

Restoring Hope – Discussion Guide

Reflections on Unplanned Pregnancy and Life Choices



*This guide invites gentle, honest conversations around the emotional, relational, and spiritual complexities of unplanned pregnancy, as seen through Ruby’s journey in **Restoring Hope**. Whether used in a small group, pastoral care setting, or personal reflection, these prompts are designed to support compassionate listening, self-awareness, and healing without judgement or pressure to have all the answers. You are encouraged to move at your own pace and respond to questions that you feel comfortable with.*

1. Acknowledging the Complexities of Unplanned Pregnancy and Choice

- Ruby’s journey in deciding whether to keep her baby highlights the complexity of unplanned pregnancies. How does the novel portray the emotional weight of such a decision?
- What internal and external factors shape Ruby’s choice? How do they reflect the real-life experiences of people facing similar situations?
- How does the novel explore the tension between personal autonomy and the influence of others in moments of major life change?

2. The Role of Support Systems in Decision-Making

- Characters like Hope, Eve, Joe, and Nova offer Ruby different forms of support. How does the novel show the importance of trusted individuals during times of uncertainty?
- Do you think the **quality** of support matters more than the **number** of people involved?
- How do Ruby’s growing self-awareness and confidence emerge through the support of others—without them overtly telling her what to do?
- What kind of supports feel helpful to you when you’re vulnerable? Are there supports that feel unhelpful, even if they are well-meaning?

3. Re-Defining What It Means to Be a Mother or Parent

- Ruby’s experiences remind us that trauma can resurface in unexpected ways. How can someone hold compassion for their younger self when making decisions today?
- Ruby wrestles with whether she’s ready to be a mother. How does the novel challenge traditional ideas of what makes a “good mother”?
- What qualities does the story suggest are most important in a nurturing, capable parent?

- Through Nova’s reflections on her own experience, what internal conflicts are revealed about being unprepared or uncertain in early motherhood?

4. The Impact of Past Trauma on Present Decisions

- Ruby’s memories of a previous pregnancy continue to shape her present. How does the novel explore how past pain may linger?
- In what ways does trauma affect Ruby’s sense of self and her capacity to hope for the future?
- What role does **self-forgiveness** play in healing from past pain and moving forward?

5. The Intersection of Personal and Collective Experience

- Ruby’s journey is shaped not only by her own values but also by cultural, social, and familial expectations. How does the novel explore this tension?
- Are any major life decisions ever truly individual, or do they always affect the people around us?

6. The Power of Small Acts of Support

- In Chapter 22, subtle acts—like Eve’s quiet presence or Nova sharing her story—help Ruby find clarity. How do these small gestures accumulate to provide deep support?
- How does the novel show that decision-making and healing are often slow, layered, and deeply relational?
- How does the novel demonstrate that simply being present, without needing to fix or advise, can be powerful support?

7. The Fear of “Messing Up” and the Weight of Expectations

- Ruby’s fear of repeating past mistakes is deeply present. How does the novel portray the pressure many people feel when facing an uncertain future?
- How do societal expectations—about motherhood, healing, or responsibility—intensify those fears?
- In what ways does Ruby’s story challenge the idea that we must be perfect or have everything “figured out” before making big decisions?

8. The Role of Hope and Trust in Times of Uncertainty

- Ruby’s decision about the baby reflects a shift toward hope and trust. What does this say about her personal growth?

- How does Hope’s quiet, unwavering support model a kind of trust that empowers Ruby’s own sense of direction?
- What does the novel say about the role of trust—in others and in ourselves—when facing the unknown?

9. The Spiritual Dimension of Personal Transformation

- Hope’s quiet faith and Ruby’s evolving self-understanding add a spiritual undercurrent to the story. How does the novel incorporate the idea that **spiritual**, **emotional**, and **practical** support can coexist?
- What role does faith or spirituality play in personal transformation for these characters?

10. The Intersection of Responsibility and Freedom

- Ruby’s decision involves balancing duty with personal freedom. How does the novel explore the tension between those two forces?
- Does Ruby feel liberated by her decision, or weighed down? Can both be true at once?
- How does the novel suggest that sacrifice, while painful, can also lead to growth or renewed identity?

11. Understanding the Messiness of Life’s Decisions

- Ruby’s path isn’t neat or linear. How does the novel challenge the idea that there is a “right” or “easy” choice when facing complex life decisions?
- How do Ruby’s conversations and relationships reflect the idea that healing and clarity often come through a winding, uncertain process?
- What does the novel say about simply taking life one day at a time?

Final Reflections

- What part of Ruby’s story impacted you the most?
- Did the novel challenge or affirm your own beliefs about choice, responsibility, and healing?
- What kind of support do you think people most need when walking through unexpected pregnancies or life-altering decisions?
- Did any part of Ruby’s story help you to feel seen, understood, or less alone?

