



Questions for Thought and Discussion

ONE

1. Learning to trust is one of the first developmental tasks a child must accomplish. How does an infant learn to trust? How do kids learn to trust? How do adults? Do trust issues change as people get older?
2. What basic necessities did the parents of Josh, the young boy of the story, fail to provide? How did this failure influence his ability to trust and color the way he sees the world? In what ways was Josh fundamentally changed by his early childhood experiences?
3. Did you learn to trust as a child? If so, how? If not, what kept you from learning to trust? If you did not learn trust from your parents, did you learn it from someone else? Who? How did he or she teach you?

TWO

1. Josh says he did not care about anything as long as he could be with his brothers. Imagine how his separation from them affected him. What was the hardest aspect of this separation for him to deal with? Have you ever been separated from family or friends for an extended period of time? How did you cope with it?
2. Josh is very matter-of-fact in his description of going to a new foster home. What coping skills had he developed during his time in foster care? Were these skills healthy? Think of a difficult aspect of your childhood. Did you learn healthy or unhealthy coping skills (or perhaps a mixture of the two)? Do you still rely on any of those skills today?
3. Josh did not seem to miss his parents or even have feelings for them. Why do you think this is? Have you ever experienced a situation so difficult that you stopped feeling the associated pain? Did the pain ever return? If so, how have you coped?

THREE

1. While in the foster home in the country, Josh experienced the most contented feelings of his life. What was so special about this situation? Have you ever experienced similar feelings of contentment? When? Did those feelings last? Do you ever feel that contentment as an adult? What prompts those feelings?
2. Josh states that while he felt safe and cared for in the country home, he did not feel loved. Do you think his foster parents loved him? If you believe so, why didn't Josh feel it? How could they have ensured that Josh felt their love?
3. Josh describes a real camaraderie between himself and the

little girl he played with. They enjoyed sharing secrets. Unfortunately one of their secrets, the candle and matches, had a tragic result. Think of a time when you shared a secret with someone. What was the outcome?

4. When Josh realized the fire was out of control, he could have alerted his foster mom. Why didn't he do that? How might the outcome have changed if he had gone for help? Have you ever hidden from a situation, allowing it to get worse, rather than seeking help? What was the result?

FOUR

1. In this chapter, we see the theme of rejection being played out again and again in Josh's life. First his foster parents rejected him. Then he was left behind by his brothers when their adoptive family did not want him. Later a couple changed their minds about possibly adopting him. How did these episodes of rejection affect the way Josh saw himself—and how he behaved? What coping skills did he develop? Think of a time when you felt rejected. How did you cope? Were your coping methods effective?
2. One of the most heartbreaking scenes in the story was when Josh's brother told him he was going to be left behind while the older brothers were being adopted. How do you think the brother felt about being adopted? Do you think Josh was angry at his brothers for leaving him behind? Have you ever felt abandoned by your family or by your friends? Describe your emotions when that happened.
3. Josh was not the only child not adopted. He describes other boys in his cottage who were never chosen. All of them had some attributes that labeled them as undesirable. How does our society treat those who are less than perfect—physically, mentally, or socially? How do

you as an individual treat those who are seemingly “less than”? Have you ever felt like an outcast yourself? What made you feel that way?

4. Why did Josh want to leave the children’s home behind, and why didn’t he take advantage of the aftercare program that could have helped him adjust to life outside? What were Josh’s three desires once he left the orphanage? How did his past affect his goals?

FIVE

1. Josh found himself homeless after leaving the children’s home. Did he fit the stereotype of a homeless person? Was he to blame for his situation? Have you ever known someone who was homeless? What would you have done differently in Josh’s situation?
2. What were Josh’s expectations when he went to check out the job with the city? Was he confident? When he learned he would need boots for the job, was his reaction appropriate? How close do you think he was to walking out of the interview? Why?
3. Why did Mike reach out to Josh? Why was Josh so reluctant to open up to anyone about himself?
4. Josh was embarrassed at his lack of money. Have you ever been embarrassed by a lack of money, social standing, or education? How did you react to those around you who had more than you?
5. Anna obviously wanted to help Josh, yet she tried to let him maintain his dignity. Was she successful? Have you ever reached out to someone in need? What was that person’s reaction? How did this reaction make you feel?

