

The First Phone Call From Heaven Study Guide

The First Phone Call From Heaven by Mitch Albom

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Contents

The First Phone Call From Heaven Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapters 1-3.....	8
Chapters 4-6.....	12
Chapters 7-9.....	16
Chapters 10-12.....	21
Chapters 13-15.....	24
Chapters 16-18.....	29
Chapters 19-21.....	33
Chapters 22-24.....	41
Chapters 25-26.....	46
Characters.....	48
Symbols and Symbolism.....	55
Settings.....	57
Themes and Motifs.....	59
Styles.....	64
Quotes.....	65



Plot Summary

The story, *First Phone Call from Heaven*, by Mitch Albom, chronicles a series of events that took place after a phone call was reportedly received from a dead relative by Katherine Yellin, a real estate agent in Coldwater, Michigan. However, the story opens with Tess Rafferty receiving her own phone call (and who, in fact was the real first person to receive a phone call). Not only does Tess receive a phone call, but across town, the police chief, Jack Sellers, also receives a phone call from his dead son, Robbie. Meanwhile, a few counties over Sully Harding is released from a military prison. His son and parents are there to greet him. The reader learns that his wife, Giselle, who had been in a coma, has just died.

Sully goes to get Giselle's ashes from the local funeral home. The ashes are kept in an urn shaped like a small angel. He doesn't know what he should do with them, and he can't bear to part with them, so he takes them home to put on the mantle.

Meanwhile, Jack wrestles with his own disbelief about the phone call. He looks at the photo of he and his ex-wife, Doreen, with Robbie by the lake. They are all wearing life preservers which Jack finds ironic. He decides that he will not tell Doreen that he's been receiving calls since Doreen went into a major depression when Robbie died.

Sully looks for a job but once everyone learns of his time in jail, he is turned away. He's moved into an apartment, but hasn't unpacked any of the boxes. His young son, Jules, who has been living with Sully's parents, moves back in. Jules is seven. An old friend of Sully's, Mark, gets Sully a job at the newspaper selling ads. Sully hates the job, but at least it is something.

The next day in church, Katherine Yellin stands at the end of the service and tells everyone about the phone call that she received from her sister. Elias Rowe, seeing her courageous behavior, stands and says that he, too, has received a phone call from someone known to be dead.

In a flashback, the reader learns that Sully's plane crashed because he had taken a flight job for another co-worker who couldn't do the flight. It would allow Sully, who was on deployment, an opportunity to see his wife and Jules.

Meanwhile, on the road into town there is a young reporter named Amy. She is furious because her boss, Phil, has sent her to a little backwater town to do a story on a woman who talks to the dead through her phone.

Across town, Tess's house catches fire. She's ceased to do much around her house except to wait for a phone call from her dead mother, Ruth. As a result, she hasn't mowed the lawn, cleaned her house, and when the space heaters upstairs fall over, Tess isn't up there to catch it in time. She makes it out of the house okay, but her upstairs is totally gutted.



At Frieda's Diner, Elias Rowe thinks about his confession in church. His phone calls have come from an employee of his named Nick. Elias feels guilty about that since Nick died penniless and hopeless, which Elias believes he helped to perpetuate by firing Nick.

Alexander Graham Bell's history with the phone and his deaf fiance, Mabel, are discussed. It is his desire to be able to communicate with her that spurs on his invention. He longs to be able to create a device that will enable her to hear music and his voice.

Pastor Warren does not know what to make of the 'miracles' that have happened to some of his congregants. No other church in the community has any heavenly phone calls coming in, which perplexes the 82-year-old preacher. He is worried at Katherine Yellin's overnight celebrity and what it might mean for the town.

Sully determines that he is going to get to the bottom of the phone calls before things get any further out of hand. His own son believes that his mother will call him, thanks to a teacher at Jules' school. Sully goes to talk to Elias who refuses to speak with him. Elias stops at the edge of town, throws his phone in the water, then leaves town.

People have started to make a pilgrimage into Coldwater; many of them camping out on Katherine's front lawn. Pastor Warren's secretary at the church tenders her resignation saying that the phone calls that have been streaming in are nonstop and that it wasn't what she signed on for. Pastor Warren goes across the street to speak with the mayor.

The mayor is excited with all of the publicity and thinks that it will put the town on the 'map' so to speak. He accepts partnerships with Dial Tek and several other larger corporations, who set up shop in the center of town.

Meanwhile, Tess, at her mother's suggestion, has called the Catholic priest, Father Carroll. Father Carroll has called in Bishop Hibbing to authenticate the 'miracle'. Tess wonders why she called either of the men since she's been a lapsed Catholic ever since they treated her mother poorly after her divorce.

There's a town hall meeting at the local high school where more people come forward to say that they've received phone calls. This makes six in all. Sully goes to the local library to do some investigating, where he meets the new librarian named, Liz. He wants to look up the obituaries of the people who are now, reportedly, calling home. He finds that all of them were written by Maria at the funeral home, which he finds odd. Even odder still, Sully learns that Maria tapes all of the interviews with the family members, then transcribes them and keeps them all in a large file in the office.

In a flashback the reader learns that shortly after ejecting from his plane, Sully had seen his wife rushing to the scene. He did not see her wreck, but later was told that she had hit the Tower Controller head on as they both rounded a turn at the airport.

Back in the present, Amy sits with Katherine, consoling her as she cries. Katherine's children and family don't want anything to do with her, thinking that she is making all of it



up. Amy takes advantage of the situation to steer Katherine clear of the other news agencies who want to talk to Katherine.

The next day Amy and Katherine go to visit the sick in the local hospital. An older man with leukemia speaks with Amy, then the next day he dies. The media seizes on this and claims that heaven is killing people and that Katherine is the angel of death. This devastates Katherine. Over at Tess's house, because of the Bishop's declaration that Tess had been the actual first receiver of a phone call from heaven, there are now 200 people camped out on her lawn. Her best friends waded through them to bring some of the kids from the daycare to see her.

Sully goes to Dial Tek and asks Jason, the clerk there, to look up some information for him. Jason hesitates, but then complies, and finds out that all of the people getting phone calls were all on the same phone plane and had the same type of phones.

Tess and Jack grow closer as Jack continues to have to go to her house to chase people off of her front lawn. Finally, one morning when Jack comes over, he is shocked to see that she's opened her front doors and is feeding everyone toast and tea. Jack pitches in to help and both he and Tess share a romantic moment later.

Sully speaks with Maria, the funeral home secretary. She is very talkative and Sully learns that the people who have access to the files are the people in the funeral home and the newspaper people. The senior reporter, Elwood Jupes, becomes Sully's chief suspect.

In order to counter the abusive claims against her, Katherine tells the public when she is live on the air, that she plans to broadcast her sister's next call, and then everyone can hear for themselves. The town becomes a circus as believers, protesters, and the media move in.

Jack's ex-wife Doreen has also been receiving calls. Finally, she goes to tell Jack about it, and then tells him that she doesn't want to receive them any longer. She tells him that she took out all of her phones and gave them away.

In front of the Harvest Church a riot between believers and protesters is about to break out. Jack and Warren go out front to try and calm things down. Jack is hit on the back of the head and he loses consciousness.

Elias comes back into town and seeks out Sully. He tells him that originally he was just going to keep on driving, but then he thought about Sully and his little boy and turned around. The two men begin to figure out a few things, but they need to prove it. Elias agrees to help Sully.

Amy's fiance, Rick, leaves her because she won't do anything but focus on work. Back at the mayor's office, everyone gathers to discuss the next media drive. Amy, finally looking at the situation with clarity, yells at them all to stop, that commercializing all of this is wrong. She is fired.



Pastor Warren is holding Wednesday night services and collapses from a heart attack. He is taken to the hospital. At the high school football field construction begins on a stage that will hold Katherine and the other Coldwater miracles. Sully learns during a meeting at the newspaper that Horace and Jupes are best friends, often spending a lot of time together. The next day Sully waits for his opportunity and he ducks into the funeral home while everyone is at lunch and takes the transcription files from Maria's desk.

Sully goes to visit Warren at the hospital. Elias is there, too. Sully asks Warren what he thinks about all of the phone call business and Warren tells him that God gives glimpses of heaven all of the time, but not like this. Sully agrees, and finds that Elwood has begun following him. He goes to the library to look up Elwood's daughter's obituary, but finds that the entire edition has been taken. Before anything more can come of it, Jack enters, takes Sully to the station for questioning. It is there that Sully learns that Jupes has accused him of much the same thing that Sully is accusing him of...making the false phone calls.

Satisfied that Sully is not involved with the phone calls, Jack releases him. Right before the show at the high school football field, Sully learns from his father that Horace didn't own the funeral home for very long, as he purchased it from the original owner only two years prior. Sully researches it and finds that Horace came from Virginia, worked for military intelligence, and did not work on Fridays. All of this evidence is enough to send Sully to Horace's home.

When Sully reaches Horace's farmhouse he sees that there is a hidden antenna on the property. Sully gets into the building, goes down into the basement, where Horace shows him the entire setup. He tells Sully that he made the phone calls to atone for his mistakes in the past. He tells Sully that his real name is Eliot Gray, Sr., the father of the Tower Controller responsible for his plane crash. Sully is shocked at the revelation, and then watches in horror as Horace makes Katherine's phone ring on stage, in front of the world.

The call has already been made, but Sully attacks Horace any way, smashing up the room, pulling cords and wires, overturning monitors. Horace gets away through a secret trap door. Sully rushes out to the car and tries to call Elias. The phone lines are spotty due to the bad weather.

Sully hits a lot of traffic on his way home, so decides to take a back road. He receives a phone call, which he answers. It is from Giselle. Suspecting Horace is up to his old tricks, Sully yells at him to stop messing with him. He is driving too fast and in order to avoid a family walking on the road, he jerks the wheel too far to the left. This takes him over an embankment and down onto a frozen lake. He loses consciousness, and then wakes to see his wife sitting on the edge of Jules' bed. She tells him that he should not tell Jules about what happened.

Sully wakes and pushes himself free of the wreckage. He just makes it to the edge of the lake when the car breaks through the ice and disappears. Sully makes it to the top



of the road where the police are already at Horace's house. They put Sully into an ambulance and tell him that Horace was found dead in a small panic room in the house.

The media have a field day with the fact that Horace had orchestrated the entire thing. Katherine, and the others feel like fools. Sully explains that the voicemail recordings and other recorded voices of their loved ones had been stored and were easily accessible to someone with Horace's military intelligence background. He'd been trying to offer some peace and consolation to those who were particularly upset by their loved ones' passing.

Sully thinks about his near death visit from his wife, and then realizes that if Horace was dead, then he could not have made the phone call pretending to be Giselle. Sully calls Jack and asks for Horaces' time of death. Horace was dead well before Giselle called him. The first, and only, phone call from heaven, had been on Sully's phone.



Chapters 1-3

Summary

Chapter 1

In a small town in Michigan, various people receive phone calls from their long dead loved ones. In particular, there is a woman named Tess, who receives a call from her mother, and then Jack Sellers, a policeman, who receives a call from his son who'd been killed in action overseas. Pastor Warren doesn't receive a call, but one of his parishioners, Katherine Yellin, does...from her long dead sister. All of the departed say the same thing: they are fine and are happy. Meanwhile, Sullivan Harding is released from prison, but his wife, Giselle, is not present to greet him. There is only his mother and father, and his small son, Jules.

Chapter 2

This chapter opens with its focus on Sullivan Harding (Sully). He is walking into town to the funeral home. His wife died while he was in prison and he wasn't allowed to attend her funeral. Her ashes are still at the funeral home.

Sully retrieves his wife's remains and begins walking. It starts raining lightly, so he finds a park bench under a tree and sits to wait out the rain. The urn is shaped like a porcelain angel, and Sully remarks that it looks like the two of them are waiting for a bus.

Meanwhile, Tess is fidgety waiting for another phone call. She paces, rarely leaving the kitchen less it ring again while she is out. She'd connected with her mother who had told her that she had arrived safely and that she wanted to tell her about heaven. But, at that moment, the line went dead. Tess has ceased all of her usual operations, including going to work, the grocery, or even walking down to the mailbox.

Jack Sellers is wrestling with his own disbelief at the police station. So far he'd received two additional calls from his son. Despite the calls, he hasn't shared any of them with his ex-wife, Doreen. She'd nearly shut down completely when Robbie had died, so how would she take this news? He just couldn't think about her right now. The last phone call from Robbie had been brief. His son had told him that there were no bad days where he was. When Jack asked where that was, Robbie told him that he knew good and well where he was. Robbie told him to tell his mother that she shouldn't cry and that if she knew what came next that no one would ever worry again.

Katherine Yellin thinks about her sister and the latest phone call. "It's better than we dreamed, Kath," her sister, Diane, had said. Katherine thinks about their growing up years, how Diane, the older of the two, was always paving the way for her younger sister. They were as close as two sisters could ever be. They'd been there for each



other through their parents' deaths, the marriages, the births. In the wee hours of the morning, Katherine decides something. She will not be silent about what is happening.

Chapter 3

Sully's story unfolds. The reader learns that he has been in prison for ten months. Nine weeks shy of his release his wife, Giselle, died. She'd been in a coma and during a thunderstorm passed away. Sully lives in an apartment in Coldwater, but his son, Jules, still lives with his parents. Jules will be moving back in with him shortly. He doesn't know what to do with Giselle's ashes, so they sit on the mantle, waiting.

Mark Ashton, an old navy buddy of Sully's, brings some groceries up to the apartment. He's driven all the way in from Detroit. He tells Sully that he might have a line on a job for him doing newspaper sales. Sully is reluctant because of the way the newspapers all reported what happened when he'd been sent to military prison. He tells Mark what he wants to hear so he will leave.

Tess looks out of the windows and realizes that she hasn't mowed the lawn in a couple of weeks. She thinks about her latest phone conversation with her mother, who had suffered from Alzheimer's for many years. Her mother had told her that there was no pain where she was. She tells her that the pain in life doesn't really touch the essence of who a person is. She says, "You are so much lighter than you think." Tess asks her how this communication between them is possible and Ruth, her mother says that an opening had been created, but that it won't last much longer.

Meanwhile, in Pastor Warren's church, Katherine has made up her mind to share what is going on with the phone calls. Just as the Pastor is about to close the Sunday sermon, Katherine rises and asks for everyone's attention. Katherine tells them about the phone call, amidst the Pastor's attempts to silence her. Pastor Warren says that they can't know if it was for real. Another congregant stands. Elias Rowe is his name. He's also received a phone call. Others soon follow.

