

CHRISTMAS AT CARNTON

Reading Guide Discussion Questions

(Expanded from those in the novella)

Spoiler Alert: Questions contain key plot points to the story.



1. What happened to Aletta—being widowed so young, already a mother and with another child on the way—was the norm rather than the exception during the Civil War. Over 620,000 soldiers were killed during the course of the war. Could you empathize with Aletta and her challenges? Her choices? Have you experienced the loss of a spouse? Could you relate to her grief and her difficulty in accepting the truth about her husband's death?
2. MaryNell, Aletta's friend, also faced a difficult choice. What did you feel toward MaryNell in her circumstances? And toward Aletta as she realized what decision her friend was facing?
3. Before reading *Christmas at Carnton*, were you aware of Women's Relief Societies and how women from both the South and the North created these organizations to support both the Confederate and Federal soldiers? Had you been living back then, do you think you would have taken part in one of these societies? And in their auctions? Discuss the important role these organizations made in the lives of the soldiers, and the differences they made to the women themselves.
4. Did you understand Jake's reluctance to be part of the Women's Relief Society? How did you feel about the newspaper article espousing that women were "best suited for hearth and home" (a common—and even celebrated—Victorian view of the day)? Did you share Aletta's reaction to that statement? What were your impressions of Jake upon his arrival at Carnton?
5. Come Christmas and other holidays, we tend to especially miss those loved ones who've gone on before us. Can you relate to Aletta's "dreading" Christmas? Have you

ever felt that way? If yes, share that experience. Read II Corinthians 5:1-10 and discuss what it means to be "swallowed up in life" as the Scripture is translated in the NLT Bible, as well as what the believer in Christ has to look forward to following the death of the earthly body.

6. As Aletta grows closer to Jake, she harbors fear. Describe her fear and what it stems from. Could you relate? What finally draws her to Jake?

7. What did you think of Tempy's character, and about what she said to Aletta in reference to being "left behind" when the rest of the slaves were taken farther South? Were you aware that oftentimes the Federal Army wasn't all that concerned with freeing the slaves? In Ch. 20, Tempy offers counsel to Aletta about her own marriage and about trusting God. Do you share Tempy's belief? Do you consider God trustworthy? Read Isaiah 26:4; Jeremiah 17:5-8; 1 Timothy 4:9-10 and discuss.

8. What is the most important lesson Jake learned in the course of the story to you? What about Aletta? How do you relate to those eternal truths?

9. Who were your favorite characters in the novel? Favorite scenes? Any similarities among your group?

10. Understanding that God's beloved Son is the greatest Christmas gift ever, what's the next best Christmas gift you've received?

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