***Leaving Blythe River***

**Book Club Questions**

1. The structure of the book is based on the time before Ethan’s father disappears and the time afterward. Why do you think the author chose to set up the story this way? How does this dynamic reflect the changes in Ethan’s character?
2. Ethan reacts strongly when he catches his father in a compromising position with Jennifer. The worst part for him is reflected in this quote: “It was the look in his eyes. *She* looked away . . . He was just looking right at me. And it was so awful, what I saw there in his eyes.” What did Ethan believe his father was trying to convey?
3. Sam calls Blythe River the “prettiest place on God’s earth.” How is the setting of the Blythe River Wilderness an intrinsic part of the story?
4. Jone and Sam play an important part in supporting Ethan’s transformation during the rescue. Do you believe that the kindness of strangers can sometimes be more helpful than our own family?
5. Despite their turbulent relationship, Ethan can’t abandon his father when he goes missing. What drives Ethan to keep looking even when others had given up? Despite a difficult childhood, does the love for a parent ever go away?
6. How are both the mugger and the bear symbols of major turning points in Ethan’s life?
7. When all seems hopeless, the responsibility of whether to keep looking for his father or turn back falls on Ethan’s shoulders. “If he chose wrong, needed to live with it . . . And he would. Because it had been his best effort.” How does this statement reflect the difference in Ethan’s perception of himself compared to when he first arrived? Do you think most people would have given up at this point?
8. Ethan tells Jone that his father’s self-worth is just fine. In fact, he thinks he’s worth more than everybody else. She replies, “No. That’s not how it works. People with really good self-worth think they’re the same size as everybody else, and they never make anybody else feel small. Any time somebody tries to act like they’re more than you are, deep down they’re afraid they’re less. Otherwise they’d have nothing to prove.” Do you agree with Jone’s insight? Why or why not?
9. In the hospital, Ethan’s father would rather die than lose one leg, even after all Ethan went through to save him. What does this say about his father’s character? At what point does one decide to stop trying to save those who don’t want to be saved?
10. When Ethan’s father finally apologizes, is he truly sorry or just looking for a reaction from his son? Do you think there is a chance for reconciliation for these two moving forward?