



THOMAS TREZISE

*FORMER
THINGS
FORGOTTEN*

DISCUSSION GUIDE

F O R M E R
T H I N G S
F O R G O T T E N

DISCUSSION GUIDE

T H O M A S T R E Z I S E

REDEMPTION
P R E S S 

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FORMER THINGS FORGOTTEN

DISCUSSION GUIDE



Author's Note

I have been a Christian most of my life. Although I follow the same journey as Tessa, I came to it with far less drama. The Holy Spirit continues to work on me to transform me into the person God intends me to be and to serve in his kingdom. That is not easy!

I have engaged in many Bible studies over the years and have spoken about Christ to many people. Making the message relatable can be a challenge, as the descent into a theological discussion follows easily. I wrote *Former Things Forgotten* to present many of the questions faced along the path to becoming a Christian and then living each day in God's kingdom, but in a manner more relatable to Christians and non-Christians than more conventional Bible study and church small group materials.

I hope you find the book entertaining on its own, whether or not you choose to explore deeper into the questions presented. The questions, however, are far more important than the answers, as each of us needs to find the answers to the questions as they speak to us. The answers offered are not definitive, and some are wholly speculative. Readers should explore the answers in scripture and their experience with God rather than accept any answer offered as truth.

The guide that follows raises some of the questions presented in the book and proposes some new ones. Some encourage you to delve into the plot. Others, however, encourage examination of more spiritual issues.

The guide is intended to be used in group or personal study. If used for a group, the leader may want to choose from the questions offered to match the nature of the group and the time available depending upon the number of chapters read. The leader also should read the Preface and Afterword to prepare to guide the group as to potential questions. Be sure to read at least the first three chapters before starting the guide.

If you use this as a personal study, the most productive approach is to look at the questions raised within each chapter and the study guide as you read. I must

confess I am not so disciplined when I read, so if you turn to the guide after reading the book or multiple chapters, you may want to focus on the questions that touch you. As an individual, however, you will not have the time constraints of a group and may choose to tackle more questions.

No matter how many questions you consider, my hope is that you are somewhere on a journey similar to Tessa's. Christ stands with arms open to welcome you into his kingdom, now and forever.

Tessa finally raised her head and looked at Mandy. "I said I know. I know you've always had the peace that's inside you. Not something that comes from other people or things. It's inside you. It's part of you. I haven't wanted to face it. I've had my own plans. They've always come up empty. Tonight was just the most recent."



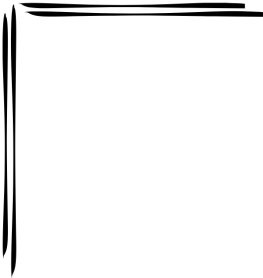
DISCUSSION GUIDE



1. Henry Gibbs relates a long family history to Tessa to justify keeping others from their mountain.

Do you have any factors with which you were raised that you use to justify your decisions?

2. Do you think something other than family history may be holding Henry on the mountain?





Chapter 3

1. We have little information on how the eternal kingdom of God, also known as Heaven, actually appears or what life there will be like. Whether the few Biblical descriptions we have are factual or metaphorical is unknown.

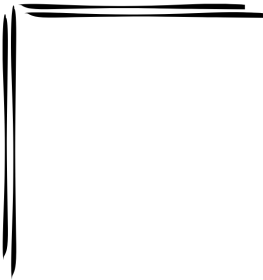
See John 14:2-3, Revelation 7:9-10, Revelation 7:15-17, Revelation 21:9-11, Revelation 21:21, and Revelation 22:4-5. This book offers a fantasy of the author no more based on known facts than any other. Yet, most of us have some idea either of what the eternal kingdom is or what we want it to be.

What do you think it looks like? How do you think life will be there?

2. Soul mates are an essential part of the fictional Kingdom of God. Do you believe in soul mates? If so, do you believe in just one soul mate? Do you think they are eternal?



1. Tessa was very excited about going to school and expected school to be as she imagined. Momma tried to temper her enthusiasm, but Tessa would not listen. Have you ever ignored advice contrary to your hopes? Has enthusiasm ever carried you past what Jesus wanted for you?
2. Saturday evenings and music were special for the Gibbs family. Did your family have similar special times? How did your family bond from them?





