

Restoring Hope - Discussion Guide

Understanding the Trauma of Abuse and the Challenge of Healing:

A Discussion Guide for Pastoral Carers and Others Seeking to Understand and More Effectively Support Victims of Domestic and Family Violence



***** THIS GUIDE IS NOT DESIGNED FOR VICTIMS OR SURVIVORS OF ABUSE *****

*Drawing on themes from **Restoring Hope**, the questions below focus on the complexities of trauma, boundaries, community, and recovery. This guide is designed for readers, small groups, and pastoral carers to reflect on the impact of emotional and psychological abuse, and the slow journey of healing. Some reflections may stir difficult emotions or memories. All should engage at their own pace, prioritising safety and self-care.*

1. The Impact of Abusive Relationships

- When Mark arrives at Hope's doorstep, the tension is immediate. How does the novel portray the emotional and psychological toll of abuse?
- What does the story reveal about the long-term fear survivors carry, even when their abuser is no longer present?
- In what ways do Hope's past experiences affect how she navigates trust and healing?

2. The Power of Community Support

- How does the community's response impact Hope's sense of safety, dignity, and value?
- What does the novel suggest about the role of collective care in times of crisis?
- How does the small-town setting influence how trauma is understood or responded to? Is that closeness more of an asset or a challenge?

3. The Cycle of Abuse and Breaking Free

- Mark's behaviour reflects the cycle of abuse. What emotional, relational, or societal factors can make it difficult for someone to stay away from an abusive relationship?
- How does the novel explore self-blame, guilt, or the emotional weight survivors carry after returning to or staying in abusive relationships?

4. Regaining Agency and Empowerment

- What are the small but significant ways Hope begins to reclaim her agency and sense of self?
- How do quiet acts of assertiveness or resistance contribute to her healing?

- Why are these small steps so important in the journey to recovery?
- How does regaining a sense of control over daily choices support Hope's healing?

5. The Complexity of Leaving

- How does the novel portray the trauma bond — the emotional tie victims may still feel to their abuser?
- What does Hope's conversation about Mark's family of origin reveal about the psychological and emotional complexity of leaving abuse?
- What does the story show about the emotional and psychological impact that can remain even after leaving an abusive situation?

6. Healing from Trauma

- How does *Restoring Hope* depict healing as a gradual and multi-layered process?
- What role do characters like Joe, Eve, and Ruby play in supporting Hope's recovery?
- How does the story show that healing is not just physical safety, but also emotional restoration?
- How does the novel affirm that healing looks different for everyone?

7. Forgiveness – For Self and Others

- What does the story suggest about the role of forgiveness in healing? Is it always part of the process?
- Does Hope wrestle with self-forgiveness? Is this a crucial step in growth after abuse?
- Can it be harmful for people to be pressured to forgive others?

8. Strength and Vulnerability

- How does the story redefine strength through Hope and Nova's vulnerability?
- In what ways does being open to others help with resilience?
- How does the novel challenge the idea that vulnerability is weakness?

9. Establishing Healthy Boundaries

- What challenges do Hope and Nova face in setting and maintaining boundaries with abusive partners?
- How does the novel portray the importance of healthy limits in recovery?

- What does it reveal about how we can hold compassion without compromising our own wellbeing?

10. Non-Linear Healing

- How does the novel reflect that healing is often messy, unpredictable, and non-linear?
- How do characters like Joe, Nova, and Rowena support Hope's non-linear healing with patience, presence, and without pressure?

11. Quiet Resistance as Strength

- Hope's calm refusal to re-engage with Mark is a form of resistance. How does the novel affirm that quiet boundaries can be powerful?
- How do small acts of resistance help Hope reclaim her autonomy and self-worth?

12. Reclaiming a Sense of 'Home'

- How does Evan's presence impact Nova's sense of safety in her own home?
- How does the novel explore the idea of home as both a physical space and an emotional refuge?
- What helps Hope begin to feel at home in herself again?

Final Reflection

- What moments in *Restoring Hope* resonated with you most deeply?
- How could this story help shape the way we support others experiencing emotional or spiritual abuse?
- What does it mean to be part of a community that walks with people through trauma with empathy, truth, and care?

If you're using this guide in a group, allow space for silence, vulnerability, and support. Participants should feel free to pass on any question and take care of their own emotional safety. The purpose is not to solve, fix, or theologise suffering — but to listen, reflect, and grow in compassion for those walking a path of recovery.

Appendix - Scripture Reflections on Trauma, Safety & Healing

(For groups seeking a more explicitly biblical framework to consider alongside the Restoring Hope Understanding the Trauma of Abuse discussion guide)

1. God Sees and Hears the Afflicted

Genesis 16:13 – *“You are the God who sees me.”*

Psalms 34:18 – *“The Lord is close to the broken-hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.”*

2 Corinthians 1:3-5 – God is *“the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort”*

Reflection:

- What difference does it make that God sees and hears us, even when others don’t?
- How might our churches reflect the compassionate aspect of God’s character?

2. Jesus cares for the Wounded and Vulnerable

Luke 7:36–50 – The woman who weeps at Jesus’ feet

Isaiah 42:3 – *“A bruised reed he will not break...”*

John 4:1-42 - Jesus speaks with a shamed woman

John 8:1-11 - Jesus protects a woman about to be stoned

Reflection:

- How does Jesus respond to people carrying shame, grief, or trauma?
- What do we learn from His gentleness toward the hurting?

3. Wisdom and Discernment in Leadership

Proverbs 18:13 – *“To answer before listening - that is folly and shame.”*

1 Thessalonians 5:14 – *“Encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone.”*

Reflection:

- What does wise pastoral leadership look like when someone discloses harm?
- How do we avoid both rushing to judgment *and* failing to act?

4. Boundaries and Protection of the Vulnerable

Ezekiel 34:2–6 – God rebukes leaders who failed to protect the flock

1 Corinthians 5:11–13 – *“Do not even eat with such people...”*

Proverbs 4:23 – *“Above all else, guard your heart...”*

Reflection:

- How do these passages challenge us to think about setting boundaries with unsafe people?
- What does spiritual protection look like in real-world church dynamics?

5. Healing and Restoration

Jeremiah 30:17 – *“I will restore your health and heal your wounds, declares the Lord.”*

Isaiah 61:1–3 – The promise of binding up the broken-hearted

John 21:15–19 – Peter’s restoration after failure

Reflection:

- How does God demonstrate justice and mercy in restoring?
- How can we become communities that participate in this restorative work?