



Discussion & Study Guide

INTRODUCTION

The documentary *The Final Gift* addresses profound issues about the impact of crime, justice, forgiveness. This discussion guide will help you reflect on your own or within a group. The guide can be used in conjunction with your curriculum or as a stand-alone. It can be used in its entirety or in small sections. As an additional resource, a one page restorative justice overview is also available from the film's website.

USES

- ~ Victim groups
- ~ Faith-based Organizations
- ~ Adult Prison Populations
- ~ Youth Prison Populations
- ~ Educational/Academic Settings
- ~ Small groups

SOME GROUND RULES

Topics in the film can be controversial, and that's okay, but it is key to show respect to opinions that differ from our own. This is where true growth comes from – a willingness to truly “see” others, even if we don't agree.

GOALS

- ~ To encourage reflection and dialogue
- ~ To deepen the understanding of “other”
- ~ To create a sense of empathy and compassion for those impacted by crime
- ~ To lead individuals and groups to action plans in the community
- ~ To educate about restorative justice and its possibilities in our current system

POSSIBLE JOURNALING PROMPTS AND DISCUSSION TOPICS

1. How do you define victim, and where do you think that definition comes from?
2. How do you define offender, and where do you think that definition comes from?
3. Do you believe there are victimless crimes, or is there a human side to all crime?



4. What emotional responses might one expect from someone who has experienced victimization? Would you imagine those responses might be different according to the severity of the crime? If so, how?
5. How can communities become involved when a crime is committed against a member?
6. We have all suffered various degrees of victimization in our lives. Write about a time in your life when you were the victim. Some questions you might consider:
 - How did you make sense of what happened to you?
 - What ways did you find to heal or grow through that experience?
 - How did the experience of victimization change you, your perspective on others, and influence your relationships?
7. We have all been offenders at some point. Although this could be a criminal offense, it certainly doesn't have to be. Think in terms of harming another person, breaking a rule, etc. Write about a time in which *you* were the offender. Some questions you might consider:
 - Did you ever understand the impact of your offense, and what helped you come to this understanding?
 - How were you held responsible for your actions, and do you feel like the "punishment fit the crime?"
8. Write about a time when you felt powerless or at the "mercy" of someone or something else?
9. What is your definition of FORGIVENESS?
10. Write about a time you forgave? Some questions you might consider:
 - Was forgiveness a challenge or did it seem to "come easy?"
 - What, if anything or anyone, influenced your decision to forgive i.e. your faith, religion, spiritual walk, your intellect, your offender's remorse, etc.?



AFTER THE MOVIE

DISCUSSION

Forgiveness is an important and difficult topic. It is a controversial one among people who work with crime victims and among crime victims themselves because forgiveness is too often presented to victims as something they **must do**. This “one size fits all” approach tends to alienate many victims of crime who simply do not see forgiveness as part of their path. In addition, “one size fits all” allows no room for “interpreting” what forgiveness means from one person to another.

1. What major issues do you think the film raises?
2. What character did you most relate to in the film and for what reason?
3. Was Karl’s sentence “fair” in your opinion? Why/Why not?
4. In your opinion, are there factors that may have influenced Karl’s decision to carry a gun or to respond in the way he did?
5. Therese does not ask Karl specific questions about the crime. Why do you think that was the case?
6. Why did Therese forgive Karl, and what do you think influenced her decision to forgive?
7. Write about or discuss Karl’s response to Therese’s forgiveness?
8. Would you have forgiven Karl? Why/Why not?
9. Why do you believe Therese had such a strong desire to meet Karl, and why do you think Karl agreed to that meeting?
10. What do you think Karl and Therese got out of their meeting?
11. Based on the movie or on your own experiences, why would victims and offenders who meet together be more likely to say that justice was done than those who only go through the criminal justice process?
12. What did you learn about Restorative Justice? Think about ways you might explore this topic further on your own or with your group/organization.



WRITING AND REFLECTION

1. Can you apply the film to your own life, and if so in what way(s)?
2. Has the film influenced your view of “victim” or of “offender?” In what way?
3. Did the film change your perspective on our criminal justice system or how you personally think of “justice?”

FAITH

For people of faith, victimization can raise questions about the power of God – where is He *during* these times? Why do bad things happen if God is loving and all powerful, truly “in control,” and where is God in the *aftermath* of the crime? An offender may experience a deep sense of guilt and feel as if he/she is beyond God’s mercy – as if he/she may not *deserve* to be forgiven or *deserve* a relationship with God.

DISCUSSION

1. Therese talks about “God’s plan” and her shock that Steve’s death must have somehow been part of that plan. How do we reconcile the conflict - God is in control and horrible things happening in our lives? What does Therese do to reconcile this or does she reconcile it?
2. Are there certain acts that in our mind are beyond redemption?
3. From your religious tradition, are there stories of forgiveness and redemption that come to mind?
4. In examining your own life, why do “bad” things happen, and where is God when these things happen?