

*Hamster Love:* Did you have pets growing up? Do you have them now? Have you ever looked at something differently by trying to see it through a loved one's eyes?

*The Antichaperone:* What is the most uncomfortable role you play in life? How might God be working through your discomfort?

*Tikkun Olam:* Do you feel you might have a major role to play in the world? What might that be?

*It's all Good:* Have you ever had a time in your life when you noticed a dramatic change in your personality? Do you ever try to stretch and understand things that are over your head? How does that make you feel?

*The Sporting Life/After the Curtis Concerts/Missing Rose/  
The Faith of a Plebe*

Like all of us, the Seyfried children have very different interests— sports, music, the military, traveling. Here are stories that look at these interests in light of our spiritual lives.

*The Sporting Life:* How different are your children, or siblings, from one another? Is being unique encouraged or discouraged in your family?

*After the Curtis Concerts:* How important is music in your life? Do you continue to follow your passion even if it's an unpopular one?

*Missing Rose:* Recall a time you were separated from a loved one. Who do you think changed more while you were apart?

*The Faith of a Plebe:* Think of a "rite of passage" in your life. Can you see a spiritual parallel? Where would you say you currently are in your faith journey?

*The Spoiler/Maybe New Year/Be Here Now*

"The dates are set by Man. The days—ah, the days are gifts from God." How you open those gifts is the subject of these essays.

*The Spoiler:* Are you content to let life unfold, or do you always want to know what is coming next?

*Maybe New Year:* Do you have (maybe unreasonably) high expectations of certain holidays?

*Be Here Now:* How close do you come to living in the present moment? Who in your life seems to savor each day?

*The Anniversary Waltz/ Another Piece of the Puzzle/ Talk to Me*

These stories talk about relationships—good, difficult, or ever changing— with God, and with one another.

*The Anniversary Waltz:* How has your relationship with your spouse/ family changed over the years?

*Another Piece of the Puzzle:* Have you ever felt estranged from a family member? Do you believe relationships continue to develop, even after death?

*Talk to Me:* Are you a natural communicator? Is sharing your feelings difficult for you? Do you find it easy or difficult to talk to God on an everyday basis?

*Acting the Part/ Ungifted/ St. Nicholas Day and Other Disasters*

We are, all of us, perfectly imperfect. These essays ask: can we see God at work in us even in our biggest mess-ups?

*Acting the Part:* Do you ever think of God as the producer-director-playwright, and you the bad actor, in your life?

*Ungifted:* Do find yourself focusing on the areas of your life where you are ungifted? How do you think God can still use you for His work here?

*St. Nicholas Day and Other Disasters:* Are any of your family traditions repeated (and maybe funny) disasters? Do you sometimes try too hard to make things perfect for the people you love?