SIX

1. Why did Josh feel out of place at Anna's table? Have you felt uncomfortable in someone's home? Why? How did you react?
2. Do you think Anna's relationship with Mike is typical of a mother and her grown son? How does it differ from your young-adult relationship with your parents (or parent)? Did you (or do you) wish for a closer relationship with them? Why?
3. Why did Anna's efforts to get Josh to open up backfire? What could she have done differently? Have your efforts at reaching out to someone ever been rebuffed? If so, how did it make you feel?
4. What do you think of Josh's taking his food to his room?
5. If you were Anna or Mike, would you have stopped trying to reach out to Josh? Why or why not? How do you think Christians should handle this type of situation?

SEVEN

1. Anna stepped in to help Josh, seemingly with no thought as to whether he would welcome her help. Have you ever been in a place that was so difficult you welcomed all offers of help? If so, how did that experience change you?
2. What do you think about Josh's allowing Anna to pay for his medical care even though he had the money to do so? Do you think Anna knew he could have paid her back? Why did she insist that he "pay it forward" rather than pay her back?
3. Josh's illness was a turning point in his relationship with Anna and Mike. What was it about the experience that changed Josh so profoundly? What would have happened if he had not gotten sick?

EIGHT

1. Contrast the way Mike and Anna cared for Josh during his illness with the way his parents cared for him when he was little. Were your basic needs met by your parents? If not, how does that affect you today? If you have experienced healing from your past, as Josh did, who or what prompted that healing?
2. While living with Mike and Anna, Josh began to see himself differently. What did Mike and Anna do that prompted this change of perspective? Is there someone in your life who does not see himself as worthy or valuable? How can you help them see themselves differently?
3. When Josh was talking with Anna about his past, she spoke words of affirmation to him. How did he react? How do you react when someone points out your best traits? Why is this element of the blessing so powerful? (See “A Special Message from Dr. John Trent” beginning on page 159 for an explanation of the elements of the blessing.)
4. After Josh opened up to Anna about his past, her questions about his brothers caused him to react with anger. Why did he become so upset? Did Anna push him too hard?
5. After Josh confessed his role in the little girl’s death, Anna placed her hands on his shoulders. Later she took both his hands in hers. Why did she do this? What did her touch convey to Josh? Why is appropriate meaningful touch a powerful and important aspect of the blessing?

NINE

1. Josh had never considered college. Why? How did Anna change his mind about the possibility?
2. When Josh got called into his boss’s office, he expected one thing and experienced something very different.

What happened? Contrast Josh's feelings about himself before he went into the office with how he felt about himself when he left.

3. Why was cutting the Christmas tree so important to Mike? Why was it so important to Anna that Josh go with her to church? What did she hope would happen as a result?
4. Josh had a physical reaction to the candles in the church. Has something ever triggered a memory so strong that you had a physical reaction? Was it a good memory or an unpleasant one? Describe the experience.
5. What led to Josh's feeling that there might be a glimmer of light inside him?

TEN

1. After everything they had done for him, Josh was still surprised that Anna and Mike wanted to spend Christmas with him. Why? What message did his gifts from Mike and Anna convey about their feelings for him?
2. Have you ever been lonely at Christmas? Have you ever done something special for someone at the holidays? Have you ever invited a nonfamily member to spend Christmas day with you and your family? Why or why not?
3. What does Josh mean when he says, "It can feel like too much"?

ELEVEN

1. Before Lori arrived, Josh had not had a close relationship with a woman. What are some of the reasons for this?
2. Josh and Lori had very different backgrounds. Why do you think they hit it off together so quickly?
3. Anna was quick to notice Josh and Lori's attraction to

each other. Do you think she approved? What were her concerns about the two of them becoming romantically involved?

4. Do you think that people who come from broken homes or a past like Josh's can "reverse the curse" and have happy, healthy families and relationships? Why or why not? Can the blessing play a part in this type of transformation?

TWELVE

1. Josh stretched the truth when Lori asked him about his church attendance. Do you think he had given much thought to faith at this point in his life? Why or why not? How did his earlier experiences influence his attitude?
2. Josh was surprised by Mike's disapproval of his relationship with Lori. Was Mike justified in his reaction? What does it say about how he felt about Lori? About Josh?
3. How did Mike's displeasure affect Josh's feelings of security?

THIRTEEN

1. One of the things Josh liked best about Lori was her honesty. Why was this quality so important to him?
2. Josh asked Lori some pointed questions about her past. Did he have a right to ask such things? How do you think Lori felt when she gave him her answer?
3. What reason did Josh give for his not kissing Lori? What did he mean when he said he "so did not want to mess this thing up"?

