

HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN, ILLUMINATED BY THE MESSAGE

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION AND GROUP DISCUSSION

GENERAL QUESTIONS

1. Read the Introduction. Share anything that strikes you or raises questions and discuss them with others.
2. What do you think of the idea of taking excerpts from famous literary authors and combining them with passages from the Bible?
3. How do you react—positively or negatively—to the contemporary translation of the Scriptures from *The Message* that is paired with each literary passage. Give specific examples.
4. Do you feel that prayer can be triggered in this way? Why or why not? What is your definition of prayer?
5. Who are other authors who have inspired you? Explain why and how.
6. Is art in general a portal to prayer for you? Explain your answer or give examples.
7. What else encourages or inspires you to pray? Name these inspirations.
8. Do you ever get “stuck” trying to pray? What happens when you do? If you are never “stuck,” why do you think that is so?
9. What is the difference for you (if any) between “religious” or “spiritual” writing and “secular” or “literary” writing? Explain your answer.
10. Can you learn how to pray from those who do not share your exact beliefs? Why or why not? Give examples if you can.

SPECIFIC QUESTIONS

1. On Page 14 tiny Thumbelina stopped to help a bird in need. Thumbelina was frightened of the large bird, but she didn't hesitate to assist him. Like the Samaritan in Luke 10:33-35, she helped someone very different than her. Was there a time you reached out to someone who was nothing like you, someone who may have frightened you? Did you go out of your comfort zone to be there for a stranger?
2. The one-legged soldier became the most remarkable in *The Steadfast Tin Soldier* on page 18. Scripture notes in 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 that God may give us a handicap as a gift. How do you use your illnesses or disability to praise God? Was there a time in your life that was so difficult that you had to submit to Christ's strength and allow God to take over?
3. The struggles of the Ugly Duckling are featured on page 28. From the start, the Ugly Duckling was ridiculed and abused. Job also felt terrorized by peers and abandoned by God in Job 30:9-19. Have you ever felt that God has forgotten you? Was there an occasion when you joined in with your friends to hurt someone's feelings?
4. How often do we abandon a gift in search of more? The soldier in the *Tinder Box* on page 34 already had a large quantity of money. But he abandoned it for the gold and then struck off the head of the witch so he would not have to give her the tinder-box. Habakkuk 2:5-8 says that money deceives. How have you deceived someone in an attempt to take their money, job, or pride?
5. The emperor in *The Emperor's New Clothes* on page 50 cared nothing for his soldiers. He focused on himself and how he looked. Deuteronomy 17:18-20 says that a king should live in reverent obedience. He should not be proud or arrogant. How does this instruction in Deuteronomy contrast with the emperor's behavior? What do you think it means “to fear his God?” Do you know of any leaders who you believe live in reverent obedience with the Lord?
6. What is the meaning of the psalm the little girl sang on page 62: “Where roses blow in the flowery vale, There we the child Jesus shall hail?” What is the significance of God creating the world with Wisdom at God's side in Psalm 104:24-31? Do you make a daily practice of taking note of God's creation? What do you think of God sending the Spirit to spring the whole countryside into bloom?
7. Gerda was frightened and alone (page 66). Only the birds consoled her. Psalm 91:2-12 says God never leaves us alone. We can trust in God. His angels will guard us wherever we go. Do you thank God for the angels around you? Do you believe you have a guardian angel? Think of a time an angel came to your rescue.

8. The Merchant's son told fantastical stories to the Princess to impress her (page 76). Scripture warns us in 1 Timothy 1:3-11 to be cautious of people who promote themselves rather than their faith. Do you know of a modern-day prophet that you believe is more interested in self-gain than professing the Word? What does it mean to love uncontaminated by self-interest and counterfeit faith, a life open to God? How do you live that teaching or fail to do so?
9. On page 84 we read of a princess that has a bizarre garden of bones. Why do you think Hans Christian Andersen wrote such a scene in a children's book? We see a similar scene in Ezekiel 37:2-10. Do you believe that God can bring dry bones back to life? What do you think is the meaning behind this graphic Scripture passage?
10. There's a lot of boasting going on in The Darning Needle on page 96. We are told in 1 Samuel 2:2-5 that no one is holier than God. We shouldn't dare talk pretentiously — ever. Do you find it difficult not to boast on social media? How difficult is it to teach our children humility today?