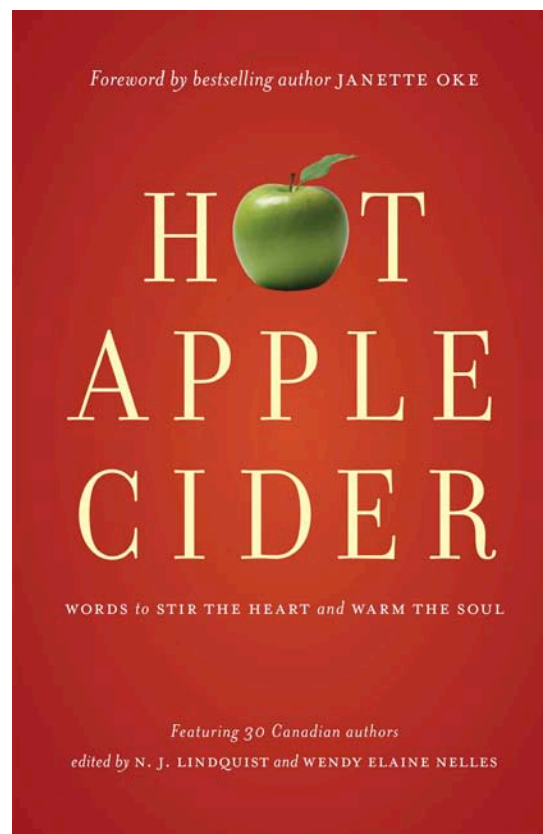


# *Hot Apple Cider*

## Study Guide



Reviews, author interviews and more at  
[hotapplecider.ca](http://hotapplecider.ca)



**“It Was Then That I Carried You” by Angelina Fast-Vlaar, p. 15**

1. Can you share about a time in your life when you felt God sent someone to help you in a time of need?
2. Have you suffered the loss of a close loved one? What did you find most difficult about this experience?
3. What helped you to move toward healing?
4. What circumstances strengthened your faith in a loving God?
5. The “angels” in this story seemed to say just the right thing. What do you think might be good to say to people in their time of need or loss? What might be not so good to say?
6. Someone has said, “When God breaks your heart, He props open the door so that you will be more sensitive to someone else’s pain.” In what way has your “broken heart” enabled you to help others?

**“Faith of Our Mothers” by Keith Clemons, p. 25**

1. Some Christians say they believe in miracles but never experience any. Why do you think this is?
2. When people pray and don’t get exactly what they ask for, why do they tend to assume God isn’t listening?
3. Discuss why you think humans tend to often ascribe the miraculous to coincidence.
4. Can you cite specific miracles that have occurred in your life?



**“The Diamond Ring” by N. J. Lindquist, p. 35**

1. Have you ever felt like you were an ugly duckling? What happened to help you see yourself as a swan? Or do you still wonder which you are?
2. Can you think of someone—maybe someone unexpected—who impacted your life for the better?
3. Have you ever wished you had a manual to help you understand someone else who seems to be very different from you? How did you cope?
4. Do you think that conformity helps or hinders society? Why? Can there be too much conformity?

**“An Almost Silent Friendship” by Marcia Lee Laycock, p. 41**

1. Share a friendship that was similar to the one described in this story.
2. Has God ever brought you a “divine appointment?” Describe what happened.
3. Share an experience that made you realize how valuable friendships are.
4. How can you be a better friend to those you meet?



**“Blind Date” by Paul Boge, p. 44**

1. How would you describe your search for a spouse (either in the past or present)?
2. What does the Bible say about how to find a spouse?
3. What encouragement could you give someone who is looking for a spouse?
4. What role do you think free will and predestination play in finding a spouse?
5. When do you think is the point at which a single person needs to accept that singleness might be God’s will for him/her?
6. What does the Bible say is the basis for a marriage relationship?

**“Romance Amid Reality” by Sheila Wray Gregoire, p. 54**

1. Do you agree with the author’s premise that one of the biggest barriers to romance is a “tendency to build walls of suspicion between us because basically we’re all insecure”? Why or why not?
2. Have you ever been in an argument with someone because he or she assumed you were angry, when you really weren’t? What happened?
3. If insecurity really is a big problem, then how can we help alleviate it? How can we help those closest to us, especially our spouses?

