

STUDY GUIDE FOR BOOK
Fire of Grace: The Healing Power of Forgiveness

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

Chapter One:

1. What were some of the emotions you felt as you read the first chapter of this story of loss? If you had been a victim of such destructive activity, what would be your reaction?
2. Can you think of a time when you or a loved one has been hurt or betrayed? Was there any sense of disbelief or denial at first?
3. Why do you think God created us with a built-in shock-absorbing mechanism that often manifests itself as disbelief or denial? What purpose does this play in helping us deal with a crisis situation?
4. What is the downside of denial? What happens if we get “stuck” in this stage and are unable to face a difficult situation or accept the reality of what someone has done to us or what we have done to them?

Chapter Two:

1. What is the “normal” reaction or emotion we experience when we realize we’ve been hurt or betrayed? Can you describe how you felt when someone injured you or someone you loved?
2. The author suggests that forgiveness is counter-cultural. Do you think that is true or not true?
3. What do we learn from society about anger and revenge? Can you think of some examples?

4. What happens when we are unable to move beyond this stage? What happens when resentment and bitterness begin to define our lives and relationships?

Chapter 3

1. Why do we find it necessary to bargain with God or others? Why do we tend to want to put conditions on our actions in relationship to others? What do we hope to achieve?
2. Can you think of a time when you have found yourself negotiating with God or others?
3. Is it really possible to “forgive and forget”? Is it necessary to forget when forgiving someone? Why is it sometimes important not to forget and yet not dwell on the hurtful action?
4. Why do describe God’s love for humankind as “unconditional”? Can you think of some examples of how Jesus practiced love and forgiveness with “no strings attached”?

Chapter 4

1. Why might you find yourself falling into a state of depression after being hurt or disappointed? Can you think of a time when you experienced this and describe what it was like?
2. Why might one be tempted to blame oneself for being hurt by another?
3. We may think that we may have somehow caused the problem or could have done something to prevent it. Where is both the truth and the danger in this kind of thinking?
4. How do we end up hurting ourselves even further when we turn in on ourselves or get stuck in a state of self pity?

Chapter 5

1. Jesus suggests that as we have been forgiven, we are called to forgive others.
Why is it important to first acknowledge God's forgiveness and unconditional acceptance?
2. Where do we find the strength and power to forgive? What or who is the source of forgiveness?
3. How is forgiveness a sign of our acceptance of another as a "child of God"?
How can we forgive and accept someone without condoning what they have done?
4. Why is forgiving someone like opening the door to the future? How does it enable us to "start over" and move forward with our lives and relationships?

Chapter 6

1. How can facing the truth and reality about one's life and relationships be the beginning of a journey toward healing in both our physical and spiritual lives?
2. What is the first step you must take on this journey toward health and healing?
3. Why is it important to recognize your own need for forgiveness and grace?
4. What are ways you can grow in and nurture a life of faith and grace?

Chapter 7

1. How did the people of Trinity decide to forgive and move forward? What are some examples in this chapter that exhibit this attitude?
2. Why is making a "decision" to forgive a necessary next step in the journey toward health and wholeness in our lives and relationships?
3. What is involved in making such a choice?

4. The catechumenate process invites people to enter into a journey of discovery about God's forgiveness and a new life in Christ. How might you choose to begin such a journey?

Chapter 8

1. What do you think is meant by the phrase "working on forgiveness"? How does one go about the "work" of forgiving another person?
2. How do you think that the people of Trinity worked at being a forgiving people? What are ways that they were an instrument of healing for the arsonist's family and the community?
3. Are you being called to forgive? What might your "work" of forgiveness consist of?
4. What does it mean to affirm one's baptismal calling to love and forgive others?

Chapter 9

1. What does it mean to live in the promise of God's forgiving grace? What is the impact on our relationship with God and with others?
2. How can the journey of healing and forgiveness lead us to discovery and release?
3. How is the community of the baptized called to a ministry of reconciliation? As God's people, what does it mean to be faithful to this calling?
4. The vocation of a Christian is to love and serve God by loving and serving others. How do we carry out this ministry in our daily life and relationships?