Analysis

In Chapters 1-3 the reader sees many of the main themes presented. First, there is the theme of loss. All of the characters, with the exception of Pastor Warren, have experienced devastating loss. Sully, not only lost his wife, but he lost his career, the respect of those around him, his freedom, and his faith.

What becomes apparent about all of the individuals introduced in these early chapters is that all of them are broken as a result of their loss. None of them have been able to move forward with their lives as a result of a death. The theme of Loss is one that will continue to be an underlying current throughout the rest of the novel as each character reconciles their loss and finds a way to move beyond it.

The theme of Faith is underscored by each phone call that is received. Each character must deal with the incredulity that they experience with the initial call. No one knows



exactly what to make of it, except that the voice on the end of the phone IS the voice of their departed loved one. In each instance, the character must deal and reconcile this miracle with their own personal belief system.

Tess, whose mother suffered from Alzheimer's is able to reconnect with her after so many years of forced separation due to the ravages of the disease. Tess is a professed lapsed Catholic, for a number of reasons, but when confronted with the phone call, Tess turns back to the church for answers. Tess finds that her faith, if not her attendance at church, has never wavered.

Both Tess and Jack's first phone calls demonstrate the theme of Connection and Communication. They are so excited when they receive the phone call that they forget, if only for a little while, that their loved one is actually deceased. To just hear their voice one more time is worth any remorse they might feel once the call ends.

Death, as a theme, is also presented in these first chapters. Death has had a dramatic impact on all of the characters who received a call. Tess's loss of her mother meant that she lost the only family that she had in the world. Her father, long since out of the picture, meant that with Ruth's death, Tess found herself quite alone in the world. Jack and his wife, Doreen, never dealt with their son's death and as a result, his death destroyed their marriage. Katherine Yellin suffered a horrible setback in every way imaginable when her sister, Diane, died. Diane had been, not only her sister, but her best friend. Without that physical connection with her sister on a daily basis, Katherine's center of gravity, so to speak, was wrecked. She could barely function. Elias Rowe is affected, not by the death of a loved one, but of an employee. Elias's situation is different in that the death of the employee haunts him with remorse.

The reader also sees the symbol of the Angel Urn as Sully goes to pick up his wife's ashes at the funeral home. His inability to decide what to do with them, and then sitting them on his mantle at home indicate that he is unwilling to accept her death, yet. Additionally, it is highly symbolic that Sully hasn't unpacked the boxes in his new apartment. He is clearly not ready to move on into life without Giselle, his wife.

Discussion Question 1

How has Sully's loss affected him?

Discussion Question 2

Compare the reaction of Tess to the phone call, to Katherine's reaction.

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the symbolism of the porcelain angel holding Giselle's ashes.

Vocabulary

static, boisterous, scrunched, en route, saliva, hobbled, frazzled, dashed, liberation, gaze, profound



Chapters 4-6

Summary

Chapter 4

This chapter opens with a brief overview of the history of the phone, itself. Alexander Graham Bell was motivated, readers learn, by the inability to communicate with his fiancée, who was deaf and couldn't speak. The action cuts to Sully who is remembering the last time he spoke with Giselle.

(flashback)

Sully is startled awake by a phone call from his senior officer, Blake Pearson. Blake is sick and asks Sully if he will fly the F/A 18 back to the West Coast for him, instead. Pearson suggests that he take a layover in Ohio to visit the wife and kids, and Sully accepts the offer. He calls Giselle and she is excited that he is coming to see them sooner than they had planned. She wants to see him.

Back in the present, Sully goes out and gets into his father's old Buick, and drives downtown. What becomes very apparent to him as he drives through the streets, is that with the summer tourist season over, he is going to have a hard time finding a job.

The focus cuts to a woman named Amy Penn, who works at the local tv station. At 31 she hates the fact that she hasn't gone further in her career. All she needs, she continues to tell herself, is one big story. When she's sent to cover a story in Coldwater, she's hoping for the big fish. However, when she gets to Coldwater, the story is about a woman claiming to have spoken to her dead sister on the phone. Amy argues with Phil, the station manager. He tells her to cover it anyway. Amy tells him that it isn't real. Phil says that the Loch Ness Monster isn't either and that it still sells papers and gets viewers to tune in.

Amy leaves and Phil pulls out the letter that prompted him to send Amy to Coldwater. It says: A woman has been chosen. The gift of heaven on earth. This will become the biggest story in the world. Coldwater, Michigan. Ask a man of God. One call will confirm everything.

Elias Rowe, from the same church as Katherine, is on the job site. He works construction and is about to leave for the day when his client asks him if he really got a phone call from a dead person. He shrugs and says he doesn't know for sure. Right then he receives a phone call on his cell phone. He answers it angrily and tells the person to stop calling him. He leaves.

Across town all five of the church leaders have gathered at Warren's offices to discuss the 'miracle'. None of the others have had congregants come forward with miraculous



phone calls. Why only Warren's church? They complain that their attendees are asking how they can contact their loved ones. They all agree that the entire thing is a mess.

Sully stops at a local bar and drinks away the disappointment. He's been looking for work for three days and there's been nothing available for him.

Chapter 5

Tess's house catches fire, and Jack's officers respond along with the fire fighters. Tess doesn't want to leave the house without her phone. She can't explain why to the firefighters, but then Jack steps up and she tells him that she needs her phone. By this point Jack has received at least four other calls from his son, so he doesn't question Tess at all. He goes back into the flames to find her phone for her. The last phone call that Jack had received, Robbie had told him that everywhere around him was a feeling of love. He also said that in heaven one doesn't actually see things as much as one is inside of them.

Meanwhile, Sully is still miserable across town, even though he is helping his son get a bath in the tub at the apartment. Jules has moved in full time and instead of making Sully joyful, he finds shockingly, that it makes him worry all the more. His job search has been dismal at best. Each application asks about criminal convictions, and his eleven years in the navy, one year in the reserves, is always trumped by the ten month stint in jail.

The focus switches to Amy Penn, who drives into Coldwater still doubting the 'big' story that she's to cover. Her first stop is Katherine Yellin. Amy wonders why God would choose such a backwater town as Coldwater to open up the phone lines.

Pastor Warren is as confused as Amy Penn. Why would God choose two people from his congregation to bestow this special favor on? What is God's purpose? He'd called Katherine into his office a few days earlier and had warned her about talking to the reporter. Katherine had put him in his place saying that if a church was chosen it should lead the way, not hold it back. At 82 years of age, Pastor Warren feels every bit of his years just now.

Elias Rowe isn't feeling much better than Pastor Warren. Elias goes to a late night diner, called Frieda's. He thinks about the calls he's been receiving. Unlike Katherine, Elias has been getting calls from a former co-worker named, Nick. Elias remembers that Nick would always show up to the job site drunk, and Elias would have to send him home. One day Nick went to work on a roof while intoxicated and he fell off of the roof, breaking his back. Elias immediately had him drug tested, which Nick failed. As a result he didn't receive workman's compensation and the medical bills from his broken back and consequent surgeries bankrupted him. A year later Nick was found in his basement, dead of a heart attack.

Now, Elias thinks as he sits at the restaurant's counter, Nick has chosen him to call from the great beyond. Not to encourage him, and not to forgive him, but to accuse him, to ask him why Elias hadn't been able to forgive him. Nick tells him over the course of four



phone calls that God has forgiven him, that he had needed help and Elias had known it, but did nothing. He continues to ask Elias why. Angrily, during the last phone call, Elias tells him to stop calling. He gets rid of the phone and changes the number. He'd thought by supporting Katherine that he had made some sort of amends for not helping Nick. Apparently not.

Chapter 6

This chapter opens with another look at the work of Alexander Graham Bell. He has a friend of his, a surgeon, expose the ear, eardrum, and related bones from a cadaver. Graham speaks into the ear and observes how the ear drum reacts. From his earlier observations and experiments, he concludes that sound can vibrate an electrical current, and that if this is true then words can also travel just like electricity. It would only take a type of mechanical device, functioning like an eardrum, to restore sound. Maybe there is hope for his intended wife, Mabel Hubbard, who can't speak. As he backs away from the cadaver he muses that the dead have been a part of the discovery years before the living ever would know of it.

Back in Tess's house, she and Jack walk through the downstairs area. For the most part the fire only damaged some of the upper rooms. Jack and Tess begin comparing notes about the phone calls and they both discover that the phone calls always come on Fridays. They both wonder if they are the only ones.

Amy drives her Nine Action News car out of Coldwater, feeling liberated. Her discussions with Katherine had been unsettling. As she edges onto the highway she thinks back to how they had gone.

Amy had started the conversation out with a lie when Katherine had asked if Amy was a believer. If it got her the story, then yes, she was going to tell Katherine she was a believer. Shaking her head, she lets the thought of the interview go as she focuses on how she is going to tell Phil that there is no story in Coldwater.

Analysis

In Chapters 4-6 Alexander Graham Bell's story continues. The author uses Bell's discoveries and life to draw a parallel between the development of one of the world's greatest communication devices, and the desire for communication in Coldwater. Many of the characteristics, especially of the characters Jack, and Sully, correspond to many of the traits, hopes, and fears of Bell as he developed the phone.

The theme of Faith is also exemplified in this section. Amy Penn receives the assignment to go to Coldwater because someone has received a phone call from God. Amy is appalled that her boss would send her on such a wild goose chase and she resents the assignment. It is clear that Amy is not a believer and is less than enthused about interviewing someone who is obviously one of those 'rabid Christian' types.



The ministers in various churches come together to discuss what has been happening. Most notably the fact that none of the other churches have had congregants to receive phone calls. The theme of Miracles is demonstrated in Chapter 4 as the ministers try to come to some sort of conclusion about what has been happening, and why. They debate as to the actual definition of a miracle, and at what point something is considered a real miracle. Pastor Warren is the most skeptical one in the entire group, as well as the senior member. He has nothing more than a 'gut' feeling that something is off about the whole thing.

Tess's house catches fire and most of the upstairs rooms are lost. The bottom floor and basement are still functional so she's able to stay in the home while it is being repaired. Symbolically, Tess was burned out, too. Taking care of her mother through the last few years of Alzheimer's took its toll on her. Now, she finds herself with a wake up call, literally and figuratively, to pull herself together, to strike out in a new way, and to move forward. When she decides to rebuild the upstairs bedroom, it indicates her understanding of the need to move on.

In Chapter 6, it is discovered that all of the calls come to the recipients on Friday. Thus, Friday begins to become a 'holy' day for all of them. Friday, too, is often considered the 'end' of the week, which also ties into the fact that these are phone calls that are being received from the dead.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss Amy Penn's character and her purpose in the story.

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the theme of Belief versus Disbelief in these chapters.

Discussion Question 3

How does Elias view his 'miracle'?

Vocabulary

notified, sympathetic, compensation, limitations, intoxicated, aparent, confirmed, cadaver, elocution, implication, mechanical, charred, salvaged



Chapters 7-9

Summary

Chapter 7

This chapter takes place four days after Chapter 6. Amy Penn has finished editing the tapes she's made and the film she's shot while in Coldwater. The short film 'teaser' is broadcast. The first person on the edited film is Katherine talking about her miracle. The next person interviewed is a Catholic priest, Father Carroll, who urges caution, stating that such matters should be left to higher authorities. Pastor Warren turns off the television, a feeling of dread filling him.

Maybe, thinks Warren, that not too many people in town actually saw the news feed. Amy had tried many times to have Warren say something on camera but he'd declined, deferring to Father Carroll who made a statement that all of the church leaders agreed with.

Warren goes into the sanctuary of the church and kneels at the altar. He asks the Almighty to take control of the situation, to not let it get out of control. Feeling satisfied, Warren slowly rises on arthritic knees to leave, taking his scarf off of the wall as he left. He doesn't noticed that the church's phone lines (all half dozen of them) are blinking.

Sully is in the middle of a recurring nightmare. He is, once again, back in the cockpit of his airplane. There is a thud, a wobble, then the gauges all freeze. He ejects from the plane and screams with the physical pain of the ejection. Below him he sees the plane explode into flames. In his dream he hears Giselle's voice telling him to stay in the air with her, that it is safer there. Sully sits up on the couch, jarred out of the dream, sweat streaming down his face.

The television is on and Amy's story is playing. Sully scoffs at the report, then goes to make dinner for Jules. Sully pauses over the sink when he hears his son ask when Mommy is going to call them.

Tess receives some unwelcomed visitors from her day care center. She is part owner in the center, but hasn't been there in almost a month. Her best friend, Samantha, and another co-worker named, Lulu, knock on Tess's door and she reluctantly lets them in. Samantha who has known Tess her entire life corners her and tells her to tell her what's going on.

Tess settles down at the kitchen table, takes a sip of coffee, and tells Samantha and Lulu everything. When she's finished everyone's eyes are wet with tears. Samantha tells Tess that she's not the only one who has been getting calls. Tess has not been watching television and so hasn't heard the news about the Harvest of Hope Church, Katherine Yellin, or the Channel 9 News story. How many more people have been getting calls and just not speaking up, they all wonder.



Meanwhile, Katherine Yellin has become an overnight celebrity. She hears something going on in her front yard. When she pulls aside her curtains she sees that there is a small group of people on their knees praying on her lawn.

Amy goes to see Phil, determined to make him see reason in regards to the Coldwater debacle. It does not go as she had planned. Phil wants to send her back to Coldwater. Incredulous, Amy demands to know why. Phil hesitates, then says he needs to show her something. He pulls up the internet posts below her story, which was placed on the Channel 9 website. Amy feels the hairs on her arms rising as she sees that nearly 14,000 people had responded....in the last four hours.

Sully and Jules are having dinner with his parents. He knows that they do it because they are worried that he doesn't have enough money to feed himself or Jules properly. And they aren't wrong, he thinks to himself as they eat dinner. He still has no job, and hasn't even unpacked the boxes at the apartment.

The conversation turns to the Channel 9 news story. Sully tells them that they can't possibly believe any of it. His mother says that she's unsure, that Elias Rowe had a reputation for being extremely honest. Sully's father says that he thinks people believe what they want to believe, and Sully agrees. Jules asks his grandmother for a phone. She asks why and he says that he wants to call his mother in heaven.

Jack receives another phone call from Robbie. Robbie urges Jack to tell everyone about heaven, that the end is NOT the end. The call ends abruptly, leaving Jack with more questions than answers. Jack counts six phone calls that his son has made to him now. Thanks to Tess, and the Channel 9 story, he knows that he's not the only one. He's an investigator, so shouldn't he investigate? He calls Tess and asks her if she received her phone call. She says yes. He asks if he can cover over. Again, she says, yes.

