

Discussion Questions

- 1 Helen says she “performs grief.” Why does she do it? What would you do in a similar situation? How does her true grief contrast with her performed grief?
- 2 Ray is a natural peacemaker. How is this good? Any negatives?
- 3 Helen and Jay-Jay have an evening routine of dancing to the radio. Any sweet parent-child rituals in your family?
- 4 As a noncombatant during wartime, Ray feels people look down on him. Why do you think he feels this way? Do you agree with his decision after the fire?
- 5 Jay-Jay, like many children his age, has a temper. How does Helen deal with his tantrums at the beginning? At the end? Have you known the joy of raising a tantrum-throwing child?
- 6 Helen’s “heart’s work” is leadership and volunteering, and Ray’s is ministry. How do you see this? Do you have an area where your talents and gifts combine into something useful and enjoyable?
- 7 Circumstances keep both Ray and Helen from their “heart’s work” during the story. How does Ray handle it? How about Helen? Have you ever been kept from something you enjoy, and how did you handle it?
- 8 Discuss Jim and Helen’s marriage. What clues did you see? How did Helen’s childhood experiences as a polio patient and as a ballet pupil set her up for this relationship?
- 9 At the Sacramento Air Depot, Ray feels he hinders the war effort. How is he not suited for this job? Have you ever had a position you weren’t suited for? What did you do?
- 10 Victor Llewellyn just can’t take no for an answer. Do you think this stems from arrogance or from insecurity? Why do you think he made his decision about the appeal?
- 11 During World War II, many women were single mothers due to widowhood or their husband’s deployment, and 19 million women took jobs outside the home. These women faced many modern issues. How do you see this in Helen’s life?
- 12 How do Ray’s past experiences with women affect his relationship with Helen? Do you think he moved too fast? Why? What was the result?
- 13 Helen deals with rationing and shortages on the home front. Do you have any personal or family experiences of World War II home front life? How would you have handled these difficulties?
- 14 Ray flies his combat tour at the peak of strength for the U.S. Eighth Air Force. Still,

conditions were difficult due to German fighters, flak, extreme cold, collisions, and crashes. How does Ray cope? How about his crewmates? How would you cope?

- 15 Do you think Helen volunteers because of her personality and gifts? Patriotism? Dealing with pain? Pleasing people? Pleasing God? Some combination?
- 16 By the end of the story, Ray is able to do things he couldn't do before. Do you think he was always capable, or did his experiences change him fundamentally?
- 17 How would you describe the relationship between Helen and Betty? Between Ray and his brothers? Between Jim and Dorothy? How did their early roles affect them as adults? Do their relationships change during the story? If so, how?
- 18 The Port Chicago Explosion was the largest home front disaster of the war, and the aftermath of the mutiny trial eventually led to the desegregation of the U.S. armed forces. While Carver is fictional, two men with medical excuses were convicted. What examples of racism and segregation do you see in the story? Were you surprised?
- 19 Ray is frustrated when Major Siegel doesn't believe his testimony. How does he deal with this? Have you been in a situation where people didn't believe you?
- 20 If you read *A Distant Melody* or *A Memory Between Us*, did you enjoy the updates on Walt and Allie and on Jack and Ruth?