1. Boon immediately rejected Corot. Have you ever arrived somewhere and immediately knew you did not belong? Did you stay or go?
2. Helel causes Tessa to think God restricts her freedom. Do you ever feel restricted by God or his commandments?
3. Tessa turns on Boon at the end of the chapter. Why does she do that?





Chapter 6

1. The reality of school that confronted Tessa on her first day clashed with her dream.

Has reality ever intruded into a dream or hope you have had and shattered it? How did you respond?

2. Henry Gibbs was very reluctant to send Tessa to school. He feared school might cause her to question their way of life.

Should schools challenge children's assumptions about life or the teachings of their parents?

What about church classes?

3. Momma also harbored fear about Tessa's first day. How did her fear compare with Daddy's?

How did Tessa's reaction to her first day impact each of their fears?



1. The loss of the primary income can wreak havoc on a family. Individuals and families respond differently. Do you think Henry responded responsibly?

Have you or a family member ever lost a job?
How did it impact you?

2. Why do you think Henry quit his job as a truck driver?

His resignation left him a changed man. His behavior toward Tessa changed also. Why do you think he changed? Was it the alcohol or something more?

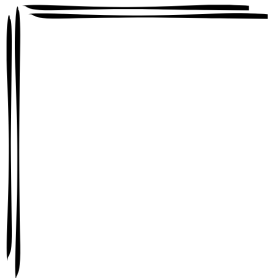




1. Tessa's need for independence challenges Boon's core belief about God. What do you think about his response to her?
2. Did Helel force change upon Tessa, or did she choose to change?
3. Tessa, Crispus, and Livia all emphasize that they want to be in control of their lives. What is wrong with that?

Don't we all want to control what happens to us and those we love as much as possible?

4. What do you think of Boon at this point?





1. Even with the family's limited finances, Tessa still looks forward to the secular side of Christmas.

Christmas can push our emotions in many directions. What does Christmas mean to you?

2. The experience of salvation can be sudden and dramatic, such as Daddy's, or gradual acceptance, and everything in between.

Describe either your own experience or someone you have witnessed. What stands out?

3. Christian doctrine states that a process of change facilitated by the Holy Spirit, called sanctification, begins after a person accepts Christ as Savior and Lord.

Christmas Day brought some very different behavior from Daddy.

Do you think his sanctification had begun? Why or why not?

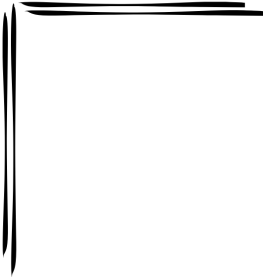


1. Helel questions God,

We need to think as we choose, love as we choose, go where we choose, and be who we choose. Love without choice is no love at all. If we cannot make ourselves happy and first serve ourselves, how can we truly love and serve someone else?

What do you think of his question? How would you answer it?

2. Boon had to make a terrible choice—follow God or the person he loved. Do you have a family member or someone you love who has rejected God? How are you dealing with that relationship?





Chapter 11

1. The mission of Daddy's life became purging sin and sinners from the world. Is that wrong?

Didn't Christ commission every Christian to bring sinners to him? See Matthew 28:18-20.

2. The attacks of September 11, 2001, shook the United States and the world to their foundations, including the Church. Daddy's reaction was not uncommon. Do you think Christians and the Church have changed since the attacks?





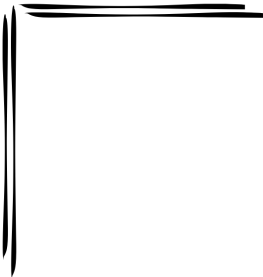
Chapter 12

1. Legends abound around Satan and the fall of humans, but facts are few. See Luke 10:18; Revelation 12:7-9; Isaiah 14:12-16; and, Ezekiel 28:13-19.

The common thread is that Satan regarded himself higher than God and was expelled from the Garden with a large number of heavenly beings, with others remaining with God.

Do you believe Satan is real or metaphorical? Do you believe in evil?

What about your sinful behavior? Does Satan cause that?



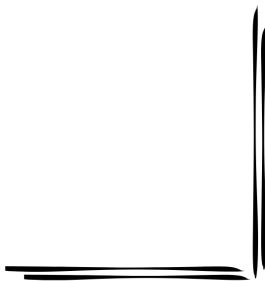


Chapter 13

1. Teens and rebellion are almost synonymous. What rules did you outgrow before the rules were abandoned?

How did you and your parents manage the conflict?