Sully has a new purpose. When he was in the navy his superiors had urged him to go into the JAG corps, to be a full time legal guy, but he'd preferred to fly. Now, of course, in order to put a stop to his son's desire to call his dead mother in heaven, Sully is determined to get to the bottom of the entire mess. Today's stop is at a place called Rowe Construction Company. The secretary tells Sully that Rowe is out on a job and is not there. Just as Sully starts to get back into his car he sees someone fitting Rowe's description start up a truck and start to drive away. Sully flags him down.

Elias speaks with him, but he can't do as Sully is asking him: to say that what happened to him wasn't true. He begs Elias on behalf of his son to come clean about it. Elias apologizes for his trouble but says he can't do as Sully is asking. Elias drives quickly away.

Elias drives to the waterfront where he tosses his phone into the water. He plans to leave town for a while. As he drives away he pauses to send up a silent apology to God for potentially squandering a 'gift'.

Chapter 8



Katherine is at the grocery store. Everywhere she goes now, she feels that people are staring at her. And she isn't wrong. Now, at the grocery store she is approached by a man standing in line in front of her. He asks is she is that woman that gets the calls. Katherine tells him, yes. He asks if she can get calls from anyone else besides her sister. Katherine shakes her head no. The man looks sad, checks out, then leaves. Katherine wonders if she did the right thing by coming forward.

Chapter 9

Amy has produced another short follow-up story on the Coldwater Incident. She's interviewing Katherine again who shares that her sister mainly tells her about heaven and what it is like. She says that her sister tells her that everyone that was lost before, is now found when you reach heaven. The picture cuts to a shot of Katherine's front lawn where many more people have gathered to pray. Amy reports that dozens have taken to praying or meditating on Katherine's front lawn. They wait for hours to talk with Katherine.

Amy interviews one of the people on the lawn who shares that her sister died, too. She tells Amy that Katherine has been chosen by God. Amy turns to the camera and reiterates that no one has witnessed any of these phone calls being received, but that hasn't stopped many from showing up and hoping for a miracle.

Pastor Warren has not seen this latest report. He heads out for the evening, and waves at the secretary who is still fielding phone calls. People were contacting the church from all over the world, asking for live internet streaming of the services, wanting to know which prayer books they used, and other such things. It is all very overwhelming to Warren. He crosses the street to the mayor's office.

The mayor tells him that he's concerned with the influx of tourists and visitors to the town. The only hotel in town is full to capacity. He wants to have a town hall meeting. The mayor wants Warren to lead the meeting. Warren is shocked. Why should he lead it? The mayor says that he should lead it because it happened in his church. Warren says that he will not do that. The mayor says that they should capitalize on the attention that Coldwater is getting and translate all of that interest into business dollars. Warren excuses himself and leaves.

Tess receives another phone call from her mother. Her mother tells her that it is a waste of time. Tess asks her to clarify and she says that all of the things that seemed to matter when she was alive, the anger, regret, worry...none of that matters. She asks Tess to forgive herself, then asks her if she remembered making cookies. The line goes dead.

Tess does remember the reference. Her mother had owned a catering business and they'd made a lot of the food together. More importantly, Tess remembers how upset and bitter she'd been toward her mother's church, the local Catholic church, who'd regarded her mother's divorce (her father had just left town without a word) as sacrilegious. Now, it seems that her mother is urging her to reconnect with the church. Maybe they will have the answers.



Jack has decided to tell Doreen about Robbie's calls, no matter what. By the time he gets to Doreen's home, he finds his ex-wife in tears. Robbie has just called her. Jack sits down to talk with her.

The action cuts to Sully who is there to meet with a Ron Jennings at the newspaper. Sully has put off taking advantage of Mark's offer of a job with Ron, but since nothing has happened by way of employment, he figures that he has no other choice. Ron is personable and kind, which shocks Sully. He gets the job.

Amy has been duly appointed to follow Katherine everywhere she goes. Amy offers to take Katherine out to eat and the two end up speaking quite a bit. Later, Katherine goes into work where there are four people waiting to see her. They don't want to buy a house, either. Amy backs away and puts her camera down to give them some privacy. However, she quickly turns the camera back on when Katherine's phone rings.

In her haste to get a close up Amy doesn't pay attention to what is around her and trips over the corner of a desk, dropping the camera to the floor. By the time she has righted the camera the call is over. She asks Katherine what Diane said to her. Katherine turns to Amy and says: Diane says to tell everyone.

Analysis

The author creates some foreshadowing in Chapter 7 with Pastor Warren's reaction to the Channel 9 broadcast. Amy had tried to interview him several times but he declined as the disquiet he feels makes him unwilling to commit to any comments on the matter yet. When Warren goes to the sanctuary to pray, the reader gains insight into Warren's personality. He likes things to be in order, and controlled. Predictability brings stability and a sense of security, he believes. Phone calls that no one can explain doesn't fit into the parameters of his routine. While he's willing to believe that they are miracles, his intuition tells him that they are not.

In the same chapter, the reader sees Sully having what is an often recurring nightmare. In this dream he is stuck in a plane that is going to crash. He goes through the procedures, then ejects from the plane. Below him he sees the wreckage and fire. This represents Sully's life at the present time, a life that is a wreck and out of control. He did everything right, he continually tells himself, and yet, his plane was lost, he was injured, his wife died, and he went to jail. To make matters worse, Sully's son, Jules, has heard the rumors about the phone calls and now he's asking his father when his mother is going to call him. This places Sully squarely into a situation that he doesn't want or need.

More and more people begin to come forward with their own tales of being called by loved ones. The phones begin to symbolize this connection to loved ones, and parallels the Alexander Graham Bell story of connection. The theme of Connection is also demonstrated through the use of this symbol. The phones also represent the faith that



people have that communication is possible with the dead. As the reports get out about the miracles in Coldwater, people begin carrying their phones with them constantly.

The people on the lawn at Katherine's is a hint of things to come. They kneel on her grass and pray, calling to her to come out and pray with them. Katherine is overwhelmed, and a little starstruck with the attention. This hints that this is just the beginning of a commercialization and sensationalizing of the phone calls, one that may spiral out of control.

The theme of Faith is also touched upon in Chapter 9 when Tess's mother urges her to reconnect with the Catholic Church, as they may have the answers she seeks.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the theme of Belief Versus Disbelief.

Discussion Question 2

How has Katherine's life changed since her public announcement?

Discussion Question 3

What is ironic about the Mayor's suggestion for a town hall meeting?

Vocabulary

acquired, grumbling, colleague, hallucinate, preachy, embraced, emblem, shawl, ridiculously, adrenaline, chaotic, entirety, sporadic



Chapters 10-12

Summary

Chapter 10

Alexander Graham Bell inadvertently finds himself at the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia. A friend of his spotted him and encouraged him to set up a table and show off one of his inventions. The only one he could set up on the spur of the moment was his rudimentary phone. It took the gold medal and was moved to the featured position at the exhibition. Speaking to someone that you could not see now seemed believable and possible. Because of this chance, the author writes, the world would be forever altered by the invention of the phone.

Sully's first job is to go to the Dial Tek phone mart and get them to renew their subscription to the newspaper. The young attendant, Jason, opens the door and speaks to Sully briefly. They walk into the office to get the check when there is a noise at the front door. There are dozens of people wanting to get in. Flustered, the attendant lets them in and all of them want phones identical to Katherine's. They mob Jason and soon the boy is afraid for his life. Sully's booming voice brings order to the chaos. An older woman whines that they want the phone that calls heaven.

Pastor Warren is beside himself. It is Wednesday evening and his church is packed. There are people clutching their phones, holding them up to the rooftops praying that God will bless their phones will a connection from their loved ones. Warren doesn't know how to deal with this. Back in his offices are the rest of the area's church leaders. One poses the question to him: Do YOU believe in this miracle?

Father Carroll has invited the Bishop to come to Coldwater, which irritates Warren. What Father Carroll hasn't told Warren is that he has been speaking with Tess about her phone calls. In Father Carroll's mind, this is now a Catholic issue.

Sully picks his son up from school only to find that the boy's teacher has given him a plastic phone. The teacher told him that maybe his mother would call him. Jules is convinced that it will happen and Sully is shocked and angry that a teacher would do that to a little kid. He made up his mind that tomorrow he would go to the school and give the teacher a piece of his mind. He drops Jules off at his parents and continues driving.

Sully crosses the town's line and sees in Lanker's Field a growing RV park. Sully is beyond irate. He wants to grab the lot of them and shake them until their teeth rattle, telling them that they are all wrong and that there is no God.

Chapter 11



Jason from Dial Tek places an order with corporate for almost four thousand phones. On the other end the executive thinks it is a typo. When he investigates he finds that it is not a typo and he sees an opportunity to make millions of dollars.

The focus shifts backwards in time to Alexander G. Bell. His mother was deaf and had to use a 'funnel' her entire life. However, he'd always refused to speak to her like that, opting, instead, to put his lips on her forehead and to talk in deeper tones. His love for his mother would facilitate his development of the hearing aid, and the phone.

As a tie in to the excerpt about Bell, the reader is told that when Giselle was in the hospital, Sully would do the same thing; place his mouth close to her forehead and speak. Though she was in a coma, Sully was sure that on some level she might have heard him. Up until his incarceration he'd never stopped trying to reach her, to hear her voice again. This is why, he realizes, this entire phone call from heaven bit irritates him so much. There was no heaven, just like there is no Giselle any more.

The town hall meeting takes place at the high school gym. It is packed, even though the meeting was limited to just Coldwater residents. Sully is in the crowd and he silently turns on a tape recorder in his jacket pocket. Father Carroll approaches the podium, gives a prayer, then in a surprising move to Warren, he asks who in the gymnasium had also had a phone call from heaven. More than a half dozen people stand, including Tess and Doreen. Jack remains seated on the stage.

Chapter 12

This chapter opens with a report from ABC News. The reporter states that people are flocking to Coldwater, Michigan. The reporter interviews the executive of the phone company, who has placed a large billboard advertising their 'chosen' phone. The reporter also gives views from a paranormal expert, and a skeptic. Father Carroll is recorded as he states that the occurrence has brought many people back to the church. The skeptic states that people who are grieving will grasp at the most unlikely of straws.

Analysis

The frenzy over the phone calls from heaven is evident in the way that the people behave at Dial Tek. The young cashier/tech, Jason, is overwhelmed. While there, Sully begins to learn some things that will eventually help him to piece together enough information to explain the phenomena. The fact that Sully's voice calms the chaos that ensues when Jason opens the front doors, foreshadows the fact that Sully is the voice of reason in the middle of the storm.

A large billboard has been placed by Dial Tek on the road coming into Coldwater. They are capitalizing on the fact that their phones are the preferred phones that the dead use to call their loved ones. This is just another indication that the entire event has been marginalized and the focus is no longer on God, the afterlife, faith, or a interconnection to loved ones, but about making money.



The theme of Love is demonstrated in both Chapter 10 and 11 as the reader understands that Bell not only had a deaf wife, but a deaf mother, too. His desire to reach out and connect, to talk with the women in his life, drove him to find a way to help. Likewise, in the present day, Sully's love for his wife, and for his son, drives him to make the determination that he will get to the bottom of the phone miracles, especially since with Jules' teacher's intervention, the phone call event has become very personal to him.

It is interesting to note how the various churches in town react to the ongoing messages from heaven. The Harvest Church of Hope and the Catholic Church seem to be the front runners; one by default, and one by decree. Pastor Warren's church, Harvest, is thrust into the limelight by default because all of the recipients of the phone calls came from the church. The Catholic Church has appointed itself the spokesmen for the event, because Pastor Warren refuses to make a statement one way or the other. Neither seems to dispute the fact that God 'could' make this happen. But, the debate revolves around the question of whether or not God 'would' make it happen. They all seem to be missing the point of the phone calls. All of the calls are encouraging people to better behavior, to reaching out to others, to letting go of their grief.

Discussion Question 1

What does the incident at Dial Tek indicate about the atmosphere in Coldwater?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Sully especially hate the 'phone call from heaven' story?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the character of Father Carroll.

Vocabulary

regal, reluctant, benediction, unimaginable, podium, notable, impromptu, mecca, clairvoyants, Ouija boards, converse, phenomena, rendering, recipients



Chapters 13-15

Summary

Chapter 13

Sully goes to the local library. He wants to do some research and without a computer of his own, and not wanting to use the one at the newspaper, the library is the only logical place to go. He meets the very young and very punked out librarian named Liz. She doesn't buy the '1-800-Heaven' ordeal, either, she says.

Meanwhile, across town, Katherine cries alone in her bed. She hasn't been to work, the people on her lawn are creepy, and the people at the town meeting had swarmed her as if she were a holy relic. How did things get so out of control? Her private blessing is a circus, she thinks. Her phone rings.

Tess gets ready to meet the Catholic Bishop. She models her very conservative dress for Samantha who is sitting at her kitchen table. Bishop Bernard Hibbing arrives with Father Carroll. There is a crowd across the street gawking and taking pictures. What Bishop Hibbing has not told anyone is that the Catholic Church wants a swift report on the current meeting. The concern is that if people are hearing from heaven, how soon would it be before people expected to be hearing from God? They ask Tess a series of questions, then after thirty minutes they take their leave. Tess asks what happens next and they tell her that they will pray about it.

Jack and the rest of the police force are overwhelmed with the phone calls coming into the station. Many times he tells people who call on the phone that he has not heard from his son. He hates lying to them, but he feels that it isn't their business. He asks Robbie what it is that God wants them to do about all of this. Robbie tells him that he wants everyone to talk about it. Jack asks why. Robbie says that it is so that others won't live in fear any longer. He says that fear makes a person lose their life, and that what is given to fear takes away from faith.

Sully is researching 'contact with the afterlife' in the library. He's returned again for a second day in a row. He reads about thousands of claims, one which was a painter who'd recorded birdsong some ten years earlier. When he played it back, his long dead wife's voice was on it. There were many such instances that he finds.

Sully asks the question that no one has asked yet: if heaven is not sending the calls, then who is? He has a list of the seven that stood up in the gym and stated that they'd received phone calls, too. Were there any connections, other than that, and living in the same town?

Sully is confronted by the librarian who decides to blatantly ask him about how he ended up in jail and what caused the crash between his jet and another plane. Sully



refuses to tell her, and shuts off his phone. However, his mind can't seem to stop the movie as it plays in his head, again.

(Flashback)

He was to fly into Lynton Airfield in Ohio on a Saturday morning. He takes off from the base and heads toward Lynton, and almost immediately the aircraft is surrounded by cloud cover. He radios in to the tower who tells him to follow his course, and to prepare to land on 27 right. It is a standard procedure.

As he prepares to land, there is a crunch. He's hit something below him a full 800 feet above the runway. He tries to level out his plane, but it is no use. He is losing altitude quickly. He sees an empty field and aims for that, then radios in to the tower to tell them of the emergency situation. He prepares to eject from the plane. He leans back into the chair, then pulls the ejection lever. He is thrown into the blue in a blinding storm of fire and light.