**“A Prairie Storm” by Carolyn Arends, p. 56**

Suggested supplemental reading: Jeremiah 29

1. What is your earliest memory of prayer?
2. Can you think of an instance in which prayer (or the answer to it) changed a situation?
3. Can you think of an instance in which prayer (or the answer to it) changed you?
4. Do you have an opportunity to pray with others? If not, how could you seek one out?

**“The Neatness Wars” by Eric E. Wright, p. 61**

1. Besides differing views of neatness and clutter, what other differences can create stress in a marriage?
2. Why is the teaching of Christ concerning judgment and criticism so foundational in the development of good relationships? (See Matthew 7:1-5.)
3. In a marriage, or in any relationship, why is it important to identify differences? Or do you think they should they be hidden?
4. In Romans chapters 13 through 15, Paul goes into considerable detail about the importance of understanding one another, accepting one another and loving one another. According to Romans 15:7, how might a continuing awareness of the cross of Christ encourage our acceptance of differences, or even weaknesses, in others?
5. What is the role of humour in relieving stress in relationships?



**“What Your Sock Drawer Says About You” by Sheila Wray Gregoire, p. 64**

1. Has anyone ever judged you by your clothes, the state of your home, or your ability to keep a clean house? If so, how did that make you feel?
2. Have you ever caught yourself judging others by their clothes, the state of their homes, or their ability to keep a clean house? Suggest ways we can learn to counteract this tendency.
3. Do you think we as Christians get too caught up in looking like we have it all together?
4. What do you think God’s priorities for our homes are?

**“Faith, Hope and Love: Give Them a Chance to Improve Your Health” by Denyse O’Leary, p. 66**

1. When you are sick, do you think that God wants you to get well? Does that make a difference to how soon you get better? If so, how? If not, why not?
2. Suppose you believed that God is punishing you by making you sick. What effect would that have on your health? Why?
3. Research shows that religious people live longer. What do you think are the key causes? (Lifestyle? Prayer? Living in a community? Relationship with God? Something else?)

**“Nitroglycerin” by Brian Austin, p. 75**

1. Is it okay to laugh in the face of difficulties, or does that show shallowness or lack of sensitivity?
2. How can you share personal stories of adversity, especially stories you might be living in right now?
3. It’s easy to laugh looking back if you are sent home with a clean bill of health? What if you aren’t?
4. How do we determine where humour is appropriate and where it is out of line?

**“Our Kids: Enemies, Allies or What?” by Ron Wyse, p. 76**

1. If you are a parent, think about one situation of conflict with your child. Or, if you’re not a parent, remember a conflict situation you had with your own parents or caregivers. Describe it (a) first as you experienced it, and (b) then as an onlooker might see it.
2. Now consider what spiritual aspects may be present in this conflict. Using James 3:13 and 4:16-17, describe what godly and ungodly things may be present.
3. Ron points out that parents and kids often don’t realize that they are co-combatants in our struggles against spiritual forces. Remembering that conflict situation, how do you think the outcome would have changed if one of you had asked, “How do you think God can help us in this conflict?”
4. Recalling that the root of conflict is how we deal with our desires (James 4:1), describe what each of you was hoping for in that conflict situation. Now discuss how both parties might relate these (usually normal and legitimate) desires to trusting God, and obeying Him. Only if it seems appropriate, try praying together concerning this.





**“Perspective” by Mark Buchanan, p. 86**

1. Mark says, “I look back on all the ‘best’ friends I have had in my life, and most now are only a rubble of fading memories.” Have you had a similar experience? Why do you think this happens?
2. Mark urges us to “practice seeing others as new creations.” What are some practical steps we can take to do that in our families? In our churches?
3. Mark brings up the disagreement between Euodia and Syntyche from Philippians 4:2-3. Can you think of a situation in your church or community where conflict between two Christians was handled well, and love was shown even in disagreement?

**“What Was God Thinking?” by Brad Burke, p. 93**

1. Have you ever asked during a difficult time in your life, “God, what were you thinking?” or “God, did you forget about me?” Did God seem to respond to your question? How?
2. Have you experienced the loss of someone close to you? How did you deal with your emotions? Do you think that we should limit our anger towards our Heavenly Father?
3. In times of sickness, what kind of patient would your doctor say you are? How do your actions reflect your beliefs about God?
4. Describe the times in your life when you've felt a comforting “hug” from God. What form did it take? How did it affect you?