Appendix: Addressing Theological Questions and Considerations

Purpose:

This appendix is designed to support facilitators, pastors, and group leaders who may encounter theological questions or concerns while using the *Restoring Hope Discussion Guide - Unplanned Pregnancy and Life Choices*. It does not attempt to resolve every theological tension, but offers a framework for engaging faithfully, respectfully, and pastorally, especially in diverse church contexts.

1. The Tension Between Compassion and Conviction

Potential Concern:

“Does the guide take a clear enough moral stance on pregnancy choices?”

Response:

The guide intentionally centres *compassionate presence and relational support* over doctrinal conclusions. It assumes that transformation happens best when people feel emotionally safe, deeply seen, and spiritually supported—not when pressured toward a particular outcome.

That said, church leaders are encouraged to **hold space for both moral conviction and pastoral care**. The guide doesn’t avoid complexity, it invites churches to live within it faithfully. Leaders can:

- Affirm the sacredness of life while recognising the pain and fear surrounding unplanned pregnancy.
- Honour the value of life *and* the necessity of listening well before speaking.
- Resist the urge to fix, advise, or convince too quickly, and instead walk patiently with people in process.

“Mercy triumphs over judgment.” – James 2:13

“Speak the truth in love.” – Ephesians 4:15

2. The Language of “Choice” and Autonomy

Potential Concern:

“Is this guide promoting a pro-choice worldview by using terms like ‘choice’ and ‘autonomy’?”

Response:

The use of the word “choice” reflects the **real, lived experience** of people facing unplanned pregnancies. Many in this situation *feel* the full weight of responsibility for deciding what to do. Naming that reality is not the same as endorsing a particular outcome.

Churches have an opportunity to be **present in the decision-making space**, rather than showing up only after decisions have been made or avoiding the conversation altogether. Trauma-informed ministry recognises that *moral formation is a journey*, not a moment.

Facilitators are welcome to clarify their church's teaching at appropriate times, but always with humility, grace, and deep listening.

3. Sin, Shame, and Past Choices

Potential Concern:

"Does the guide avoid talking about sin or repentance?"

Response:

The guide's focus is pastoral and reflective, not theological or doctrinal. While it avoids using language that may trigger shame or defensiveness, it does not deny the reality of moral struggle or spiritual growth.

In many cases, those who are carrying regret or shame already feel the weight of their choices. A trauma-informed approach invites us to **trust the Holy Spirit's timing** in conviction, and to model **Christ's gentleness** in how we accompany others.

If appropriate in your context, you might gently invite reflection on:

- God's readiness to forgive and restore after repentance (1 John 1:9)
- The freedom of self-forgiveness and release from shame
- How Jesus often led with compassion before calling for change (John 8:1–11)

4. Cultural, Social, and Economic Factors

Potential Concern:

"Does the guide let external pressures excuse personal responsibility?"

Response:

Not at all. The novel and guide simply **acknowledge the broader forces** that shape a person's decisions, such as financial pressure, lack of support, relational trauma, or cultural expectations. This awareness leads not to excusing sin, but to **deepening empathy**.

Scripture often takes these realities into account. Think of:

- Jesus' compassion for the woman at the well, who had lived under social stigma (John 4)
- The early church's care for vulnerable widows and families (Acts 6)

In this spirit, leaders can both call people to responsibility and offer **practical support** that helps make life-giving choices more accessible.

5. The Role of the Church in Stories of Crisis

Potential Concern:

“What is our role when someone shares a story of past abortion, abuse, or trauma during the study?”

Response:

The most important role the Church can play is to **be a safe place**—not just theologically, but emotionally and relationally. If someone opens up about past trauma:

- Thank them for trusting you enough to share honestly.
- Avoid rushing into advice or correction.
- Offer follow-up support or referral to pastoral care or counselling.
- Reinforce their dignity and God’s love.

The Holy Spirit is present and active in these sacred, vulnerable moments. The leader’s role is not to resolve, but to hold space for grace and growth.

Tips for Facilitators: Leading with Sensitivity and Discernment

- **Pray beforehand**, asking for wisdom, compassion, and spiritual insight.
- Let people **opt out of difficult questions** or skip topics without shame.
- If the conversation becomes heated or theological disagreement arises, gently redirect toward shared values: *listening, grace, truth, and love*.
- Consider offering **one-on-one check-ins** for anyone who seems affected or distressed by the conversation.

Closing Word to Leaders

This guide is a tool, not a script or statement of belief. Feel free to adapt it, contextualise it, or supplement it with your own theological input. Your presence, humility, compassion, and ability to listen deeply will make all the difference in conversations.

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