Returning to the present, Sully goes to the Funeral Home to see if they want to take out a full page ad in the newspaper. Sully still very much detests his job and today he hates it more. Horace, the funeral home owner, greets him and they discuss the ad going into the paper. As Sully is leaving Horace asks Sully something that no one has bothered to ask him since his arrival back in town. He simply asks Sully how things are going. Sully tells him that they aren't going so well and Horace puts a hand on his shoulder and tells him that he gets it. Sully doesn't doubt that he does.

(Flashback)

Sully's mind reeled shortly after ejecting from his plane. Finally, he manages to get himself to focus on what is going on at the moment. His parachute had opened, his plane was in a field away from people, and he was not hurt. What he could not know, the author writes, is that his wife, Giselle, had seen the crash and fearing the worst, had stepped on the gas pedal, a prayer on her lips. It would be the last thing she would say.

In the present, Amy is driving Katherine through town. Amy notes that Frieda's Diner is packed beyond capacity. Katherine makes small talk with the reporter, but she reflects back on the conversation she had with her sister hours before. Her sister told her that the others who were receiving phone calls were also blessed. She tells Katherine that she needed to know that knowing about heaven is what heals people on earth.

Amy has successfully, so far, steered Katherine clear of the other news agencies, telling her that they were from large cities and couldn't be trusted to tell the truth like it is. Amy feels slightly guilty but she'd been told by Phil to stay ahead of the big boys.

Chapter 14

The author writes about Alexander Graham Bells' race to the patent office. He shares that by a mere clerical error, Gray (Bell's rival) was listed as having gotten his patent in as the 39th of the day while Graham was fifth in line. A similar jockeying is happening



between Tess and Katherine, though it is the Bishop and the Catholic priest who are stirring things up. According to them, Tess received the first phone call, not Katherine. The proof is frozen on Tess's voicemail. When the Bishop makes the official announcement Tess wonders what the difference is. Samantha draws the curtains back to show her all of the people now covering her lawn.

Sully confronts the teacher and the principal about the phone incident. The principal agrees with Sully and asks if he wants to file a formal complaint. Sully can hear his wife's voice in his head telling him to calm down. He drops it with a promise that they won't do it again. Back in the car Sully looks at his son and wonders how a God could be so cruel to a little kid, a kid that hadn't heard his mother's voice for two years. Jules asks him how Sully knows for sure that his mother is dead. Jules points out that Sully wasn't there. It rocks Sully to the core.

(flashback)

The black smoke was still pouring from the downed plane when Sully's parachute finally deposited him on the ground safely. He radios in his location and that he's landed safely. Protocol dictates that he wait for pick up. He waits a long time and no one comes. And no one radios back from the Tower. In the distance he sees Giselle's car heading toward the wreckage. Desperately he waves his arms trying to get her to see that he is okay.

Chapter 15

Channel 9 News has a new report that it is broadcasting. It is of an elderly man in the hospital speaking with Katherine. He's in end stages of Leukemia and wants to know if there truly is a heaven, if Katherine's sister truly called her. Katherine assures him that it is all true, and Amy has captured it all on film. What Amy does not report, and did not know when she filed her story was that in the night, the patient would die, despite his doctors saying that he was stable. It is as if he gave up fighting. Immediately the internet lights up with accusations aimed at Katherine. Amy learns that there are protests scheduled.

Back at Tess's house, Samantha tells her childhood friend to be ready by 10 o'clock that she has a surprise for Tess. Tess puts on makeup for the first time in a very long time, she realizes. It dawns on her that the Thanksgiving open house that her mother had each year hadn't been meant as a way to embarrass her, but it had been a way for her mother to combat her loneliness. She feels terrible. A car horn sounds and Tess looks out of her window. There are nearly 200 people covering her lawn and the side yards, but in the driveway there is a yellow van from the daycare. Samantha had brought the children to her and Tess is happy beyond measure.

Jack is invited over to Doreen's home. Doreen has remarried and Jack still finds it awkward to go back into his old home and see another man sitting at his old table. Doreen had told Jack that Robbie's friends wanted them to sit down and talk to them, so Jack had agreed. Now, as he sits at the table he is regretting his decision. Three young



men sat at the table with them and Jack remembers them as young boys. All of them had enlisted with Robbie. They ask what Robbie says when he calls Doreen. She says that he tells her that the end is not the end, most often. The boys smile and tell her that this was the name of his favorite song, too. It is by a Christian rock band called House of Heroes.

Jason, at Dial Tek, opens the store doors, glad that for a change no one is trying to force their way in early. As he turns from the door he hears someone knocking. Sighing, he turns around and sees that it is Sully. Jason waves him on in. Sully hands him a yellow legal pad from his bag and tells him that he has a favor to ask of him. In short order, Jason looks up the information and Sully is right with his hunch: all but one of the people who were contacted from heaven had the same phone provider. All of them used cloud storage. Sully presses Jason to dig further. How long did each of them have the service?

The focus shifts to Alexander Graham Bell. He speaks about meeting the love of his life, Mabel, when she came to him as a deaf student. Though she is ten years younger than he is, Graham falls for her hard. Though his invention went on to be a remarkable breakthrough, it would never help Mabel as Graham hoped it would.

(Flashback)

In the ambulance, after the plane crash, Sully borrows a cell phone off of the guys. He tries to call his wife constantly, but she doesn't pick up. He tries to contact the Tower, and still no one answers. He is taken to the hospital where the nurses agree to continue calling his wife for him as the pain meds take effect.

The flashback ends and Sully recalls that they told him later what had happened. When she'd seen the plane down, Giselle had feared the worst and had raced toward the plane. At the same time, the Tower controller, who'd made the mistake that caused the crash, was trying to get away from the scene of his crime. The two vehicles collided. The controller was killed instantly, and Giselle never woke from her coma.

Analysis

In these chapters many of the elements that were introduced in the earlier chapters are further expanded. Sully, especially, begins to follow a personal theory that will prove that the phone 'miracles' are just elaborate hoaxes. Katherine begins to understand the full ramifications of her 'saintly' status as people camp out on her front lawn and people in town begin to treat her differently. She's more alone now than when Diane died.

Tess isn't faring any better. The Bishop comes and asks her a series of questions that makes her feel less 'favored by God' and more a victim of the inquisition. She is appalled at the Bishop's remark about people thinking that they can speak directly to God. Tess's faith isn't shaken, but her belief in the church of her mother (Catholic Church) remains at the same low opinion as before. Tess is afraid that she's made a monumental mistake calling them.



Jack is not only having to deal with the influx of calls about the increased traffic and trespassing, but also what to do about the calls he's been receiving from Robbie, his son. He did not stand with the rest of the phone call recipients because he feared for his job. He also didn't want to fully commit to something he didn't understand.

Discussion Question 1

What moral and ethical dilemma is Amy Penn faced with in view of her boss's request?

Discussion Question 2

Describe the series of events that led to Sully's plane crash, Eliot Gray's death, and Giselle's coma.

Discussion Question 3

Why do the protesters come out in force after the leukemia patient dies?

Vocabulary

heightened, liable, gaze, insanely, aversion, ventriloquist, vulnerable, squinted, fraction, dissembled, reassurances, squadron, blossomed



Chapters 16-18

Summary

Chapter 16

Protesters show up early on Katherine Yellin's lawn. They are upset with the leukemia patient's story, and the fact that he died the next day. In fact, Amy shares, there were seven other cases of people across the nation with terminal illnesses giving up the fight to die. Literally, the new slant to the Coldwater miracle, Amy tells Katherine, is that heaven is killing people. Katherine is appalled. She begins to blame the others who came forward, thinking that maybe they are the real hoaxes. Tess Rafferty, Katherine says, quit going to church decades ago. Why would Heaven call someone like that? Katherine starts crying and Amy doesn't know what to do. She sits at the kitchen table awkwardly and sips her tea. Katherine tells Amy, between sobs, that her own children, and Diane's children want nothing to do with her. They say that she embarrasses them.

Pastor Warren is in his office still contemplating the turn of events. Does he serve God or the people? Both? Or none at all? His secretary knocks on the door. She gives her two weeks' notice. The stress and strain of fielding all of the calls from around the world, dealing with crying or angry people, is just too much. She apologizes, then leaves.

Jack Sellers goes to Tess's house where many people are sleeping on her lawn. He lets the sirens sound to wake them, then starts the almost daily chore of making them leave. Some ask him if he's a believer. He tells him that what he believes isn't important, but they beg to differ. Tess comes to the front door and waves him in.

Tess offers him coffee and while he takes a sip she asks him why he didn't speak up when others came forward with their contact stories. He tells her that honestly he was afraid, and Tess is grateful for his honesty. He tells her that he feels as if he is letting Robbie down by not telling everyone.

Sully waits outside of the funeral home until Horace goes to lunch. He lets himself in and runs into the secretary. He tells her that he'll wait for Horace in his office if that is okay. She shrugs and he goes in. The secretary's name is Maria and she is a talker. This is what Sully has come for. He pumps her for all sorts of information.

Five thousand people are now camped out in Lanker's Field, waiting for Thanksgiving to begin. Katherine Yellin's home sports nearly 200 people, but they aren't the believers from before. They are protestors who've made it their personal mission to 'expose' all of Coldwater as frauds. The entire city is overwhelmed.

The entire place has become commercialized in a way that it has never experienced before. Most of the vacant store fronts are now teeming with new businesses. Media attention has zeroed in on the town giving them massive exposure. The Mayor is very pleased. He is worried about Katherine, though. All of the other phone call recipients



agreed to go on a national talk show. But, when contacted, Katherine tells them that she has something of her own planned.

Chapter 17

Katherine goes on the air with Amy Penn and tells the viewers of Channel 9 News that she will share the call when it comes through, and the people can hear firsthand from her sister what heaven is like. Then, Amy reports, the protesters will understand that Katherine is not responsible for anyone's death.

Sully is back in the library, but since it is the weekend, he's brought Jules with him. Liz, the young librarian, takes Jules to help him find a book about tigers, while Sully continues to put together details for his investigation. He's particularly looking for the obituaries of those people who reportedly were now calling their living relatives in Coldwater. He'd gleaned from Maria at the funeral home, that when she wrote the obituaries for the paper, she actually first tape recorded her interview with the family members. Her obituaries, he finds, are extremely detailed, right down to the types of pets they owned. The tapes would have even more information for someone enterprising enough. Sully hates where his mind is going, and some part of him is glad.

(Flashback)

Two naval officers come to visit Sully in his home. He's still struggling through the painkillers to try and wrap his mind around the fact that his wife is essentially a vegetable and his son is without a mother. The officers begin to grill him about the night before he took the flight. The insinuation was that Sully had been drinking less than 12 hours before flying the plane. Sully knows they are suggesting that the crash and the death of the Tower operator, are going to be pinned on him. Right then, he doesn't really care, but he has the presence of mind to ask for his lawyer.

Chapter 18

This is the thirteenth week since the first phone call from heaven. It is snowing and it is Thanksgiving. Tess hopes that since it is so cold that the people camping on her lawn will have gone away. Most of them have, she finds as she looks out of the window, but there are about thirty people who have refused to budge. Tess thinks of her mother's open door policy for Thanksgiving and she decides to honor her mother's memory by doing the same thing. She invites the people on her lawn to come inside and warm up.

The annual Thanksgiving Dinner celebration at the Harvest of Hope Church is in full swing. This year, notes Warren, the numbers are up. Many of the people who came to town were ill prepared to deal with the snow and bad weather. He opens the church to them, so that they can get in out of the cold. Most of them stay to have Thanksgiving with the church. Katherine Yellin calls Warren on his cell phone. He is shocked to hear from her. He is even more shocked when she asks if he is feeling well. He tells her that he is, and then she gets to the real reason for her call. She wants to come and take part in serving the less fortunate in the dinner line. But, she doesn't want to get in the way either. She wonders what he thinks about it. He thanks her for the offer but says that



under the circumstances that it might do more harm than good. She hangs up and Warren thinks that all blessings do not bless the same.

This was also true for Doreen. Several weeks after receiving calls from Robbie she finds that she is back to square one in dealing with his death. She is not joyful, she is sad and depressed. She had made her peace with her son's death and his disconnection from her day to day life. Now, her suffering has returned and she doesn't want to go back to the way she was when Robbie first died. She just can't. So, she goes throughout the house and disconnects all of the phones, and turns her cell off. She takes all of the phones and takes them to the Goodwill store.

Sully attends Thanksgiving at his parent's home. The extended family is there, and so is Liz from the library, who was invited by Jules. As they eat they all complain about the trouble that the 'miracles' have brought to the town. And, Sully's father reminds them, more people were turning back to their faith, no one went without a meal on Thanksgiving, and all of the churches made sure that there were more than enough beds for anyone who needed one. It could be worse they all agree.

(Flashback)

The headlines in the newspaper read: Was Pilot Under Influence During Crash? Sully's father paces and rages at him while he sits there, hands folded in his lap. He attempts to tell him that the controller is the ultimate villain here, but his father doesn't hear him. Sully asks his lawyer to ask about the flight recordings, which have conveniently gone missing, but it is never done. The military and the public have their scapegoat and Sully is served up like a turkey at Thanksgiving. He agreed to a plea deal so that he could be done with it and back at Giselle's side faster. But, she didn't last that long.

Back in the present, Sully is suddenly not hungry any longer. They stay for another hour to be sociable, and then he takes Jules home. Jules is asleep before they get home, so Sully puts him to bed in his clothes. Then, he pours himself a stiff bourbon and sinks back to watch mindless TV and forget. There is a knock on the door. Sully opens the door. It is Elias Rowe.

Analysis

The theme of Communication and Connection is evident in Chapter 16 in several ways. First, Katherine is accused of 'killing' the leukemia patient and enabling many others nationally to quit fighting to live. Katherine is devastated, and to make matters worse, her own family decides that they want nothing to do with her. She feels so lost and abandoned, and only Amy, the reporter, sits with her at the kitchen table.

Pastor Warren, because of his inaction on the matter, has become alienated by his congregation, his fellow ministers, and by his secretary who decides she's had enough, and leaves. Meanwhile, Jack and Tess connect over their phone calls from dead relatives, and as a result connect with each other in a way that neither thought possible.



The theme of Loss is evident in Chapter 17 as Katherine loses her 'rockstar' status and instead becomes the target of vicious protesters who camp out on her front lawn. This loss of favor from the public, the loss of her family's support, all compound to make Katherine miserable.