**“Hurtled into the Valley” by Angelina Fast-Vlaar, p. 103**

1. What was it like for you, or a loved one, to receive a diagnosis of cancer or another serious illness?
2. What helped you most to deal with the shock of the diagnosis?
3. In what ways did you feel God’s presence with you throughout your journey?
4. How did others support you?
5. What thought would you like to pass on to someone who has been diagnosed with cancer or some other serious disease?

**“People Matter Most” by Grace Fox, p. 105**

1. What does our society value most?
2. How are our relationships with people affected if we place too much focus on material things?
3. I’ve been in homes where the owners apparently preferred clean carpets and fine furniture over the comfort of their guests. If you’ve experienced the same, how did it make you feel? How can we ensure we don’t fall into the same mentality?
4. How can we teach our children that people are more important than money or belongings?
5. What are some practical ways to show our family members that they matter to us? How about our neighbours? An elderly person in a seniors’ care facility? A single mother?



### **“Broken Bodies, Shattered Lives” by Paul Beckingham, p. 107**

1. While most of us don't experience the kind of life-shattering accident that changed Paul's life, many Christians do have moments in their lives when they feel that they are failures and God has abandoned them. Have you ever felt that way?
2. Read Romans 5:3-6. If you should ever encounter a situation where you feel powerless, do you think you would be able to rejoice in the difficulty? How could other Christians help you?
3. Paul offers seven ways we can learn fresh faith perspectives during loss or sudden change (p. 109). Which of these have things have worked for you? Can you think of additional ways?

### **“Be the CEO of Your Emotions” by Donna Carter, p. 111**

1. What types of situations really push your buttons?
2. Have you ever wondered why you overreact to certain circumstances? How do you explain this to yourself?
3. Can you detect a link between your strong emotional reactions and your emotional biases? Describe it.
4. How can you reduce the intensity of your emotional reaction when your buttons are pushed? Give an example of what that might look like for you.
5. What do you think of King David's “unholy prayer?” (Refer to p. 118 or Psalm 109.) Can you imagine talking to God like that? Why, or why not?
6. What happens if we tell God the truth about how we feel?
7. How would your life improve if you learned to manage your emotions better?

### **“Living Outside Our Comfort Zones” by Eleanor Shepherd, p. 120**

1. In the second paragraph Eleanor says, “How I wished I could take my children and hold them close to me and keep them safe from all harm!” What are the things in your life that you want to hold closest to you? Why?
2. What is a comfort zone for you? Eleanor includes in her description of comfort zones the idea that they are non-threatening places, where she feels adequate and at ease psychologically and emotionally. What are other ways you would explain a comfort zone?
3. Eleanor's story recounts several incidents where she was confronted with significant new challenges and felt pushed out of her comfort zone. Tell of some times when you have been pushed out of your comfort zone. How did it feel?
4. Have these been occasions when you have grown in your faith? Why or why not? What have you learned about yourself and about God through your experiences?
5. When her husband became diabetic, the writer asked God, “Why?” Have there been occasions when you have asked God “Why?” about some difficult situation? What has been the response you have had to your questions? What evidence do you have that God knows and cares about you?





**“Dylan” by Brian Austin, p. 129**

1. Does a Christian’s faith cushion him or her from the raw agony of grief? Should it?
2. How much of someone else’s grief do you think we can you comprehend?
3. Romans 8:28 is often quoted in the aftermath of tragedy. Can a Scripture be true, but still be more hurtful than helpful in the early days of grief?
4. When is it appropriate to draw a grieving person’s attention to promises that God will bring good out of their loss?
5. The loss of an infant or a child feels wrong, unnatural. It brings a very different grief from the loss of a senior. If you have experienced one but not the other, is there any way to bridge the gap of understanding and empathy? How can you reach out and bring comfort? How can you reconcile your faith in a good God?

**“How Big is Your Umbrella?” by Sheila Wray Gregoire, p. 131**

1. God says in 1 Corinthians 10:13 that when we go through something hard He’ll always provide a way of escape. What does that look like to you? How do we find it?
2. Sheila says in this selection that part of the problem with going through hard times is that we assume it’s all about us, that God must be trying to teach us something. Do you agree with her that sometimes He may ask us to go through something for a completely different reason? Does that seem fair?
3. Have you ever tried to bargain with God when you’re walking through something difficult? What has been the result?