2. Teen rebellion not infrequently includes God and church. Did that happen to you or your children? How did you work through it?





Chapter 14

1. Boon asks an eternal question. How can God love us and allow bad things to happen to us at the same time?

Have you ever asked that question of God? What answer did you find?

2. God asked Boon why he thought God created souls. What would be your answer to that question?
3. Do you feel free within God's love or restrained by trying to meet his standards when that is hard to achieve?
4. The dialogue between God, Boon, and Ariel touches many important issues. Which stands out for you?

The answers offered carry the fiction but are not necessarily eternal truths. Where would you offer different answers?

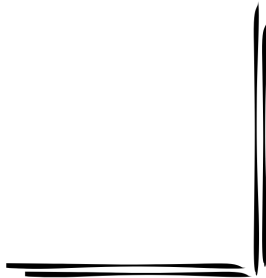


1. Tessa and Mary come from very different worlds, yet they quickly bond as friends.

Do you have or have you had a friend who is very different from you culturally? How do you explain your connection?

2. As Mary relates, haints developed from the Gullah-Geechee culture of coastal South Carolina and Georgia but penetrated more broadly into the southern Appalachian culture.

Have you heard of them previously? Can you think of other supernatural superstitions that have gained broader cultural acceptance?





Chapter 16

This chapter raises more questions for consideration than can be raised here. It also offers answers that are broadly based on Scripture.

You should nevertheless search Scripture for the answers rather than accept those offered blindly.

1. Death is the great common factor for all life. Practically everything done by all forms of life addresses survival and the circumstances of life. Death also, however, is the great leveler. No matter our circumstances of life, we all pass into death exactly the same, except in one respect.

God draws a great distinction between what happens to those who repent of sin and return to him and those who do not. See Genesis 3:17-19; Ezekiel 33:10-11; and, Matthew 25.

How do you feel about that? Is that fair?

What if a friend or family member has not made that choice? How do you feel about God, then?

2. God speaks of people entering his kingdom as soon as they make the choice to accept his grace. That means life in the kingdom begins before death, not after, through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus repeatedly taught that the kingdom was near at hand and would come upon people spiritually. See, e.g., Matthew 4:17; Matthew 6:10; Matthew 12:28; Luke 17:20-21; John 3:3; and John 14:17-20. See also, Ephesians 3:20-21.

Is that something you have considered? Have you experienced life in the kingdom?

3. Boon is angry with God. Do you feel it is OK to be angry with God?

Have you ever been angry with God? How did you feel about your anger?

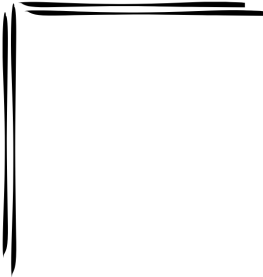
Compare the anger of Jesus in John 2:13-22 with that of King David in 2 Samuel 6.

How did God react to Boon's anger?



1. Daddy concluded Mary was a sinner and prohibited Tessa from seeing her. Mary confirmed for Tessa that he was right in his assessment.

What do you think? Should Christians avoid sinners to help them avoid the temptation to sin?





1. God begins this chapter with the following statement:

Nothing matters for the rebels but that they repent and ask to return to the Kingdom. One of our greatest challenges is that even when they profess belief in the eternal Kingdom, many will continue to live almost as if they don't believe. They know that death brings an end to their lives on Earth, so their attention is on their daily existence, not the Kingdom. Self-centeredness blinds them to the life waiting beyond them. Even their prayers concern what they want and rarely involve service to the Kingdom.

How do you feel about that?

2. Do you believe in angels? Why or why not?
3. God's dialogue with Michael touches on the Trinity and the divinity of Christ. Those topics have consumed theologians, filled tomes, and spawned countless sermons over the centuries. And the debate continues.

The answer God gives is essentially from a Wesleyan perspective; that is God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are one being manifested in three persons.

For more information see:

<https://seedbed.com/john-wesley-experiencing-trinity/>.

For an easily digested discussion, see:

<https://www.wesleyantheology.com/the-trinity.html>.

How do you experience the Trinity?