The theme of Love surfaces when Tess decides to honor her mother's memory by opening her door up to the strangers camped out in the snow outside her home on Thanksgiving. Likewise, it is Doreen's love for Robbie that prompts her to remove all phones from her home and to give them to a local charity. She can no longer bear to hear his voice as it is just a reminder of his death. She would rather remember him in a loving way.

The theme of Miracles is demonstrated in Chapter 18 as Sully's family discuss the trouble that the 'miracles' have brought to the town. If God were behind it, would it all be turning out as it has, they all wonder? When is a miracle a miracle, they ask.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the theme of Love in these chapters.

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the theme of Loss.

Discussion Question 3

Why does Sully's father think the phone calls are good in some aspects?

Vocabulary

descended, hysteria, balm, contagious, congregants, commotion, regrettably, elation, palpably, hunkered



Chapters 19-21

Summary

Chapter 19

Channel 9 News has a new broadcast. Amy reports that one of the recipients, Kelly Podesto, whose friend died in a car accident the year before, has come forward stating that she made the phone call up. She apologizes to the girl's family and to the town.

The report isn't out an hour before an emergency meeting is called in the Mayor's office. Many of the advertisers and new businesses now want out of their contracts. They feel as if they have been duped. The Mayor reassures them that one teenager's prank shouldn't cloud the rest of the miracles. They agree to stay in town, but will withhold their advertising dollars until they are sure the damage has been mitigated. Unless they receive proof that these phone calls are real, they will be leaving by the end of the week. The Mayor hopes Katherine Yellin's phone call comes through.

In front of the Harvest of Hope church a riot is about to break out. Pastor Warren wakes from his nap on his office couch to loud screams and threats. He quickly ran onto the front steps waving his arms and asking them to all stop and consider their actions. A police cruiser shows up and Jack Sellers gets out. He can tell that their small police force is no match for the several hundreds of people who are getting ready to start an all-out brawl in front of the church. He calls for backup from the surrounding counties. He turns back to try to break up the worst of it and is clubbed on the back of the head. Jack falls to the ground.

Back in Tess's house, Samantha has arrived and is helping Tess give warm toast and tea to those who have come in out of the cold. Each day, since Thanksgiving, Tess has made a point to have the people on the lawn come into the house and share toast and tea with her. And phone calls. Tess's mother has called twice, and Tess relays the messages to those gathered. She tells Tess, and those gathered, that heaven is the same feeling that a child gets when they know their parents are in the house. There's no fear, no dark, and when one thinks about the love, there's light.

Sully opens the door and lets Elias Rowe in. He tells Sully that this is the first time he's come back to town in about three weeks. He needed to avoid the crazies, and then just now, when he'd seen how the craziness had escalated, he knew that he would be leaving again. But, he tells Sully, he felt compelled to see him first.

Sully asks him what specifically made him leave, not buying the 'crazies' excuse. Elias shares the story about Nick, his former employee, and Nick's questions which he couldn't escape. He ends the story by telling Sully that he threw his phone into the water.



Sully studies Elias, then shares what he's learned so far. Elias shakes his head and tells Sully that he, too, had the same phone plan a few years before. The only one that hadn't had the same plan was Kelly Podesto, who had just confessed to making it all up. That also jives with what Sully is beginning to piece together. He asks Elias if he would be willing to get a new phone, and a different phone plan to test his theory. Elias agrees.

Phil insists that for the next story Amy bring him along. This is the first time her boss has ever been that interested in a story she's covered. Amy hopes that this will show Phil how dedicated she's been to the story and what she's given to the story and Katherine. While she waits for a couple cups of coffee at the gas station, Amy calls her fiancé, Rick. He answers the phone and sounds annoyed.

Alexander Graham Bell's invention would revolutionize millions of people, but for him the triumph would not be as grand. Mabel would still never learn to speak as others did, nor would she ever regain her hearing, even with the aid of a device. The communication that Alexander longed for with Mabel would be impossible.

The action cuts back to Amy who is still on the phone with Rick. What's the matter? she asks him. He tells her that she's become obsessed with the story and that it is all they talk about anymore. He is also upset that she stays in Coldwater more than at home. She tells him that this story will put her on the map. He tells her that there IS no map, and what about the map that includes the two of them? Amy hangs up on him.

Chapter 20

Jack waves Doreen back to his office at the back of the police station. When they were married, Doreen and Robbie would bring sandwiches to everyone. Many of the workers there wave at her. She tells him that she saw him go down on live TV and had immediately jumped into the car to come over and see if he was okay. She tells him that she took out all of the phones in the house and Jack is shocked.

Doreen tells him that it was like losing him all over again and that she just can't do it anymore. She sees a picture that Jack keeps on his desk. It is of the three of them on a boating outing when Robbie was a teenager. Doreen smiles through tears and comments that they are wearing life preservers.

Jack doesn't tell Doreen that he has been continuing to speak with Robbie. He receives a phone call and Robbie asks if Jack is okay. Jack tells him that he is fine and asks Robbie some pointed questions about the statement 'the end is not the end'. Robbie doesn't answer it and instead tells him that he loves him. Jack says that 'the end is not the end' is a song by a band. Robbie tells him that doubt is how he will find him. Jack asks for clarification but the connection is gone.

Sully looks over his lists and his notes. He's back at the library and Liz comes by to see if there is any progress. Jules is with Sully and is coloring a picture patiently. He continues to tell Liz and Sully that his mother is going to call him soon. Liz changes the subject and starts to help Sully work out things that he has on his lists. They conclude



that backup files for the obituaries have to be kept at the newspaper, which also means that someone at the newspaper also has all of the taped interviews that Maria did.

The Mayor has gathered the advertisers, Jack Sellers, Amy, Phil, and Katherine Yellin to a lunch meeting at Frieda's. He wants to propose something to them all. The Mayor wants to broadcast the phone call and the message from Katherine's sister live from a Coldwater church in time for Christmas. He wants the Channel 9 group to work with the larger network advertisers. They work out a deal, but as they are about to shake on it, Amy screams at them to stop. She says it is wrong. Amy claps her hands over her mouth, as shocked as the rest of them about what has just come from her mouth.

Elias Rowe stands at the banks of the Great Lakes. It is Friday. His phone rings. It is Nick. As soon as he's done speaking with Nick, Elias phones Sully and tells him that he was right.

The action cuts to Pastor Warren at the church. There are 500 people crammed into his church on a Wednesday night. Before he can launch into the lesson he is interrupted by questions about heaven and the phone calls. Pastor Warren tries to steer the conversation and focus back to his discussion on manna from heaven. He'd heard about the Mayor's plan to televise Katherine's sister's phone call and every fiber in his being is screaming at him to stop it. Something about the entire thing had never seemed right to him and what is really upsetting him, he confesses to himself, is the fact that no one is listening to him when he urges caution, not even the church leaders.

Pastor Warren regains control of the gathering and focuses on his lesson about true miracles. He also uses the example of manna from heaven and how the people were presented with a miracle and it wasn't enough for them, they demanded more from God. And then God grew angry, he tells them. Suddenly, just after asking them if they knew what the word 'manna' meant, Pastor Warren collapses.

Chapter 21

Alexander Graham Bell developed the phone, but it would be Edison, a rival of Bell's, who would command that the standard greeting on the phone should be 'hello'. Though Edison would go on to improve the phone's quality and transmission capabilities, none of his ideas for the phone would be as great as Bell's. However, the mention of a 'spirit phone' by Edison garnered a fair share of attention. He told reporters that he was working on a device that would allow people to one day speak to the dead.

Compared to Bell and Edison, the crowds that now flocked to Coldwater would have astounded even them. Many people sat for hours on the highway waiting for a chance to get into the town to witness Katherine's phone call from her sister. The governor sent state troopers and national guardsmen to maintain order.

The phone call would be taken at the football field since there was nowhere else big enough to hold the anticipated crowds. Jack Sellers went on the record with anyone who would listen that the entire idea was a very bad idea. Amy Penn had continued to



protest as well. Phil, her boss, had claimed that the stress was too much for her and he'd sent her home.

Katherine receives another phone call from her sister in the privacy of her home. It is a week before the proposed exhibition. Katherine tells her sister about everything that is going on, about her fears, her dreams, and her concerns. Diane asks her what she wants and Katherine says she just wants people to believe her. If Diane will come on the phone and tell everyone that she was the first to receive a call, then things will be good. Diane seems to agree with the time and date.

Sully goes to an editorial meeting, the first he's attended since starting a few months earlier. He meets the senior reporter, a 66-year-old man named Elwood Jupes. Elwood and Sully talk and Sully finds out that Elwood and Horace at the funeral home are best friends. He also finds out that Elwood disapproves of Maria writing the obituaries.

Jack Sellers likes flipping pancakes, he thinks, as he works on his ninth stack of them. He has been volunteering to help Tess feed the people from her lawn each morning. Jack feels at home there and more and more finds himself drawn to Tess.

Tess speaks with him privately after everyone has been fed. Jack tries to talk her out of being a part of the exhibition. Tess tells him that her mother told her to tell everyone and so while she won't be doing what Katherine is doing, she will certainly tell anyone who asks her, what her mother has said. She asks why Jack won't come forward. He says he has doubts. Tess says something that chills Jack to the bone. She says, "Doubt is how you find God." Robbie had said those exact words to him in their phone conversation. It couldn't be a coincidence.

Tess reaches up to touch his wound and asks if it hurts. He tells her that it doesn't hurt much and that he really wishes she would stay away from the exhibition. She asks why and he says that he can't protect her out in the open like that. Tess's eyes soften and the two of them share a kiss.

Over at the library Liz is swamped as visitors anxious for maps and history of the county command her every minute. However, she's agreed that at six o'clock she will close down and allow only Sully access to the materials that he needs to continue his investigation. Sully arrives a little after six o'clock and he has someone with him. He tells Liz that they are going to sit in the corner and talk. Liz shrugs and walks off. The man is Elias Rowe.

Sully asks him to remember word-for-word, what it was that Nick had said to him. Nick had told him, among other things, that he needed to take care of 'Nick'. This didn't make any sense to Elias. They had orchestrated a list of questions that Elias would ask when Nick called him. One of those questions was 'Where are you calling from.' Nick had said that Elias knew where he was calling from. Suddenly, Liz screams. Sully comes running and she tells him that someone, a man, had been outside of the window putting his hands against the glass. Sully runs out in time to see a blue car driving away. When he goes inside he asks Elias if he'd ever talked to Elwood Jupes.



Katherine scoots over on her step to allow Amy to sit down next to her. Amy tells Katherine that she went home as Phil had ordered her, but when she got to her apartment it was clear that Rick had gone. So, she'd showered, packed a bag and come back to Coldwater. She tells Katherine that she wants to see things through. Katherine tells her that she can stay in the extra bedroom. The two women talk about anything and everything except the Coldwater incident.

Finally, they do begin to speak about it, but it is Amy who begins. She tells Katherine that none of the TV people or reporters care about her as a person. They just want the story. She confesses that at first that was all she wanted, too. But, she goes on to say that at some point they weren't reporting news, they were creating and orchestrating it, and she couldn't be a part of that anymore. That's why she said what she said, she tells Katherine. Katherine smiles and tells her that she knew that all along.

Why go through with it, then, asks Amy. What if she doesn't call? Katherine tells her that Diane will call. Amy sits quietly for a moment, and then confesses that she lied to Katherine when she said that she was a believer. Katherine smiles and tells her that maybe after Friday she will be.

Sully goes to the funeral home the next day while Horace is, again, at lunch. He speaks with Maria again, and in a short few minutes he is presented with an opportunity. Maria leaves the room to see who has just walked into the front parlor. Sully is alone with the files. He quickly locates all of the 'chosen' six and tucks them into his bag. Maria returns and Sully leaves. As he is getting into his car he sees a blue car sitting in the back of the funeral home. Whoever is in it is watching him.

Pastor Warren had suffered a mild heart attack, the doctors tell him. They also tell him that he must stay in bed at the hospital for the next few days. The nurse tells him that he has a visitor and Warren is shocked to see that it is Elias Rowe.

Alexander Bell received the lion's share of the attention for the first telephone transmission, but the author urges the reader to also recall that there was an assistant, by the name of Watson, who was indispensable to Bell.

Pastor Warren studies Elias Rowe's face. He looks tired, Warren decides. Elias asks for his forgiveness. Warren asks him for what. Elias says that he interrupted his sermon that day. Warren tells him that Katherine had already beat him to that distinction. Then, Elias tells him that he will need to ask his forgiveness one more time. Now Pastor Warren is intrigued. Sully walks into the room.

Elias tells Warren about Nick calling him on his phone. Warren asks why Sully is there and he tells the Pastor that he has more than enough suspicion that the calls are being fabricated. Pastor Warren tells Sully that he completely believes in heaven, and that God gives people glimpses of heaven, but not like this. Sully is shocked that the preacher is agreeing with him.



Sully learns that the blue car that seems to be showing up in all of the places Sully goes to belongs to Elwood Jupes. In the backseat of the car were boxes from Radio Shack. While sitting at his desk, Sully could feel Elwood staring at him.

Finally, Elwood left and Sully followed him. Elwood's car pulled into the funeral home's parking lot, then after an hour the car went to Tess's house. After Tess's house, Elwood went to the high school ball field. He made a big deal of examining the equipment. Then, he went back to the offices. Sully detours and stops by the library.

He tells Liz what he'd seen. He asks her what possible reason Elwood would be doing something like this. Liz says that his daughter drove off of a bridge in the county and killed herself a few years previously. Sully asks why the girl killed herself and Liz can't remember, but she says that the old paper is still in storage. She returns a few minutes later, a look of fright on her face. The entire edition is missing.

Sully goes back to the newspaper office, goes into the stacks on the pretense of pulling an old ad for a client, then finds the paper that was missing from the library. He takes the paper and puts it in his briefcase. On his way to picking up Jules from school and dropping him off at his parent's house, he called Elias. The older man was waiting for him on his apartment's stairs when he arrived.

Together they read the old newspaper and are startled to learn that Elwood had written his daughter's own story. This seems wrong, both men agree. But the people report that the voices they hear are real, Elias reminds Sully. How is the perpetrator mimicking the voices? Before they can go much further there is a knock at the door. It is Jack Sellers and he wants Sully to come with him to the station.

At the football field Amy stands with Katherine on the stage. The mic check is still ongoing and Amy can tell that Katherine is anxious. Amy tell her that she doesn't have to do any of it. Katherine tells her that she does have to do it, that it is bigger than just her.

Alexander Graham Bell was forced to defend his rights to the telephone more than 600 times. After a while, weary beyond measure, he left the United States for Canada. It grieved him to his soul that people would think that he'd stolen the ideas instead of coming up with them on his own.