**“Jesus’ Disciple Wears a Stethoscope” by Harold Fuller, p. 136**

1. After reading the story of Dr. Aletta Bell in India, some readers have exclaimed, “Unbelievable!” They hadn’t realized that such conditions still exist. What in particular surprised you? (E.g., Male attitudes? Women’s status? Health conditions?)
2. What effects of non-Christian religion did you notice, versus the spiritual peace found in Jesus Christ?
3. Critics often say the gospel destroys other cultures. How did the gospel free local culture from its own destructive tendencies?



4. In what ways did Dr. Bell disprove a stereotype that missionaries are only concerned with proselytizing and winning converts for their own religion, while neglecting human need? How did Aletta make one the outgrowth of the other?

5. What personal spiritual experience brought peace to Dr. Bell’s mind, in the stress of frustration over unmet ambitions?

6. The story about Dr. Bell’s life and mission work is different than most chapters in *Hot Apple Cider*. Yet in what ways is it also inspirational or devotional?



**“Shards of Silence/Seasons of Hope” by Dorene Meyer, p. 147**

1. When someone who should protect you hurts you instead, then the ability to trust is damaged. This also affects a person’s ability to trust God. Many of us have been hurt in the past in different ways by people in a position of trust. Discuss various ways we can hurt, and be hurt. Share one of your own experiences, if you feel able. Are you able to trust God, our Heavenly Father, the One who asks us to call him “Abba,” the Hebrew word for “Daddy?”
2. Dorene alludes to the fact that when some (negative) emotions are tightly suppressed, then other (positive) emotions are also not allowed to fully develop. Are some emotions more acceptable to society or to the church than others? What are these, and why do you think they are more accepted?
3. Is there an event in your past that you have been afraid to bring into the light? Sharing your story with someone is the first step in the healing process. And it is often the hardest because of denial. Denial is something that God has put in place to protect us, especially to protect us when we are small children. But it is not meant to be a permanent thing in our lives. If you are comfortable, can you talk about this experience with the group today? Or, if you would prefer, commit to sharing it with a trusted friend later.
4. This is not an easy topic to face, but these are the facts: In Canada, one out of every three girls—and one out of every five boys—will experience some form of sexual assault before the age of 18. Child sexual abuse often happens in homes where there is already some type of family dysfunction. If a child is unable to talk about the abuse, then this makes it much worse. Someone who has a solid home life with loving (though not perfect) parents can much more easily recover from abuse. This is particularly true if the abuser is not a primary caregiver/parent (if, for example, the abuser is a hockey coach).
5. Discuss what comfort/counsel a child might receive from family, church and community after a traumatic event like a death in the family, as compared to what comfort/counsel he or she might receive after an incident of sexual abuse. Does it make a difference if the abuser was a close family member or a church/community leader? What can we do to help a child who has experienced abuse?
6. Often a great deal of shame and unworthiness is associated with sexual abuse. But the shame is most often wrongly borne by the abused rather than the abuser! The law is clear: Sexual interference, invitation to sexual touching, sexual exploitation, incest and exposure to a child under the age of 14 is a criminal act. If a child “consents” to a sexual invitation by someone who is an older teen or adult, what kind of guilt, legally or morally, should the child own? What are some ways can we assure the child that we accept her and love her unconditionally? How can we reassure a child that we don’t blame him for what happened?

**“Crisis and Character” by Paul Beckingham, p. 152**

1. People often ask how anyone can believe in a loving God when there is so much pain and suffering in the world. However, after quoting Romans 5:3-5, Paul says, “God gives us hope through suffering, renewing our sense of a future through crisis and pain” (p. 153). How can we get our heads around this difficult truth?
2. Rabbi Harold Kushner says that there are three sorts of people in the world (see bottom of p. 153). Which type of person do you think you are? Have you changed as you’ve grown older?
3. How has your character been molded though crises that you have faced?



**“Searching for Something that Fits” by Marcia Lee Laycock, p. 155**

1. How has your life been a search in the same way that Marcia described her own journey?
2. How has God satisfied your longing to belong?
3. Describe the moment when you realized that God really does love you.
4. What has it meant to you to know that God’s love is unconditional?