4. Immanuel gives Michael the following description of salvation and sanctification:

I also will sacrifice myself as a human to a most horrific and painful death. The critical difference is that I will then rise in the Kingdom body that stands before you now. My death will overcome their sin and open the Kingdom to them, and my resurrection will confirm my message and authority is of God.

Immanuel goes on to explain that surrender to the Spirit triggers the process. Does that make sense to you?

What about being a good person?



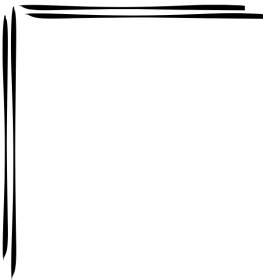
Chapter 19

1. Even though Tessa lives with the beauty of nature around her, God inspired her through nature on Lookout Mountain. Has nature ever inspired you to take action in some way?
2. Boon served as Tessa's supernatural guide at Lookout Mountain. Have you experienced God's supernatural presence or his kingdom?
3. Tessa thought the moment on Lookout Mountain defined the purpose of her life. Have you ever had such a moment of clarity defining a purpose or call for your life or a critical decision?



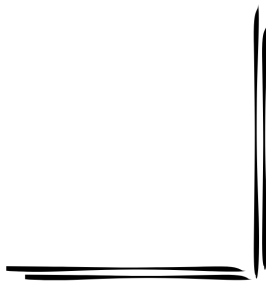


1. Tessa's relationship with her father had disintegrated. They fight constantly. Were you at war with one or both parents during your teens, or beyond?
2. What do you think of Daddy's statement that his primary purpose is to redeem Tessa as a sinner?
3. Do you remember your first experience of the death of something or someone you loved? How did that affect you?
4. Tessa *put down* Mudge. Could you have done that? Do you sense a change in her when she returned?





1. Daddy's response to Tessa's use of the Lord's name crystallized his commitment to sin, judgment, and punishment above everything. Have you ever met a Christian like that? How do you feel about Tessa's response to him?
2. How would you describe Momma's treatment of Tessa and her advice? What about Momma's response to Daddy? How do you feel about her?
3. Is Mary a help or a hindrance to Tessa?
4. Is Tessa's rejection of God reasonable?

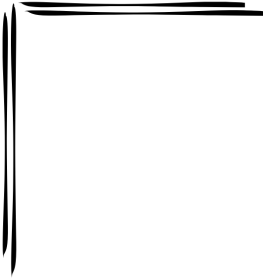




God made clear when he sent Boon to Tessa at Log Mountain that he wanted her to attend Berry College.

The college application process, even under the best circumstances, is daunting. Tessa has no parental support, yet the door seems wide open to her.

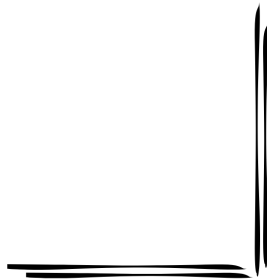
Do you think God manipulates people to bring about certain events?





1. As with Tessa, almost everyone reaches the point when they know they are leaving home. How did you feel when you reached that crossroads? Did you react with joy as Tessa? Fear? Or both?
2. Do you think Tessa's treatment of her parents was appropriate?

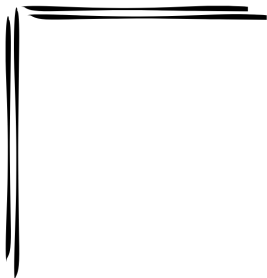
The Bible commands us to honor our mother and father. See Deuteronomy 5:16. Did Tessa break that commandment?





Chapter 24

1. The old adage, “Revenge is a dish best served cold,” applies to Tessa’s graduation day. She had an elaborate plan to exact some revenge against her parents. Was she justified?
2. How do you feel about her treatment of Ellie and Will?
3. What moments in her final scene with Daddy do you find meaningful? Why?
4. Do you find any significance in the screen door coming off its hinges with Tessa’s final kick?





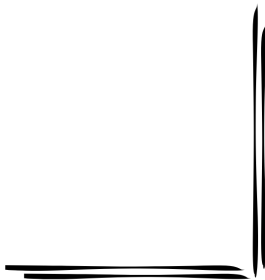
1. Tessa's and Mary's parting seemed to hold words unspoken. Should Tessa have said more than she did?

Did Mary know something Tessa did not?