Back at the police station Jack asks Sully what he knows about the phone calls from heaven. Jack hurls questions at Sully, asking him how he is involved. He wants to know why he followed Elwood Jupes, what his involvement is with Elias Rowe, and if he's ever been in jail. Sully asks him what all of this is about. Jack asks one more question about Jupes and Sully says that he thinks Jupes is behind the phone calls. Funny, says Jack, that's exactly what he's saying about you.



Analysis

The commercialization of the event is felt in these chapters as the town scrambles to keep its new business partners happy, the stores and restaurants struggle to keep everyone happy, and new waves of protesters take to the streets. In front of the Harvest church a riot is about to take place. Jack arrives and wades into the mess and ends up getting injured. The sacred has now become fully profane.

The theme of Love and of Communication/Connection is evident in the episode between Amy and Rick. Amy feels that she's got one shot at making it to a larger network with this story and as a result she's upset and feels betrayed by Rick who just wants her to come home and be with him. While Rick seems willing to enjoy love, communication, and connection, Amy is so focused on Coldwater that this isn't possible. Ironically, she's so focused that she doesn't see that the one thing that all of the 'ghosts' are saying on the phone, she is taking for granted....communication, loving, being able to touch a loved one's hand.

Amy Penn demonstrates the theme of Faith when she vehemently argues against the media circus featuring Katherine Yellin. Not only has she gotten to know and befriend Katherine, but she knows what it will do to Katherine if the call doesn't come through. She also hates how the miraculous has had a dollar sign attached to it. It feels wrong, as she says. As a result, she's fired from the 'big' story that she's waited for her entire life. It is at this point the reader sees the character development happening for Amy. She's not as focused just on the story and her career. Her time in Coldwater has opened her eyes to the bigger more important picture....family, connection, and love.

Meanwhile, Sully's investigation hasn't gone unnoticed, and Jack takes him into the station for questioning. As it turns out, Elwood Jupes has had the same suspicions about Sully. An event that was intended to console, encourage, renew faith, and offer comfort to the bereft has now become a hotly contested matter, destroying, disrupting, and disintegrating the town and the people who received the phone calls.

Discussion Question 1

What has Sully discovered in his investigation so far?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss Amy's character development since the beginning of the novel.

Discussion Question 3

Compare Sully's determination to get to the truth with Bell's story.

Vocabulary

rival, phonetically, compressed, disc, inciting, indestructible, apparatus, avalanched, eclipse, millennium, zealots, lunacy, sacrilege



Chapters 22-24

Summary

Chapter 22

It is the day of the broadcast for Katherine and Diane's phone call. The reporter is on camera telling the world about Coldwater, Michigan. He recaps the series of events for the viewing audience, stating that not since Alexander Graham Bell demonstrated the phone for the Queen of England has the world sat in such anticipation of a phone call.

A massive snowstorm has blanketed the entire town of Coldwater. Schools and businesses are closed because snow plows can't get through all of the congestion in town. Sully's father comes to pick up Jules and keep him for the day while Sully walks in to work. Talking with his father Sully finds out that Horace, the funeral director, is not the original owner of the funeral home. The original owner, Sam, retired two years prior.

Suddenly, Sully thinks that maybe he gave up on his conspiracy theories too soon. Sully goes over to the funeral home but Maria tells him that Horace is not in, that he doesn't work on Fridays. Sully's eyebrows raise. Maria tells him that since the summer he's been taking off every Friday.

Maria tells him that Horace was ex-military, came to Coldwater from someplace in Virginia. Sully knows the place that Maria mentions. It is the army's command center for military intelligence..the people responsible for wiretaps and intercepts. She tells Sully that Horace sits in on all of the interviews with the people before Maria writes the transcripts. Sully asks for Horace's address, but Maria begins to be frightened and scoots out of the office to go to the show.

Sully runs toward the library, calling Liz as he runs. She meets him there and opens the building for him. She asks what's going on. Sully tells her that he needs to know where Horace lives and needs an address. Liz pulls it up on her computer. There is no listing.

Liz tells Sully that the real estate office in town would have a record, so they lock up the library and hurry over there. The real estate office has one other person working, most of them having already left to go get their seats for the show. The one man that is there tells them that Katherine getting that phone call is the worst thing that ever happened to the town. He is only too willing to help Sully and Liz.

Back at the high school football field the host of the show emerges and stands on the stage in front of everyone who is gathered. The people who've received phone calls come out and sit on the stage on stools that are set up for them. Katherine emerges last, sitting to the side from the others, her phone in her hand.



The action shifts back to Sully who has managed to get his car out of the snow and is barreling down the roads as fast as he can toward Horace's address. He plays over his conversations with the man, every word now suspect.

The action cuts away to Alexander Graham Bell. He's received a request to show the telephone to Queen Victoria at her personal residence. Reporters are lined up in droves to cover the event. Unfortunately, minutes before the scheduled demonstration, Bell finds out that at least three of the four phone lines he was going to use, are not working. There is no time to repair them. He hopes the one remaining line will work.

Back in the present, Elias Rowe sits with Pastor Warren at the hospital. They watch the events unfold. On the stage all of the recipients listen to the host as she begins to introduce them all. Before she can cut away to an expert she's planned to interview, all of the phones go off all at once. The cameras zoom in.

Sully finds the house that he's looking for, slams the car into park and vaults from the seat. He has to go over a high chain link fence in order to reach the house. As he approaches the farmhouse he sees a large boxlike structure next to the barn. There is a large multi-branched antenna connected to the structure. A camouflage netting has been thrown over it.

Back on the stage everyone answers their phones. Then afterward, when everyone calms down, the host asks them what was said. All of them reply that their loved ones all said the same thing: We are here. Jupes shouts out from the crowd that none of them heard anything that the people with the phones could be lying. He tries to whip the crowd into a frenzy.

Sully puts his ear against the side of the building to see if he can hear anything. He is not able to hear anything and he realizes that he is going to have to catch Horace in the act if anything is going to carry any weight. He works his way around the building and finds a small access door. He goes in.

Back on the stage the host speaks directly to Elwood Jupes. He tells the host that he, too, received a call from his dead daughter. When he told the person on the other end of the receiver that he would call the police if they ever played the sick joke on him again. She never called back, he tells the host. Elwood challenges the host to let the people 'hear' the voices for themselves.

Back at the barn Sully sees another door. He hesitates, knowing that he will have only one chance to catch Horace in the act. He yanks the door open. Horace is not there. Sully enters the room quietly, looking around. He sees Maria's transcripts from the funeral home on a desk, a series of legal pads, highlighters, and files. Horace calls Sully's name. Sully spins around, but Horace is not in the barn. Sully goes back outside and sees Horace standing by the farmhouse, waving him in.

Sully goes into the farmhouse, guardedly. Horace waves him in, then walks away, down a hallway, into a basement. Sully thinks that maybe it is a trap, but he has to go. He shrugs out of his coat so that he can fight if he needs to. As he enters the basement he



sees Horace sitting in front of numerous monitors and consoles. Sully asks him what he's doing and Horace tells him that he knows that Sully knows what he's doing. At that moment, before Sully can do anything about it, Horace presses a button, and Katherine's phone rings on the stage.

Sully watches, awestruck, as Horace begins to type onto his keyboard the words that Katherine's sister tells her. Using old voicemail recordings, and with a little military intelligence know-how, Horace has managed to lift enough key phrases that he's strung them together to deliver the final message from heaven, which he delivers to Katherine Yellin via her dead sister's voice.

Sully, breaking out of his shock, loses control and begins pulling and ripping cords, smashing consoles, throwing monitors around the room. Horace simply stands off to the side with his hands in his pockets. When Sully confronts him he asks him why he did it. Horace says that there is nothing false about hope and he has no regrets. Sully asks him what he hoped to achieve with the deception.

Horace tells Sully that he (Horace) is dying, and this is his way of doing penance. Sully asks him why he chose Coldwater of all the places on the face of the Earth. Horace tells him that it is because of Sully, which shocks Sully.

Horace says that Sully should have read the deed more clearly. Sully tells Horace to stay where he is that as soon as he can he's going to call the police, he will expose Horace. Horace smiles slightly and tells him that it isn't going to happen. Horace leans against a far wall in the basement and the lights go off. It is complete and utter darkness.

Sully manages to get out of the house, and back to his car. He is only able to get so far down the road before he hits a massive case of gridlock. Hundreds of people are driving to Coldwater because of the show and Katherine's phone call from heaven. He picks up his phone and calls Elwood Jupes. He starts to tell him everything but Jupes tells him to stop, that if what he's saying is true that it needs larger media attention. He tells him to expect a call from a friend of his who works for the Chicago Tribune.

Back at the hospital Elias and Pastor Warren have been watching the broadcast. Elias turns to Warren and asks if what has just happened proves what they believe. Warren says that if a person believes, they don't need proof. Warren suggests that he is ready to die, to go to heaven himself. Elias holds his hand.

Sully is still stuck in traffic and fuming. He plays over the conversation with Horace in his head. What had he meant about reading the deed to the property? He searches through the papers on the seat next to him and starts reading it. On the line where it lists the buyer's name is written: Elliot Gray, the Air Traffic controller who'd ruined Sully's life. Sully's phone rings. It is the reporter from Chicago calling. They speak for a few minutes, but then the call is disconnected.

Sully looks to see if his battery has gone dead, but it hasn't. The phone rings again and he answers it. On the other end of the phone is his wife's voice. Angrily, he tells the



voice to stop messing with him, that he knows that it is Elliot. 'Don't tell him' the voice implores him. The call is ended. Angry, bereft, Sully turns the car around and heads back to Eliot's farmhouse. He intends to kill the man who is supposed to be dead already.

Jack takes Tess home, but his visit is cut short when his deputies tell him that there is a commotion going on at Horace's farmhouse. Jack tells them that he's on his way.

Sully approaches Horace's home but finds that the police are already there. Red and blue lights flash against the night sky. Slowly, Sully backs out of the long driveway and turns around.

Back in Coldwater, Pastor Warren dies.

Chapter 23

Tired of the continual traffic snarls, Sully leaves the main highway and speeds down a back road in the dark. On either side of the road are steep drop-offs into a ravine that leads to a frozen lake. In an attempt to avoid a family who are walking on the road, Sully swerves and his car goes over the embankment. Sully and his vehicle land on the frozen lake. Sully loses consciousness and wakes to find himself sitting on the edge of Jules's bed with Giselle. She tells him that he can't tell people that there isn't a heaven, but he can tell about what he knows, for Jules' sake.

Before he can respond, he regains consciousness, pulls the door's handle and falls onto the frozen ice. He is almost to the edge of the lake when he sees his father's car sink through the ice and disappear under the water.

Chapter 24

A reporter stands in front of a camera, Horace's farmhouse in the background. The reporter tells the camera, and the listening audience, that a startling discovery indicates that the phone calls from heaven were perpetuated by Horace Belfin. Belfin, the reporter shares, was found dead by authorities, his cause of death unknown. Already, the reporter states, protesters have come forward claiming that they told everyone from the start that there was no heaven, and no calls.

Analysis

The theme of Loss is apparent in all of the chapters in this section. First, there is the loss of Pastor Warren as he dies in the hospital with only Elias Rowe there with him. Then, there is the loss of belief by many of the people when they learn that Belfin was behind the phone calls.

The reader sees a character change in Sully as he confronts Horace. He is angry with Horace, who seems very unconcerned that Sully has found him. Sully tears up the room, but still Horace is unconcerned. When Horace disappears, Sully is left wondering



why he let the man escape. But, what is more apparent is that Sully's reaction indicates that on some level he really wanted the phone calls from heaven to be true. Now, he knows that they never were, and that his original supposition that God doesn't exist, is the real version of the truth. Then, in the next chapter (23) Sully has a visit from his wife who tells him not to tell the world what he knows. He is able to say goodbye to his wife, to hear her once more. When he wakes, of course, he believes that it was all trauma induced. However, some glimmer of his faith has returned, demonstrating the theme of Faith, Love, and Connection, all in one scene.

The theme of Miracles is subtly introduced in these chapters, not only through Sully's visitation with his wife during his accident, but also in the very fact that it challenges people to consider what a true miracle is. The actions by Horace were a hoax, but the positive aspects that came out of the act were miraculous in themselves. For a while, anyway, their thoughts were turned toward contemplating life after death, love, death, and faith.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the theme of Loss in these chapters.

Discussion Question 2

What happens when Sully runs off of the road into the frozen lake?

Discussion Question 3

Why is Sully so upset with Horace?

Vocabulary

monitored, anticipation, demonstrated, dimension, disproving, obituaries, cynicism, squad



Chapters 25-26

Summary

Chapter 25

It is Christmas Morning in Coldwater. Sully watches his son open up his gifts, then smiles at Liz who has come over to watch the festivities at Sully's parents' house. Sully excuses himself and goes into his childhood bedroom. Once there he shuts the door and pulls out an envelope from Horace, which Jack handed to him the night before. He had told Sully when he gave it to him that after he read it to please give him a call.

Horace writes in the letter that his son, Eliot Gray Jr. was the man in the Tower that fateful night. He says that he destroyed the flight recordings that would have vindicated Sully in order to save his son's job. He had been estranged with his son and wanted to make things right between them. Having had a terminal cancer diagnosis had made him believe that he had limited time to work out his issues with his son.

He went to his son's home but his son threw him out. Then, later that day he went to the Tower. Horace (Eliot Gray Sr) writes that he believes that it was his distraction to his son that ultimately caused the series of events that cost so many people so much. He writes that at that point he wanted to make amends, somehow. When he bought out Sam's interest in the funeral home and heard the sad wishes of the grieving families, he decided that for a few families, those who seemed to be struggling with their loved ones' passing, he'd grant them that one wish: to hear from them one more time. To give at least eight people some hope, some peace.

Sully feels chills going up his arm. Eight people? Maybe he didn't count the call from Giselle. Sully pulls out his cell phone and looks at the time that he'd received the call supposedly from Giselle, then he dials Jack. Jack confirms that they got to the farmhouse and found Horace dead at 6:50pm. Giselle's call had come in at 7:44pm. Horace had not made that call.

Chapter 26

The town goes back to normal and the visitors leave never to return. The official story is that a low level clerk from the government, suffering from brain cancer, had landed in Coldwater and perpetuated the hoax. Jack and Tess settled into a comfortable relationship, Amy Penn decided to live in Coldwater and write a book about her experiences, Katherine went back to work at the Real Estate office and remained close friends with Amy. Elias went back to his business, and Pastor Warren was laid to rest in the cemetery. Sully also moved forward, placing Giselle's ashes in the cemetery. He goes home and has the first real sleep he's had in years.