**“Friday, 8:50 a.m., April 7, AD 30” by David Kitz, p. 157**

1. Pilate washed his hands and walked off into his palace. In what ways today do we wash our hands and walk off when we consider Christ's death?
2. Along with the stained purple robe and the patibulum (the horizontal beam of the cross), Jesus carried “...the weight of the world.” (See bottom of p. 159.) In what respect is this true? Read Isaiah 53:6. Do we personally bear any responsibility for Christ’s death? How?
3. Take a moment to reflect on how the author portrayed Barabbas in this biblical fiction. (See p. 158.) Then consider this statement at top of p.162, “The response that a pardon can bring is well beyond understanding.” What do you think this means?
4. Jesus’ disciples were absent from the procession that led him to Golgotha. In what situations are his disciples still absent today?
5. Marcus the centurion asked himself, “Justice? What justice was this?” (See bottom of p. 157.) Can you think of an instance where you, or someone else, were treated unjustly? What can we do in such situations? What does God want us to do?

**“A Fertile Heart” by Keturah Leonforde, p. 166**

1. Think about a time when you faced a crisis situation (your own or someone else’s) in which the outcome was totally unpredictable and outside of your control. How did you respond to the crisis?
2. What role did your faith, or lack of faith, play in handling the situation?
3. Looking back, what qualities or resources did you discover or tap into to help you deal with the crisis?
4. What unanticipated blessings emerged as a result of this crisis?
5. Identify three important life lessons that you have learned that you will carry forward as a result of having gone through this crisis.
6. Consider what you would say in a thank you note to the people who supported you through dealing with the crisis situation.

**“The Joys and Surprises of Giving” by Diane Roblin-Lee, p. 171**

1. When you are blessed by God, does the blessing now belong to you?
2. How do you know when or what to give to fill a need for another person?
3. Should God's blessings or answers to our prayers to be free of effort on our part?



4. It is okay for Christians to want to look attractive?
5. Share the greatest blessing God has given to you in terms of how the gift has blessed others as well as you.

### **“Where Have All the Mothers Gone?” by Thomas Froese and Jean Chamberlain Froese, p. 181**

1. Thom and Jean tell us that the equivalent of “three jumbo jets filled with pregnant women quietly crash to earth, every day—or 525,000 mothers every year” (p. 187). Were you surprised to read this statistic? Why do think there is so little media coverage of this major story?
2. The issue isn’t simply medical. It’s actually cultural. What role does education play?
3. Can you think of other unfair situations women face simply because of their gender?
4. As Christians, what can we do to make the world a safer place and show God’s love?
5. Thom and Jean could have had successful careers in Canada, but God placed the plight of these women on their hearts. Is there something you feel God has called you to do in order to make a difference?

### **“Mama Nellie” by Paul Beckingham, p. 192**

1. Paul’s story about Mama Nellie reveals the global truth that people tend to assume other people aren’t quite the same as us. (It has been used to justify slavery and other forms of oppression.) How can we as Christians counteract this form of racism?
2. Do you feel this assumption has impacted the church? What can we do to focus on what unites us instead of on what divides us?
3. Paul says, “A strange new angle of vision opened up for Mama Nellie” (p. 194). Can you share a time when you suddenly saw another person or situation in a different light?



### **“Will my Baby Die Without Me?” by Grace Fox, p. 195**

1. Life is unpredictable. Describe a situation in which your circumstances changed in a split second. How did you feel in that moment?
2. Where do you find personal strength when faced with difficult circumstances?
3. God often encourages me through song lyrics. He might use a meaningful quote, a scene from nature, or a poem to bolster other people. How does He encourage you? Describe a situation in which He touched your heart in a special way through a particular means.
4. Intense human experiences often result in our learning more about God and who He is. If you’ve found this to be true, describe your experience. What did you learn about God’s character? And how has it made a difference in your life today?



**“Jessie's Generation: Canada's Firebrands of Mercy and Justice” by Jane Harris-Zsovan, p. 204**

1. What would you have done, if you had found the woman dying in the shack? Would your actions differ from Jessie? How? Why?
2. Do we truly believe that we “can do all things through Christ?” Why? Why Not?
3. If you thought you could impact the world, where would you start? Working one-on-one with an individual? Or working through a large group? Which is more effective?
4. Do you think the poor in Canada deserve our help? Or are many of them poor because of bad decisions? As Christians, should that factor into our decision to help them or not?

