

Grace for the Broken – Discussion Guide

Discerning Relationship Safety

*This general discussion guide is written for book clubs, trauma-informed support organisations, church groups, and individuals. The questions invite thoughtful conversation around how the story of **Grace for the Broken** allows readers to better discern unsafe relationships and identify behaviours in relationships that point to trustworthiness and healthy respect.*



1. Subtle Warning Signs

In the story, Hope labels these relationship concerns:

- “Subtle undermining”
- “Framing criticism as concern”
- “Positioning himself as rational”

Discussion Questions:

- Which of these behaviours would be hardest to recognise early in a relationship?
- Why do behaviours like this feel convincing or confusing rather than harmful?
- How did Ruby feel after experiencing these encounters?
- How do behaviours like this differ from healthy disagreements in relationships?
- Should we be wary of partners who begin to criticise our friends and family?
- What is significant about the fact that Ethan does not apologise when he is challenged about speaking disrespectfully?

2. Signs of Healthy Relationship

Which characters in the story modelled these safe relationship behaviours?

- Owning mistakes without defensiveness
- Not rushing trust
- Encouraging others growth
- Showing consistency over time

Discussion Questions:

- Which characters demonstrated relationship safety throughout the whole story?
- How did Joe demonstrate that he was a safer person to be in relationship with midway through the novel?
- Why do we sometimes attribute safety to people who do not deserve to be trusted?

3. When Good People Miss Harm

The book demonstrates that anyone can be at risk of being deceived by someone who is charming.

Discussion Questions:

- Why does Joe initially defend Ethan?
- What emotional investments might cloud someone's judgment when harm is happening, and they can't see or hear it?
- How should we respond when someone raises a relationship concern we don't yet see?

4. Discernment vs Fear

Discussion Questions:

- Hope has experienced coercive control previously in her life. Why is her discernment not recognised or respected?
- Eve affirms that survivors often recognise subtle harm earlier. Why is this an important truth to hear?
- How can dismissing these insights cause further harm to survivors?
- What fears can people carry that stop them wanting to see harm?
- How is fear in relationships different to discernment?
- Are there situations when past trauma can distort awareness rather than sharpen it?
- Ruby reacts out of a desire to protect Sam. Why does this still lead to harm?
- How can fear-based decisions sometimes override wisdom?

[Wisdom insight: Fear can sometimes protect. But discernment needs careful reflection]

5. Boundaries

Ruby: *"I don't want a relationship where I have to become less..."*

Discussion Questions:

- Why are boundaries often seen as rejection?
- What makes a boundary healthy rather than defensive?
- What changed in the story for Ruby when she established this boundary?
- Why do some people in unsafe relationships avoid putting boundaries in place when they first experience disrespect?
- Is it ever too late to start establishing healthy boundaries in a relationship?

6. Forgiveness vs Trust vs Reconciliation

Definitions:

- **Forgiveness** → releases personal bitterness (can be an individual decision)
- **Relationship Trust** → rebuilds slowly after harm
- **Reconciliation** → needs to be mutual, only after genuine repentance and changed behaviour

Discussion Questions:

- Can you forgive someone without restoring the relationship?
- What did Jesse need before trusting Ruby again?
- Why is 'quick forgiveness' potentially harmful?
- In faith environments, why does forgiveness sometimes get mentioned before safety? How can this attitude change?

7. Impact of Unsafe Relationships on Others

Discussion Questions:

- How is Ruby as an adult still being impacted by her relationship with her mother?
- How do unsafe adult relationships affect children like Sam and Lily?
- Lily never describes violence directly. What does her "princess/prince" story reveal indirectly?

- Why is it important to pay attention to what children say about safety, even in play?
- What are some ways we can intentionally guard others from unsafe relationships?

8. The Power of Narrative Control

We need to be aware of the dangers presented by positional power or community collusion when unsafe people can use these avenues for harm.

Discussion Questions:

- Ethan says, “*People see what they expect to see.*” How does he use this to his advantage?
- Why are people more likely to believe a charming, powerful, or wealthy person over someone who is unimportant, has a fault or a challenging past?
- Do we naturally look for reasons to distrust those who have different ideas to us?
- How can coercive or charming people use this to their own advantage? (For example, by demonstrating they are on your side or can be useful to you.)
- How does gossip function as a tool of harm in the town?
- What responsibility do bystanders carry when they repeat unverified claims?

9. Safe and Healthy Leadership

Faith communities are sometimes viewed as unsafe places due to past harm that has occurred in churches.

Discussion Questions:

- What specific practices make Tom and Eve *safe* leaders?
- Why is it important that they:
 - Name power imbalances?
 - Set clear boundaries when talking to Hope and Joe?
- How might a lack of these practices lead to harm?
- What do safe leaders do with power in contrast to those who are unsafe?
- Have you ever mistaken charm for safety in leadership? What is helpful in discerning the difference?

10. Grace and Justice

God's grace and justice are important themes explored in this story.

Discussion Questions:

- Why are these themes so significant to Jesse due to his past?
 - How does Tom model and explain God's grace to Jesse?
 - Can grace apply without repentance?
 - How do Ruby's interactions with Jesse near the end of the novel help him better understand grace and justice?
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Safe relationship behaviours modelled by Jesse, Eve, Hope, and Tom in the story ...

- *Tell the truth even at cost*
 - *Encourage growth in others*
 - *Respect autonomy of others*
 - *Take responsibility for own behaviour*
 - *Honesty and openness*
 - *Consistency*
 - *Seek wisdom*
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Closing Reflections

- What is one red flag you will pay more attention to now in relationships?
- What is one sign of relationship safety you value more clearly?
- How can you better support others now in relationship safety?