Analysis

In Chapter 25 a real miracle is revealed, and the theme of Miracles is revisited when Sully reads Horace's letter and realizes that the phone call he received supposed from Giselle, could not have been made by Horace. This revelation, coupled with his near death visitation, completes Sully's transformation. He realizes that he has not lost his faith after all, and that there is life after death.

The rest of the people involved in the Coldwater miracle go back to their own lives, but all of them live differently, and look at things differently. As a result of the experience everyone is changed. Tess and Jack begin a romantic relationship in earnest. Amy, having lost her job, decides to live in Coldwater and work on a book about her experiences. But Sully, now fully recovered and at peace with his wife's death, is finally able to take her ashes and place them in the cemetery.

The theme of Connection is also demonstrated in Horace's (Eliot Gray Sr) attempt to reconnect with his son. Facing his own death he realizes what is important in life, and what he has denied himself and his family for so many years. In a desperate attempt to reconcile and communicate with his son, he acted impulsively and in doing so destroyed many lives. This would seem to underscore the importance the author is suggesting about making and maintaining connections and communications with loved ones and friends; that in the end, that is what truly matters.

Discussion Question 1

What is the author suggesting about connections and communication?

Discussion Question 2

How does life resume for the residents in Coldwater?

Discussion Question 3

What does Sully realize about his wife's phone call?

Vocabulary

sham, aneurysm, wafting, sanctuary, eulogy, varsity, converted, incurable, operative



Characters

Tess Rafferty

Tess Rafferty is a single middle aged woman living in Coldwater, Michigan. She is the part owner of a daycare center in town. She is the first woman to receive a phone call from a deceased relative; her mother, Ruth.

Tess does not tell anyone about the initial contact because she is afraid that she is either losing her mind, that no one would believe her, and because she wasn't sure how to tell anyone about it, anyway.

The first person she tells is Jack, who confesses that he, too, has been contacted. Later, Tess stands up at the town hall meeting along with six others who share that they've been contacted. She was curious when Jack did not make a declaration at that point, but understood his reasons.

Jack and Tess become involved romantically toward the end of the book. Tess's life was not easy before her mother passed away. Her mother suffered from dementia, but before that Tess's mother Ruth had been a single mother, struggling to make ends meet. However, despite this, Ruth had also been a generous person, always making a point of opening her home on the holidays to anyone who didn't have a family to celebrate with. It is this memory of her mother that makes Tess continue the tradition.

Jack Sellers

Jack is the middle aged police chief in Coldwater, Michigan. He is divorced from his wife, Doreen. Jack receives a phone call from his deceased son, Robbie, who was killed in Afghanistan where he was fighting with the Marines.

Jack doesn't tell anyone, except Tess, that he has been receiving calls from his son. Later, Jack begins to suspect that the calls are not from beyond the grave, but are being perpetuated by someone else, less ecumenical. It isn't until he joins forces with Sully that he begins to understand how all of the puzzle pieces fit together.

Jack is attracted to Tess, though she is ten years his junior. This parallels the story of Alexander Graham Bell, in many respects. The author makes sure to precede many of the sections involving Jack with an excerpt about Bell's life. This is to suggest the theme of communication and the human need for connection.

Regardless of how things turn out at the end of the story, Jack has come to a healing point in his grief about his son's death, and about his own faith and beliefs. When the town is inundated with tourists and additional media, Jack is overwhelmed and angry that his small town is being put through the wringer.



Pastor Warren

Warren is in his early eighties at the time of the telling of the story. He has been the pastor of the Harvest of Hope Church for almost his whole life. The church has been his life and he has ministered to many generations of families in the area. As the story opens, Warren is fairly complacent and predictable in his routines and beliefs.

However, when Pastor Warren is confronted with Katherine's admission that her sister contacted her from heaven, it challenges Warren's belief system, and calls upon him to take a stand that makes him very unpopular with everyone, even his fellow ministers in the town.

Pastor Warren becomes increasingly alarmed and appalled at the way in which the entire 'miracle' becomes commercialized and exploited by the media and business owners. It is when he is preaching against this very thing that he has a heart attack.

Katherine Yellin

Katherine Yellin was always in her sister, Diane's, shadow. Diane was her older sister and always made sure that Katherine had a turn, was encouraged, and knew that she was loved. They were not only sisters, but best friends. So, when Diane died while still in her mid-forties, Katherine was devastated.

When Katherine Yellin receives the call from her sister, it overwhelms her at first, but then she accepts what she can hear, and continues to hear. She is very vocal about it, and when her sister urges her to tell everyone about it, she takes this as a directive. She is the first to go public about her phone call, though it is later discovered that she might not have been the 'first' person to receive a phone call in town.

Katherine seems to like the limelight that is thrown onto her. She likes how tourists view her, asking her to pray with them. She is in the public eye a lot, is interviewed by Amy Penn and Channel 9 news, and courted by other major media outlets. She becomes incensed when it is suggested that Tess Rafferty was the first person to receive a phone call. She escalates the frenzy by promising the media that her sister will call and that she, Katherine, will put her sister on speaker phone in front of everyone gathered so that they can directly answer questions about heaven.

Sullivan Harding

Sullivan Harding (Sully) is being released from jail when the book opens. He's been in a military jail for ten months, during which time his wife, Giselle, died. Giselle was injured, and sustained an accident that placed her into a coma, when she rushed to a plane accident looking for Sully.



Sully has a small 7-year-old son named, Jules, whom he regains custody of when he is released. Sully had been a pilot for the Navy and had been flying a plane from one coast to the next, with a layover to see his wife. The Tower controller mixed up the landing pattern and Sully ended up in a collision with a smaller plane. Sully managed to eject and safely land away from the crash site.

The military were only too anxious to wrap up the horrible publicity that occurred because of the crash, and latched onto the information that Sully had been consuming alcohol ten hours prior to his flight (which is against the rules). However, he had been completely sober and the tapes that would have exonerated him were too damaged to be used. He was court-marshaled and sent to military jail for ten months.

Sully is incensed that people in his home town are so gullible when the phone calls begin. He knows that the phone calls must be fraudulent because no loving God would allow a small 7-year-old child to be exempt from hearing from his mother. Sully lost his faith when his wife died, and throughout the course of the book he searches for some meaning to his life.

As he does research in the library, he meet a girl named, Liz, who is 15 years his junior. Liz helps him do research on the events happening in town, and doesn't believe that people are being contacted from the beyond any more than Sully does. Sully invites her to his family's Thanksgiving Day meal, and she becomes Jules' favorite babysitter.

Doreen Sullivan

Doreen Sullivan is the former wife of the Coldwater Police Chief, Jack Sullivan. She also begins receiving phone calls from her deceased son, Robbie. Unlike Jack, she tells people about the calls. She has since remarried, and her new husband is less than thrilled at the attention that Doreen begins receiving.

Doreen tells Jack that at first the calls made her feel ecstatic, but then after a few weeks went on the opposite began to be true. She became depressed and returned to the way she was when Robbie died. Realizing that it was not healthy for her any longer, she unplugged all of the phones in her house, and put them, along with her cell phone, into a box and gave them away.

Jules Harding

Jules is the 7-year-old son of Sully. He likes the librarian, Liz, and enjoys spending time with her. Jules and his father get along well, except in one area: the phone calls. Jules is convinced that he will receive a phone call from his mother just like everyone else is receiving. Sully is devastated that his son would believe this and tries to talk to him about the possibility of it not happening. It doesn't go well and motivates Sully to discover the truth.



Giselle Harding

Giselle Harding was the wife of Sully and Jules' mother. She was involved in a terrible car accident when her vehicle was run off of the road when she was on her way to pick her husband up from the airport. She saw the plane go down and thought the worst.

Sully remembers his life with her throughout the novel, and it indicates that they were very much in love and dedicated to one another. Her death rocked and wounded Sully to the core of his being and shredded his belief in a loving God.

Elias Rowe

Elias Rowe is an African American man living in Coldwater, Michigan. He owns his own roofing company. He is one of the first to receive a phone call from a deceased person, only this person was a relative of his. The person that reaches out to him is Nick, a less than valuable employee that used to work for Elias.

Elias had insisted that Nick's alcohol level be tested when Nick fell off of a roof. It was proven that Nick was intoxicated and so the insurance company would not cover Nick's bills. As a result Nick and his family were devastated financially. Nick finally died, alone, of a heart attack. The phone call to Elias asks him why he didn't help him when he could have. This shames Elias so much that he decides to leave town.

Elias returns to town briefly and is contacted by Sully. The two of them team up to try and figure out who the less than heavenly person is behind the phone calls and mass hysteria.

Mark Ashton

Mark is an old Navy buddy of Sully's. It is Mark that gets Sully the job at the newspaper as a salesman.

Amy Penn

Amy Penn is a news journalist in a small station located outside of Coldwater. When her editor, Phil, gives her the assignment she is less than thrilled, thinking that he doesn't value her talent or ability. Unknown to her, nothing could be further from the truth. Phil had received an email telling him to specifically send Amy to the story.

When Amy meets Katherine, she is less than thrilled. However, she gains Katherine's trust, gets to know everyone in Coldwater, and eventually begins to dislike the turn that she sees happening in the story. At one point she tells Phil that she can no longer report on the event happening in Coldwater because it isn't right.



Amy sees how the media is creating the news, not reporting it, and she finds it unethical. However, even though she has been fired, she continues to stay in Coldwater to support Katherine. She has a fiance named, Rick, who dumps her midway through the novel because she is never home.

Phil

Phil is the station manager where Amy Penn works. He is a newsman, and beyond that, a business man. When he sees the potential for revenue as a result of Amy's story, he's all in, regardless of whom it may hurt.

Father Carroll

Father Carroll is the local priest of the Catholic church. He is a foil to Pastor Warren. Whereas Warren wants nothing to do with the media and the spotlight, Father Carroll constantly maneuvers himself to always be seen as the spokesman for the clergy in Coldwater. Father Carroll brings in Bishop Hibbing to speak with Tess, who is a lapsed Catholic. They are excited when they learn that Tess was the first to receive a call from heaven, and not Katherine (who is not a Catholic).

Samantha and Lulu

Samantha and Lulu work with Tess at the daycare. Samantha, in particular, is Tess's best friend. Sam stays with Tess and helps her feed the people who start to camp on Tess's lawn.

Jason

Jason is the worker at Dial Tek. He initially meets Sully when Sully comes in to collect fees for the ad that the business places in the paper. However, later on, Sully talks Jason into doing some cyber-sleuthing to determine if there is some connection between the recipients' phones. When there is, he tells Sully that they all had the same phones, with the same phone plan.

Horace

Horace is the owner of the funeral home. He speaks with Sully on a few occasions and always takes out large ads in the paper. Horace tells Sully that they write the obituaries for the paper, not the reporters.

Horace is also a close friend with Jupes, whom Sully suspects of having something to do with the phony phone calls from heaven.



Ruth, Tess's Mother

Ruth is Tess's mother and is the one that calls Tess from heaven. She tells her daughter not to worry about her, that there is no pain in heaven, and that she shouldn't grieve any longer. Ruth had suffered from Alzheimer's and dementia. But, before this happened, she had been very involved in her community, helping others and staying busy. She never remarried when Tess's father left them.

Robbie Sellers

Robbie is Jack and Doreen's son who was killed in Afghanistan. He tells his father that the 'end is not the end'. This ends up being a chief clue that leads Jack to team up with Sully to get to the truth.

Diane, Katherine's sister

Diane was Katherine's older sister. The two had been very dedicated to one another, marrying and having children around the same time. They took care of one another and were best friends, as well as sisters. When Diane died it devastated Katherine, who was never fully able to move forward.

When Katherine receives the phone calls from Diane, she reaches out to Diane's children to give them the good news. However, they want nothing to do with her, calling her a nut job. Katherine's own children, also, want nothing to do with her as a result of the events in Coldwater.

Bishop Hibbing

Bishop Hibbing is presented as a self empowered individual representing the local diocese in the miraculous events. He speaks with Tess Rafferty and tells her that they they will be investigating to see if it truly is a miracle. He is extremely pleased that Tess has been the first to receive a call.

Maria

Maria is the receptionist at the funeral home who does the interviews with the family members, and then writes the obituaries. She keeps massive files and recordings of the interviews. Sully suspects that someone is accessing her files and using them to recreate the phone calls from heaven.

Maria is extremely outgoing and will talk the ears off of anyone who is unlucky enough to catch her on a slow day.



Kelly Podesto

Kelly is a teenager who stood with the others in the town meeting to declare that she was receiving phone calls too. She claims to have been contacted by her friend, Brittany, who had been killed in a car accident a year previously.

Liz

Liz is the young librarian in Coldwater that helps Sully do his research on the people who are receiving phone calls. She thinks what he is doing is noble and tells him that the media were unfair to him in the papers following his plane crash. She helps take care of Jules for Sully.

Elwood Jupes

Jupes is the senior writer (and the only writer) for the newspaper in Coldwater. At first he is acting extremely suspicious and Sully thinks that he might be the one that is involved in the phone calls. However, when Jack arrests them both following an altercation, Jack learns that Elwood was thinking the same thing about Sully.



Symbols and Symbolism

Porcelain Angel (Giselle's remains)

Sully is handed the angel urn when he goes to the funeral home to pick up Giselle's remains. He can't decide what to do with them so he takes them home. The urn and her ashes represent his grief over her death and his inability to move forward. At the end of the story, he is able to take her ashes to the cemetery, indicating that he's made his peace with her death.

Giselle's Name

Giselle's name, translated, means 'pledge'. Throughout the novel, Giselle appears to Sully in his dreams, memories, and in a connection from heaven. She is 'pledged' to him from even beyond the grave.

Phones

The phones are the connection devices that the people use to communicate with their dead loved ones. Throughout the novel references to phones as a way for people to connect is emphasized, even providing historical references to its development. They also represent each individual's faith in the phone calls. Most of them carry it with them wherever they go, just hoping for another phone call.

Fridays

The phone calls always come in on a Friday, never any other time of the week (at least at first). This ends up being a clue that Sully locks on to which eventually leads him to Horace's farmhouse.

Sully's unpacked boxes

Sully moves into an apartment but leaves all of his things in boxes. This represents his inability to move forward with his life. At the end, he begins, with Liz's help, to unpack the boxes and move forward with his life.

Sully's recurring plane dream

Sully's plane dream is a recurring dream of his having to eject from the cockpit of the plane the day that his wife died. In the dream he has no control over anything and



continues to reflect back on his training as a pilot. This dream is indicative of his inability to move forward because he wants to make sense of what happened.