FOURTEEN

1. Anna generally treated Josh and Mike as equals and rarely gave them orders. Why do you think she resorted

to making them serve at the soup kitchen? What did she hope to accomplish by doing so?

2. Has anyone ever disapproved of something you did or a relationship you were involved in? Were the concerns accurate? How did you handle the situation?
3. What do you think about the way Mike and Josh worked out their disagreement? Was it realistic? Can you think of a better way either could have approached this? If Anna had not intervened, what do you think would have happened?

FIFTEEN

1. Josh said he was in a “terrible spot” as his relationship with Lori grew more serious. How was it terrible? How had the events in his past colored the ways he saw himself?
2. Was Josh’s response to Lori’s confession appropriate? Why did he react so harshly to her confession when he had a painful secret in his own past?
3. Lori’s dad had rejected her. Then Josh rejected her too. What message did she receive about her worth from these important men in her life? Was this an accurate message?
4. Josh cut Lori off swiftly and with no apparent second thoughts. How could he do this?
5. Have you ever had someone reject you? How did you react to this experience? In what ways were you able to overcome the rejection? Did you suffer any long-lasting effects?

SIXTEEN

1. How did Josh’s childhood experiences affect the way he handled his breakup with Lori? What old feelings and patterns of behavior did he fall back into?

2. What old patterns do you seem to revert to when the going gets rough? How can you avoid them or choose a different path?
3. For someone who saw himself as a victim, Josh was quick to encourage Mike. Explain why he saw Mike's chances of recovery in a more positive light than he saw his own chances at a successful life. Do you think he was truly optimistic about Mike's chances or just trying to encourage himself?
4. Josh credits Mike with everything good that has happened to him. Was Mike the one responsible for the good in Josh's life? Name someone whom you believe was responsible for something positive that has happened in your life.

SEVENTEEN

1. How did Mike's illness change the dynamics of the household? How did it change Josh's role in Mike and Anna's life?
2. Mike and Anna had done many kind things for Josh. What kindness did he show to them in this chapter?
3. Josh volunteered to help Mike go to school. What did he mean when he said he wanted to do this for "for me too"?
4. Mike never asked, "Why me?" in Josh's presence. Do you think he ever thought it? Contrast Mike's attitude to Josh's general attitude about his life.
5. What elements of the blessing (see explanation on page 160) are illustrated in the scene where Mike is included in the family pictures?
6. How did Mike bless Josh when he asked him to care for Anna?

EIGHTEEN

1. How did Josh's role in Anna's life change after Mike's death? In what ways did Mike's death change Josh as a person?
2. Josh had never had anyone need and depend on him the way Anna did after Mike's death. Was Anna's dependence on Josh healthy? What do you think of her suggesting that Josh move into Mike's old room?
3. Explain Josh's curiosity about Mike's childhood.

NINETEEN

1. Was Anna surprised at Josh's discovery that she had had a daughter? Do you think she planned to tell him about Jody or to keep her life a secret? Why? Were her reasons for not telling Josh valid? What effect did this secret have on Josh?
2. Explain Josh's anger at learning about Jody. What was he angry at? Who was he angry with?
3. Why couldn't Josh accept Anna's blessing at that moment?
4. Lori told Josh that Mike and Anna had made a choice. What did she mean? What choice had they made? Do you think you could forgive or give the blessing to someone who had hurt you the way that Josh accidentally hurt Anna and later Lori? Why or why not?
5. Josh did not receive the blessing from his parents, but he did get the blessing from Mike and Anna. How did this change the direction of his life? Do you believe he and Lori were able to give the blessing to their own children?
6. Lori also had a "blessing deficiency"—she had not received the blessing from her father at a critical moment in her life. How did that affect her—especially her relationships with men? Why do you think she was able to

move past this? Did she, too, receive the blessing from someone else?

7. If you did not receive the blessing from your parents—or if the blessing was somehow incomplete—what can you do? Is this something that other people in your life have given you? Could you ask for it?
8. Who do you know that needs the blessing in their lives? Will you pass it forward and share the blessing with them or offer forgiveness?
9. Last question! Who is the first person God puts in your thoughts who could benefit from reading *A Place Called Blessing*? What would be the best way to get this person the book or encourage him or her to read it?