

Disaster Status

Book Discussion Guide

1. As *Disaster Status* opens, nurse Erin Quinn smacks her red boxing gloves against a speed bag. Her most frequent prayer is “Keep me strong”—physically, professionally, and emotionally. Why is staying strong so important to her? How did her past shape that need? How did it influence her relationships with men? her relationship with her grandmother? Discuss.
2. Fire captain Scott McKenna has lived his life in the shadow of his heroic father. Why is this particularly difficult for him now? Have you ever felt driven to “measure up” to someone else?
3. Personal reactions to stressful events (like the Pacific Point pesticide disaster) often bring old emotional wounds to the surface (Erin). Or reopen wounds that are barely healing (Scott, Cody, Leigh Stathos). The character of Sarge Gunther gives a dramatic face to the devastating effects of post-traumatic stress. Why did saving Cody Sorenson become so important to him? As a reader, did the character of Sarge evoke fear or sympathy? a mixture? Discuss.
4. What role do you think Arlo and Annie Popp play in *Disaster Status*? Annie’s driftwood and sea glass mobiles are “worn smooth by the sea,” like people are by time and tests of faith. Compare and contrast Annie’s mobiles with Erin’s stained-glass window hanging (how they were shaped, what inspired them, what feelings they evoked).
5. Iris Quinn spends time each day with centering prayer, by sitting still and “listening with the ear of her heart.” Do you make quiet time with God a regular part of your day? How does that help you?
6. In *Disaster Status*, the author uses several symbols.
 - a.) Erin’s fight against the beach house’s shower mold continues until an epiphany moment when she pulls down the stained-glass window hanging and lets the sun shine in. What do you think the shower mold represented?
 - b.) Scott McKenna (to quote Annie Popp) “battles that cold ocean like a tortured soul” as he trains for Ocean Rescue. Early in the book, he is swept against a large rock and injured. Near the book’s end, he climbs up on that same rock and prays for help in becoming the man God wants him to be. In the epilogue, he proposes to Erin on that beach. What significance do you see in Scott’s collision with the rock and the peace and happiness that he finally finds there?
7. Iris intends to gift Erin with a copy of the poem “A Strong Woman vs. A Woman of Strength.” What impact did the words of this poem have on you? Are you a person of strength?
8. Erin conducts a Faith QD hospital ministry, inviting hospital staff to gather before their shift and ask God to be present during their workday. If it were possible, how helpful would you find that in your workplace? In what specific way?

9. In *Disaster Status*, the author offers inside glimpses into the fast-paced world of emergency medicine and attempts to “put the readers in the trauma room.” In contrast to popular TV medical shows, she hopes that the book’s elements of faith will help “*Grey’s Anatomy* find its soul.” Did you feel that? Discuss.
10. Forgiveness plays an important role in this book—forgiving others and oneself as well. Scott wrestles with guilt regarding his sister’s death and Cody’s injury. Erin refuses to forgive her father. Sarge struggles with his role in the death of Gulf War civilians. Leigh Stathos is only beginning to deal with her husband’s betrayal. Iris Quinn’s quiet strength—and ultimately her forgiveness of the man who assaults her—is a result of her own experience with God’s grace and touches the lives of all around her. Do you know people who, like Erin, pull on a pair of boxing gloves against past hurts? or, like Scott, drag themselves through cold seas of self-punishment? How tough is forgiveness for you?
11. The author offers snippets of humor to temper the story’s more serious moments. Like Jonah the yodeling Chihuahua, the scene at the senior citizens’ karaoke night, and the verbal sparring between Erin and Scott. What was your favorite chuckle?
12. The Mercy Hospital series intends to offer both entertainment and an encouraging message of hope. How hopeful did you find the ending of *Disaster Status*? for Erin and Scott? Iris? Cody? Sarge? Leigh? Discuss.