2. Compare the Mary of Davis Creek with the Mary of Chattanooga.

How are they similar? How are they different?

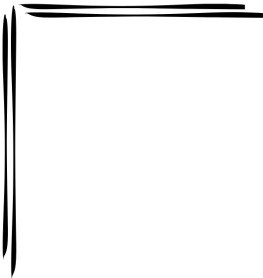
Do the differences matter?





1. Gardenias trigger Tessa's memory of home. Is there something that brings back home to your memory?
2. At the end of the chapter Tessa reflects on the people who had helped her during her move from home to Berry. She associates them as being valley people and proof of Daddy's error.

God has not sent any messenger since Lookout Mountain years earlier. Were these people Christians following God's plan or just good, decent people helping Tessa?





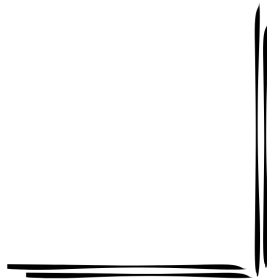
1. Janie says that she felt a call to care for Tessa and then knew it when she felt Tessa's loneliness.

Do you believe Christ calls us through the Holy Spirit to specific actions? Have you ever had such a call? How did you know it was by the Holy Spirit?

2. Tessa and Mandy quickly bond as friends even though they come from very different backgrounds. What drew them together?

Have you ever had a friend who was very different from you? What caused you to bond?

3. The end of the chapter suggests that Tessa's past may be fading from her. Do you think that is true?



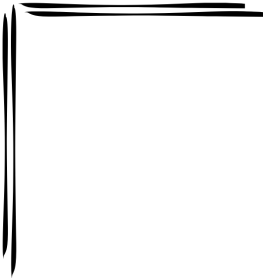


1. Mandy witnesses to Tessa about her faith. Do you think her witness was effective?

Should she have done more?

2. How do you feel about Tessa's exchange with Roy?

Would you have handled him differently?





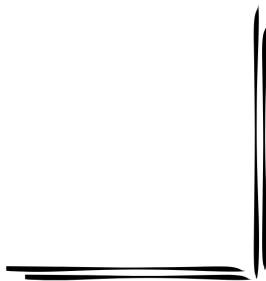
1. In 2 Corinthians 6:14-18, Paul warns Christians about being *unequally yoked* in relationships with unbelievers.

Has Mandy made that mistake with Tessa? Is she heading for trouble?

Do you think Christians should hold themselves apart from people who are not Christians?

2. Have you ever known someone like Roy? How did you handle him?

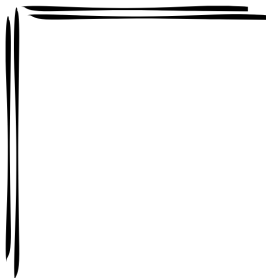
Mandy seemed to suggest that if Tessa wanted to have sex with Roy, that was OK. Was her advice appropriate? How would you have managed the situation?





Chapter 30

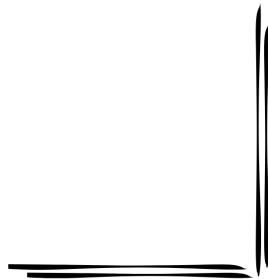
After Tessa's talk with Roy on the Viking Trail, did your opinion of him change? How?





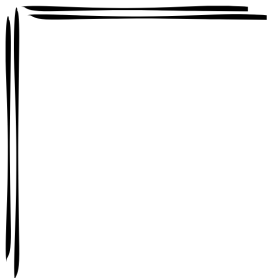
Roy shattered Tessa's dream of a relationship with him beyond friendship.

Have you experienced unrequited love? How did you respond? Did faith play a role?





1. Tessa's unspoken question was whether respect matters more than desire. How would you answer that question?
2. Do you think Roy and Tessa have built a solid base for their relationship?
3. Mandy reveals to Tessa that she had been praying for her relationship with Roy, but not exactly what her prayer had been. What do you think her prayer should have been?





God and Immanuel explain to Boon that they permit humans to suffer in order to serve the broader purpose of bringing them into the Kingdom. Boon accepted that purpose, albeit grudgingly.

Do you think a loving God should permit suffering?