Alexander Graham Bell

Alexander Graham Bell is featured throughout the novel. This is because the author wants to draw parallels between aspects of Bell's life and that of several of the characters, most notably Jack and Sully. Both men lack the ability to communicate well, or at all, with the people that they love, and all are driven to do what they can to make that connection.

Tess's burned out house

Tess lives in her mother's home that she shared with her for so many years. When the top part of Tess's home burns out, Tess realizes that she needs to make a change in her own life. The burned out top floor of the house represents Tess's spiritual and mental state at that time. When she starts repairing and renovating the upstairs, the reader understands that Tess is also on the mend for the better.

Dial Tek Billboard

The Dial Tek billboard represents the commercialization that took place when the phone call miracles began happening.

People on the lawn (Tess's house)

Tess looks out of the window one snowy morning to see hundreds of people camped out on her lawn. This represents how desperate many people are just to have one more conversation with their loved ones, or to have proof of the afterlife.

Life Preservers

Jack's wife, Doreen, points out a picture that sits on Jack's desk. All of them have life preservers on and Doreen remarks that this is what family should be to one another...life preservers. She goes on to state that the phone calls that everyone has been receiving are also life preserving in many ways.



Settings

Harvest of Hope Church

The Harvest Hope Church is where a good deal of the action takes place in the novel, *First Phone Call from Heaven*. Pastor Warren is the spiritual leader of this church. At 82 years of age he knows many of his congregations members' families for several generations. The Harvest Hope Church is where all of the recipients attend who received phone calls from heaven.

Tess's House

Tess's house is where the reader first sees Tess receive the phone call from her dead sister. However, it is also where the reader sees a fire start, gutting her entire upper floors, where she welcomes people camped out on her lawns to come into her home and get warm, and where she begins to fall in love with Jack.

Police Station

This is where Jack works. The station is where Jack first receives his phone call from Robbie. This is where he and Doreen discuss the phone calls, her decision to remove her phones, and where Jack begins to investigate the phenomena.

Coldwater, Michigan

This is the town where the event takes place. It was literally a little heard of small town in Michigan that was suddenly thrust into the media spotlight. When tourists and others begin to flock to the town it overwhelms their infrastructure, filling up hotels to capacity, making food orders soar, and impact on the roads and other businesses.

Dial Tek Phone Mart

This is where Jason works and where Sully begins to figure out what might be going on as far as the calls from heaven.

Lanker's Field

This is a large field just outside of town that begins to be inundated by RV campers and tents of the faithful waiting to see or talk to those who are receiving information from heaven.

Coldwater Library

The library is where Sully goes to do research on the town and the people who are receiving calls. This is also where Sully meets Liz, who is the young new librarian.



Themes and Motifs

Faith

The theme of Faith is woven throughout the novel, as most of the novel deals with people's belief, or lack of it. Pastor Warren draws a distinct line between belief and faith, however, stating that faith is when a person thinks for themselves, and belief is when other people do the thinking.

Many characters in the novel have lost their faith in heaven or religion all together. This is true of Tess Rafferty, who is the first person the reader encounters in the book. Because of her father's abandonment, she and her mother had always been the charity case in town. This upset Tess so much, especially as she watched the way people talked about her mother behind her back, that when Tess was old enough to rebel against going, she did. Later, when she reaches out to her priest, she reconnects with her faith, though she does not return to the church.

Sully is angry with God for most of the novel. He declares that no loving God would separate a child from his mother, then put the father in jail. He sees evidence against God from the beginning, as if it were a personal vendetta. However, when he nearly loses his life in a frozen lake, he learns that faith is more than churches, phone calls from heaven, or any of that. Then, faith becomes real for him again.

What seems evident throughout this novel is that faith, true faith, is viewed as a dynamic, living, state. That the person who engages in faith has a calm assurance about them, such as Pastor Warren, which does not require proof of things unseen.

Loss

Loss figures prominently in the novel. The focus is, at first, on the survivors of loss, those relatives and family members, friends, who've suffered the loss of their loved ones. However, there are many types of losses that occur, other than physical loss through death.

There is the loss of faith, in the case of Sully. In many instances, Sully is angry with any type of spirituality and wants nothing to do with it. He regains his faith at the end of the novel, when he realizes that the 'real' first phone call from heaven actually came to him. Then, he lets go of his anger, and his grief and is able to take his wife's ashes to the cemetery.

Tess is able to let go of her loneliness when she finds Jack, and Jack is, likewise, able to let go of his sadness at losing his son. Diane also is able to deal with her loss of her sister, and puts aside her often caustic personality so that she can enjoy life more.



The town, itself, loses some of its innocence in this novel. It is painted as a quaint picturesque small town where there are wholesome values and slices of Americana at every turn. However, they are the site of a media blitz and an influx of tourists that they are unprepared for. They lose that innocence, their way of life, and their credibility, at the end.

Death

Death is a theme throughout the novel because the entire conflict revolves around the fact that people have died and their loved ones are grieving. Through the phone calls, death is shown to merely be a transition, not the end, but the beginning.

One of the phone calls that is received by Jack Sellers from his son, Robbie, suggests that the 'end is not the end', indicating that death is not something to be feared, that it is simply the ending of one way of life, while another begins.

Death is also present when Horace tells Sully about what really happened the night of his plane crash and Giselle's tragic accident. His son dies, and because of this, and Giselle's accident, Horace is set on the course of events that eventually leads to his creation of the false phone calls.

Pastor Warren dies, and his death is shown to be peaceful and quiet. At one point, while he is in the hospital with Elias, he tells Elias that he won't be preaching Christmas morning sermons. He says that he's okay with that. Thus, the author seems to be indicating that if one makes peace with the fact that death is inevitable, it makes living what time is left, more precious.

Love

In the end, a grand statement is made by Horace through Katherine Yellin's phone. He basically tells everyone that love is what everyone is born from, and what everyone returns to, in the end. In each instance of a phone call, a small segment of this sentiment is mentioned.

Robbie says that the 'end is not the end', while Tess's mother tells her that there is no pain in heaven. Elias's phone call tells him that he should care about everyone. What is evident in every phone call received is that the love that each feels for one another travels with them.

Even when it is determined that the phone calls were a hoax, the forward momentum has begun anyway. There are those, the author states, who still refused to believe it when the hoax story broke on the news stations. The calls were an indication that love survives the grave, and that love is the great medium through which communication and connection is transported.



Love is exemplified in many ways throughout the novel. There is the love of a father for his son, illustrated by Jules and Sully. There is the love of two people who are connecting, as exemplified by Tess and Jack. There is the love between sisters, and friends, as exemplified by Katherine's experience with her sister, and then with Amy Penn.

The Afterlife

The debate about life after death is discussed many times throughout the novel. The reader is first introduced to the possibility when Tess Rafferty receives the phone call from her mother, Ruth. The reader is asked to decide whether Tess is really receiving calls or not. As each character who receives a call, and a few who don't receive calls, grapple with the ramifications of tangible proof of life after death, it challenges the belief systems and moral fiber of each individual, and the town as a whole.

The author seems to suggest with this novel that one's decision about life after death is wholly dependent on one's mindset, cultural beliefs, and desires. Pastor Warren offers to many of the characters the continued message that one does not have to see to believe, to know, that there is life after death. He points out that all of the world's sacred texts point to existence after the death of the physical body. Yet, human beings, as a point of reference, are conditioned to only believe that which they can experience with the senses.

The author challenges the readers, as he challenges his characters, to determine what comes 'next' after death of the physical body. How does this shape one's life, or does it merely suggest a moral compass?

What results from the exploration of this theme, at least for Sully, is that believing that there is an afterlife gives people peace of mind, courage, and most importantly, hope that there is 'more' and that the 'end is not the end'.

Miracles

The word 'miracles' is mentioned throughout the novel. The phone calls are regarded as miracles and are quickly picked up and disseminated throughout the world as a verified miracle. The Catholic Church, as well as Pastor Warren, are hesitant to fully embrace this designation for different reasons. Pastor Warren, with all of his experience in dealing with spirituality, suspects that something is amiss, though he can't say what. The Catholic Church is careful to fully bestow their designation of 'miracle' but at the same time take the forefront in the investigation of the 'miracle'.

The author suggests through the use of miracles, and the characters' discussion about the occurrences, that the term 'miracle' is loosely defined. One man's miracle is another man's misery. This is especially evident in Doreen's case. At first, hearing from Robbie brings her a great deal of joy, but then as the weeks wear on, the continual phone calls don't bring joy, but despair, as she realizes that her son is truly dead and gone, and will never be returning in the flesh. This realization forms the basis for her decision to



remove all phones from her home and to cut off all communication with the messages she's received.

Elias Rowe also experiences the same thing as Doreen. He is one of the only people to receive a phone call that wasn't from a direct relative. His call was from a former employee, Nick, who'd died penniless and broken due to some actions that Elias took on the job site. He does not view the phone call as a miracle at all, but rather a punishment.

Sully doesn't view the phone calls as a miracle because he's certain that if there were a God in heaven, and He was allowing phone calls home that more people (his son as a case in point) would be receiving a phone call, and not just these few in one little town.

Still, the term 'miracle' begins to be defined by each character's growing understanding that miracles don't always come in fantastic and dramatic ways, but in small, still ways. This is evident in the growing relationship between Tess and Jack. It is also Sully's realization of his son's love and joy of life, of Liz at the library, and the support of his family. Each of those things, to Sully, Tess, and Jack, are miracles.

Connection and Communication

As a major theme in the novel, the theme of connection and communication, this innate desire that all human beings have, is underscored and exemplified. Initially, it is the connection between those still living and their loved ones, who miraculously are calling them from the great beyond. The joy and elation of reconnecting with those who were once gone is palpable and shapes the direction of the novel, providing one of the key initiating conflicts which drives the story.

The author suggests that this need to connect transcends the grave, and that of all the things that people hope to take with them, it is this connection, the love, that creates that bond and that connection. Without her sister, Katherine was lost socially, mentally, and emotionally. Connecting with her sister on the phone brought back the best part of her, if only for a while. This allowed Katherine to be able to also open herself up to include new people in her life, namely, Amy Penn, the newspaper woman.

Tess was able to see clearly the choices that she'd made in the past, how they shaped her ability to reach out and include others, and how this isolated her, making her miserable. Opening herself to connection allowed her to be able to find Jack and to begin a relationship that she thought she'd never have.

Sully's desire to connect, to let go of the shame and anger over his wife's death, is also a story of connection. In his grief he disconnected from himself, his family, and his young son. He was not open to the possibilities of connecting with the community. When he finally makes his peace with her death, by taking her ashes to the cemetery, it has signaled his desire to reconnect with others.



Finally, the author uses the life story of Alexander Graham Bell, the father of the phone, as the primary example of someone whose deepest desire was to connect and communicate with his wife who was profoundly deaf and mute. Still, despite this limitation, both were able to find a way to develop their own way of speaking, while the rest of the world benefited from Bell's wonderful inventions (which wouldn't have existed but for his passionate attempts to find a way to reach his wife).

Styles

Point of View

The point of view in this novel is told in third person, limited. Often there will be a shift in mid-chapter from one character to the next, but always in first person and from their point of view. The situation may be the same event, seen four different ways, through the lens of four different people.

Language and Meaning

The language and meaning is kept modern and on an intermediate level. There are often references to Alexander Graham Bell and the era in which he lived, as well as references to biblical and religious actions, titles, and belief systems.

Structure

The structure of the book is mostly in linear fashion, with a few flashbacks. Some of the chapters include 'transcripts' from actual broadcasts that either are presently taking place, or have just taken place. The reader reads the transcripts as if the news were playing and it is written in script formatting. There are 26 sections to this novel, none of the titled as chapters, so to speak, but rather by days or events that took place.



Quotes

Sully did this now, finished unfinished sentences, believing that the words people do not speak are louder than the ones they do.

-- Sully (chapter 2)

Importance: Sully has returned to Coldwater after ten months in a military prison. He feels people looking at him and judging him constantly.

The news of life is carried via telephone. A baby's birth, a couple engaged, a tragic accident on a late-night highway— most milestones of the human journey, good or bad, are foreshadowed by the sound of ringing.”

-- Sully (chapter 2)

Importance: Sully is still grieving when he learns of the phone calls from heaven.

He draped himself in her sad memory, because it was the closest thing to having her around.

-- Sully (chapter 3)

Importance: Sully is unable to move forward with his life because of his despair over his wife's death. Everywhere he goes he sees her and he spends a lot of time simply sitting and remembering their life together.

Besides, a glimpse of heaven is often held close for fear of losing it, like a butterfly cupped in a child's hands.”

-- Jack (chapter 5)

Importance: Jack has received a phone call from Robbie and he's unsure as to whether or not he should tell anyone about it. He ends up not sharing the news with anyone.

Faith, it is said, is better than belief, because belief is when someone else does the thinking.

-- Pastor Warren (chapter 5)

Importance: Pastor Warren never believed that the phone calls were real, but no one would listen to him. In this particular quote, he is thinking about a conversation that he's just had with his other fellow ministers in town.

She felt silly, being consumed by a telephone. But when she heard her mother's voice, the most blessed sensation would wash over her, the bad of life rinsed away.

-- Tess (chapter 13)

Importance: This shows how Tess, and others that received the phone calls, felt when they began receiving the calls.



Fear is how you lose your life . . . a little bit at a time. . . . What we give to fear, we take away from . . . faith.

-- Robbie (chapter 13)

Importance: This is something that Robbie tells Jack during one of the phone calls. The fact that the calls end up being a hoax doesn't seem to downplay much of the truth that is imparted to the people receiving the calls.

Sometimes, love brings you together even as life keeps you apart."

-- Narrator (chapter 15)

Importance: This statement is made by the narrator in regards to the events that have transpired for all of those receiving phone calls from their loved ones.

Although these people would have passed away eventually, the mystery of death is why it chooses a particular moment. With no earthly answer, coincidence can become conspiracy.

-- Amy Penn (chapter 16)

Importance: Amy Penn muses about the fact that people seem to want to grab onto anything, however remote, to make a story out of it, to sensationalize it, or to use it to bolster their own particular beliefs.

You can't get your phone to answer, and I can't make mine ring.

-- Katherine (chapter 20)

Importance: Katherine tells this to Amy when Amy tells Katherine that her fiance has left her. Amy tries to call her boyfriend, but the phone calls aren't answered. This also shows how worried Katherine is that her sister won't call again.

Desire sets our compass, but real life steers our course."

-- Narrator (chapter 22)

Importance: This is said by the Narrator in that despite a person's best efforts to make a plan, life happens and often alters that plan.

But it was not a new idea. We call out; we are answered. It has been that way from the beginning of belief, and it continues to this very moment."

-- Narrator (chapter 25)

Importance: This is a statement from the Narrator about the nature of Faith and communication, the need to connect.