**“How I Found Jesus in a Drug Dealer's Apartment” Deborah Gyapong, p. 210**

1. What does this story tell you about God's salvation plan, even for prodigals?
2. Is it safe to dabble a little in the occult or drugs? How might they open you to demonic oppression?
3. What role do you think supernatural evil plays in the life of a Christian? How does this story change your perspective on it?
4. Many of us do what Debra admits she did: “Despite a personal relationship with Jesus, I reserved the right to pick the parts of the Bible that ‘spoke to me,’ and to ignore the rest.” (See p. 215.) How does this practice impact a person’s life? Does Debra’s story change your perspective on the importance of having a true Christian faith as handed down by the Apostles' eyewitness accounts of Jesus Christ? How do we develop such a faith?

**“Of Cobras, Culture and Change” by Ray Wiseman and Don Ranney, p. 220**

1. Both missionaries, newly arrived on their fields, seem to question their call to serve God. Do you believe our churches and colleges prepare missionaries for the cultural challenges they face? (Refer to Acts 17:16-34, where Paul meets a cultural challenge.)
2. The story depicts missionary work in the 1970s. Do you believe the demands on missionaries have changed since then? How?
3. The missionary appointees to both India and South Africa disclose tension between themselves and field leadership. Why do you think we experience inter-personal tensions in churches and Christian organizations? What can we do about it? (Read of missionary tension in Acts 15:36 and about unity in Ephesians 4:1-16.)
4. Should workers in Christian organizations publicly reveal problems? Or should they remain quiet in order to protect from criticism the Christian church generally, or the organization specifically? What are the potential repercussions of deciding to remain quiet? Of deciding to go public? (Read Ephesians 4:17-32.)





**“The Pink Blossom” by Eric E. Wright, p. 230**



1. What fundamental difference of choice distinguished the lives of Terrance and Susan?
2. What results followed Terrance’s choice? Susan’s?
3. In what senses did Terrance have a “tarnished soul” and a tarnished life?
4. In the light of eternity, who would you say made the better choice? Why? (For the reader to consider personally: As I look at my own life, what choices have I made that reflect Terrance or Susan?)
5. What do you think Terrance should do at this point in his life?

**“The Ventilation Grate” by Brian Austin, p. 233**

1. Are homeless people victims of circumstances and bad luck, or do they just lack initiative and live the life they have earned?
2. Does giving to a homeless person just perpetuate the cycle of dependence?
3. Does the potential of abuse (e.g., money given for food spent instead on alcohol), make it morally wrong to give money to people who may not use it wisely?
4. Are Scripture verses such as “He who gives to the poor lends to the Lord” relevant in our day with government agencies and tax supported relief programs? What is an appropriate level of giving? How can you minimize the potential for abuse?
5. Are we really giving to Jesus when we stop and talk to that man on the street—the same one we stopped and talked with last week, and the week before? If we are seeing no change, no progress, are we wasting our time and the resources God has entrusted to us?

**“One True Friend” by Donna Dawson/Fawcett, p. 235**

1. Some readers have reported that they cried after reading this fictional story. Why do you think people were moved? What do you think we can learn from fiction?
2. Could you tell about a time when you've interacted with someone living on the streets? What were your feelings before you approached him or her? What did you feel like after the exchange?
3. What ways do you think you could have helped that person?
4. Can you think of some other practical ideas that could help the plight of the homeless in your own community?

**“Padre, Can I Have a Word?” by Paul Beckingham, p. 245**

1. While you may never have been in the military, have you ever been in a situation where a leader or group refused to listen to your concerns? How did you handle it? In hindsight, do you wish you had done something differently?
2. How important is forgiveness in our day-to-day lives, whether from God, others, or ourselves?



**“Shared Tears” by Brian Austin, p. 248**

1. When people are grieving, most of us feel an almost desperate hunger to give answers, to fix their hurt. Is it really more helpful to cry with them rather than quote Scripture, or is that a cop-out?
2. Most of us will agree that Scripture is truth. Can it ever be wrong to quote truth? Can you elaborate?
3. Men grow up with the message, “Big boys don’t cry.” Some women have bought into that message too. Shedding tears can bring intense embarrassment to men. What do you think is the appropriate way to share the pain of someone else and offer comfort, when the other parties don’t know how to let themselves cry?
4. If you are on the receiving end, how should you accept comfort from someone who doesn’t know how to let himself or herself cry?
5. Our society sanitizes death and loss, painting a veneer of respectability over it. Yet the pain can be intense and raw beneath that veneer. Whether it is our own grief or sharing with a wounded friend, when do you think it is appropriate to move beyond the veneer? Is there a meeting place where the rich promises of Scripture and the almost bottomless hurt can be acknowledged and expressed?