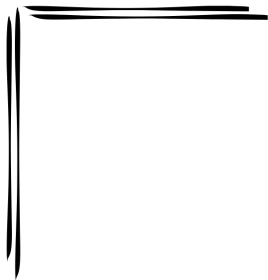




1. A wedding turns a page in the lives of the participants and offers hope of fresh starts. What pages did Tessa's wedding turn?

What hopes did it offer Angela and others?

2. Janie told Tessa that she had prayed that Tessa would recognize all of the extraordinary events that brought her to her wedding day. What do you think she meant by that?

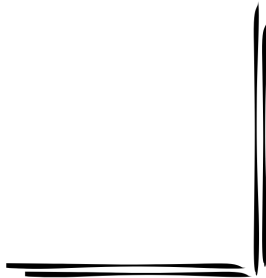




1. What does Phil's plan for Roy tell you about him as a father? As a person?

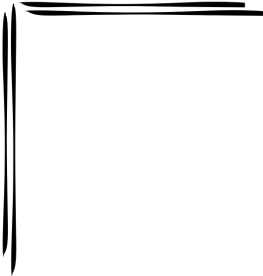
Does his response to Tessa change your thinking?

2. Should Phil and Angela have shared their misgivings about their son with Tessa before the marriage?
3. Was Tessa's response to Roy's behavior reasonable? Should she have been more supportive?





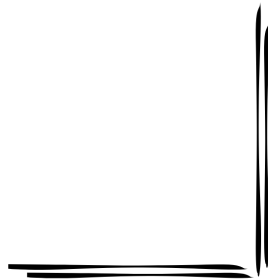
1. In the midst of tears from Janie and Mandy, Tessa sheds none. What does that tell you about Tessa?
2. What do you think of Tessa's plan?
3. Compare Tessa's life-view with Roy's.





Chapter 37

Tessa's unspoken question was whether Roy deserved grace. Did he?



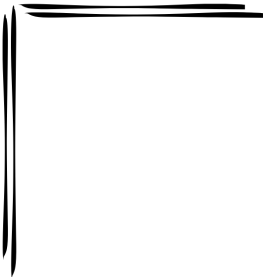


Chapter 38

1. Roy fell away from his promise to Tessa and descended into anger and depression. Should Tessa have stayed with him?
2. Janie's death broke Tessa's moorings. She could see that Janie faced her death with strength and peace.

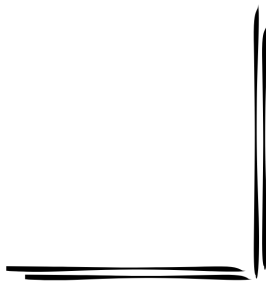
Pastor Matt used that as an opportunity to teach Tessa that God is not the God of judgment, as she learned from her daddy, but rather the God of peace Janie found and lived in Christ. Why did Tessa not listen to him?

3. Read Janie's letter to Tessa again. What is the message to Tessa? To you?





1. Throughout her life, Tessa has found peace at the top of mountains. Do you have a place or practice that helps you find peace?
2. Tessa has concluded that having a child will give her the life fulfillment she seeks. Is it reasonable to conclude that any single thing, no matter how significant, can bring fulfillment?
3. What words describe Tessa's response to Roy? Should she have responded differently?

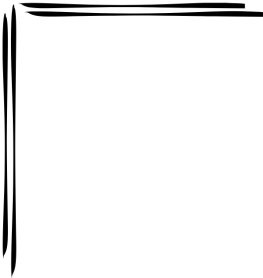




1. Tessa says she never lets anything stand in the way of what she wants. Mandy turns that around and tells her that she has a hole in her life that she tries to fill with wrong things. Have you ever pursued something only to find that once you have it you remain unsatisfied?

Have you ever considered whether you might also have a "hole in your soul?"

2. Tessa has rejected God for nearly twenty years, yet she tells Mandy she has known the source of Mandy's peace. If Tessa has known that, why has she resisted God for so long?





1. This chapter has many questions and offers many answers. Look it over again and note any that stand out to you? Why are they notable?
2. Mandy finally tells Tessa about Jesus after so many years. How do you think she handled the situation? Should she have done something different?
3. What lesson does the way in which Mandy witnessed to Tessa offer?
4. Are you surprised by Tessa's reaction after accepting Jesus?