**“On Writing with Passion and Integrity” by Dorene Meyer, p. 251**

1. Dorene writes about the “silenced voices” of many of the Aboriginal children who were abused in residential schools. On June 11, 2008, the government of Canada apologized to the Aboriginal people of Canada for its responsibility in the Indian Residential school system. Do you think this apology will help Aboriginal Canadians to feel their voices have been heard? What is your response?
2. “Listening, without making assumptions,” is a very difficult thing to do. It is perhaps made more difficult when wounded people feel that no one is interested in what they have to say. How can we make ourselves available to people who are hurting? Suggest some things we might do to overcome our assumptions and be more open to hearing their stories? Did reading this poem open any new avenues of thought that you would like to share with the group?
3. Dorene writes about what she feels passionate about. What things do you feel most passionate about? How do those passions motivate what you do each day?
4. “Integrity—being true to yourself and what you believe.” Would you say this is an accurate definition of integrity? Are there times when you have been tempted to “throw in the towel” as the author did?
5. “Is it enough to have His approval and His alone?” Many people faithfully serve without wanting or needing a pat on the back or a thank you. Are you feeling alone in your service for God/others? What keeps you going every day? Talk about ways that we might be able to support each other more and work together as a community.

**“My Letter to the Editor” by N. J. Lindquist, p. 256**

1. Can you think of a time in your life when you went ahead and did something simply because you felt you had to do it. What happened?
2. What surprises you the most about this story? That a 12-year-old would write something like this? That N. J. found the clipping in her mother’s purse? That her mother never spoke about it to her? Do you think God often uses unexpected people to shape our lives?



3. Do you have a hard time sharing your faith? Many people do. Brainstorm about some ways or situations where you might be able to talk about your faith in a natural, relaxed manner.

**“The Child on the Tracks” by Carmen Wittmeier, p. 260**

1. Why might someone hesitate to participate in/contribute to humanitarian projects? Why might someone choose to become involved?
2. Discuss your reaction to Bob and his Bugatti. Is it fair to draw a parallel between Bob and the average North American?
3. Would Bob’s actions have been justified if he had parked 10 Bugattis on the track? What about 100? Would it make a difference if that child were his next-door neighbour instead of someone he did not know? Does Western culture place higher value on a child in North America than a child in a developing country?
4. Carmen observes that rather than saving the child on the tracks (Gabriella), the child saved her. How has child sponsorship, or other forms of giving, saved or transformed you?

**“The Stuckville Café” by Bonnie Grove, p. 266**

1. Carol has a habit of thinking “for a second” before she answers questions about herself. Why does she do this?
2. In the story, people seem to take extravagant liberties with each other’s company. They stand close, ask personal questions, and keep coming back for more. Why are they able to do this and yet not offend or upset anyone else in the story?
3. The story takes place entirely inside a small café—people come and go, but Carol always stays, she’s always available. Do you have a Stuckville Café in your life? Where is it? What happens there?
4. Carol talks about “violent compassion” and “strange grace.” What do these two phrases mean?
5. Debi tells Carol God is already using her. How is God using you today in your current situation?

**“The Clay and the Vine” by Brian Austin, p. 277**

1. Surrender is implicit in the words of this brief poem. It is not a concept that fits well with independence and self-sufficiency. It doesn’t sound nearly as strong and assertive as “commitment.” What place should “surrender” have in a Christian’s life? If you are comfortable to share, how close does your life come to that?
2. Taking a stand and not backing down often stirs our admiration for the hero in a book or a movie. But are there areas in your life where you have taken a stand, but fallen? Has it happened more than once? Are there habits you are determined you are going to beat, but still find yourself pulled by them?



3. “Living the life He planned” sounds like surrendering your identity and your will. If you have experienced times of surrender to God, were you less yourself? Can you describe the good or the bad of those times? Was there something in those times you wish you could preserve—or wish you could forget?