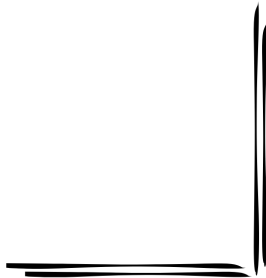
1. Mandy tells Tessa she has “Jesus eyes.” What does that mean to you?
2. Why do you think Tessa’s mother did not try to contact her after she connected with Mandy?
3. Tessa is concerned that she will make the same mistake as Daddy and confuse her will with God’s. How can we tell the difference?
4. Follow the path that Tessa followed in her first walk through the Bible by reading these verses:
 - Proverbs 3:5-6
 - John 3:16-17
 - John 14:6
 - Romans 6:23
 - Romans 8:28
 - Romans 10:9
 - 2 Corinthians 5:17
 - Galatians 5:22-23
 - Ephesians 2:8-10
 - Philippians 4:6-7
 - 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18
 - 1 John 1:9

What did you learn?



1. Tessa realizes that she controls nothing in life but her response to events, but that she now has Jesus to help shape her response. Do you believe that is true?
2. Was Tessa's change in her behavior toward Roy believable?

Roy's response?

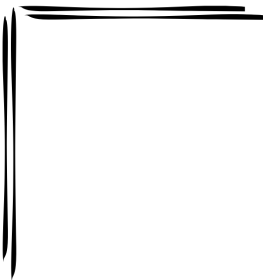




1. How do you understand Clay's message, *Stuck at the Gate*?

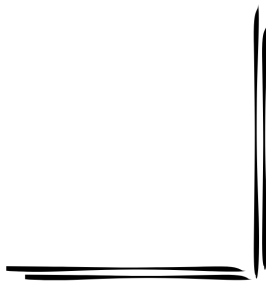
What do you take from it?

2. Should Tessa have reacted differently to all she learned about her mother and father? Was her response what you would have expected from a Christian?



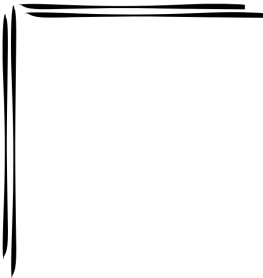


1. Tessa knows that hugging Billy violates the rules, yet she feels a strong call by the Holy Spirit to hug him. Christians are not supposed to be rule-breakers. Should she have held back?
2. Tessa realizes that in her relationship with Billy, she has become exactly the person she was intended to be and, for that moment, was living in the kingdom of God. Have you ever had such an experience?





1. What happens to us after death remains a mystery. Tessa's experience is just one among infinite possibilities. What do you think happens immediately after death?
2. What about Tessa's experience at the gate to the Kingdom resonated with you?
3. How do you want to be received in Heaven?

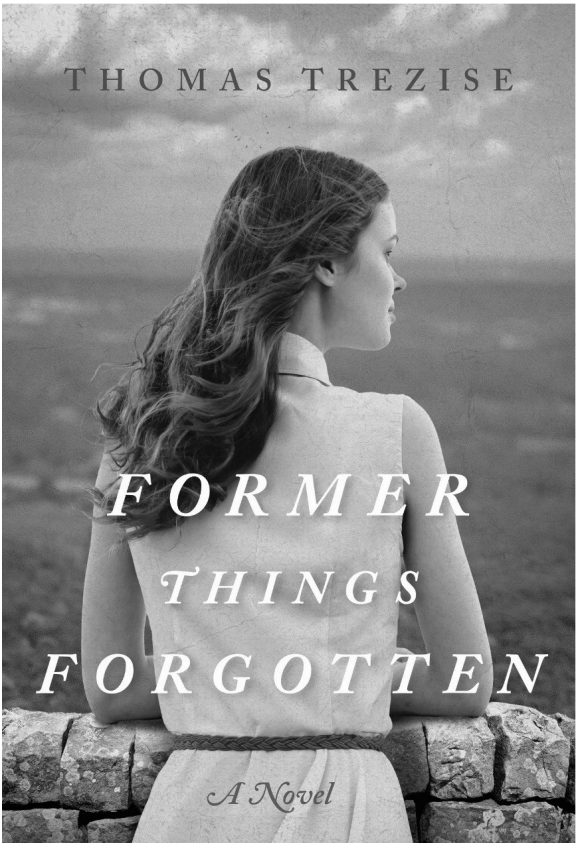


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