

No Turning Back

Discussion Questions

1. Because of the trauma she suffered, Livvy is not on the life path she had envisioned for herself. Have you ever experienced an unexpected change in circumstances that had you questioning your path? How did you deal with it?
2. When trying to decide whether or not to go to San Quentin, Livvy isn't sure whether it's God's will for her or not. Have you ever sought God's will for a decision in your life? Do you feel he answered, and if so, how did you sense his answer? What are ways you think we hear from God?
3. Livvy is worried that she's "supposed" to be using the gift God gave her. Do you have talents or experiences that you feel God has given you that he'd like to use for his purpose? Do you struggle with the "shoulds" when you don't in fact want to use your gift? What might be holding you back?
4. Grace is worried about Livvy going to San Quentin and thinks she shouldn't go. Have you had someone in your life whose decisions you disagreed with, but you had to let go of as they made their own choices? Is it hard for you to keep your opinion to yourself in those situations? Have you needed to be there for someone when things ended badly, without saying "I told you so"?
5. Livvy struggles with fear in the wake of her past. Do you struggle with fear or anxiety? What are some things that help you?
6. During the riot, Lucas struggles with wondering "what Jesus would do" in the situation. Have you ever felt like you don't know the best biblical response in a situation you've faced? How did you handle it?
7. Lucas feels a spectrum of intense emotions that he doesn't believe are Christlike. Have you struggled with anger, with hate, with strong emotions in a situation where you were truly wronged? How have you dealt with those feelings? What does it look like to strive to be more like Christ when we have intense negative feelings?
8. When Livvy learns what Tobin was convicted of, she struggles with her feelings around his actions. Have you been in a situation where you had to address your feelings about someone else's actions, even when those actions had nothing to do with you? Did it make a difference whether the other person was repentant about those actions or not? What are we called to if the other person never seeks our forgiveness or grace?
9. Forgiveness is often a very difficult, painful process. Livvy considers that she has no right to hold Tobin's sins against him when the same blood Jesus shed in atonement of her sins was also shed for Tobin's sins. Is there someone in your life you struggle with forgiving? Does it feel like forgiveness of the sin means condoning or whitewashing it? Do you feel like that person should receive some sort of punishment for that sin and not get off too easily?
10. Sometimes we need to forgive but still maintain healthy boundaries. If Wade had survived, could Livvy have forgiven him while still keeping in place safeguards against his intrusions into her life? Have you struggled with someone who was too toxic to have in your life, who you were nonetheless called to forgive? How have you approached that?

11. Livvy and the others from Willowvale Bible Church interact with many convicts and correctional officers. Some of the prisoners were Christians, some definitely weren't. How did you feel about the shifting, invisible "us-versus-them" line that Livvy observes—the line between the "good guys" she allies with and the "bad guys"? Did you like Smitty? Fallon? Did you feel like you needed to know what their crimes were in order to like them?
12. Were you surprised at Livvy's choice between the two men? Did you have strong feelings for one or the other outcome? Would your feelings be different if Livvy were your sister, best friend, or daughter? Or if Tobin were your brother or son?
13. Tobin says he feels confident of God's forgiveness of his sins, and at first is OK with Livvy asking about his crime. Then he becomes more hesitant about discussing it with her. Why do you think that is? He reflects that while God has forgiven him, the State of California still requires him to serve his time. Is it hard to differentiate earthly justice from divine justice? Have you ever felt like you needed to be punished for something you've been forgiven for?
14. Lucas struggles with whether it's appropriate to pursue Livvy romantically. Then he wrestles with what kind of leader he is supposed to be in a terrifying situation for which he's utterly unprepared. Finally, he feels that his emotions are beyond what's appropriate for a pastor trying to lead his people to healing. The Bible says those in spiritual authority will be called to give an account (Heb 13:17) and that they will be judged more strictly (James 3:1). What do you think this means? Can our shepherds be human and struggle with genuine issues while they continue to lead us? How can we support them? Have you ever been encouraged upon learning that a spiritual leader or mentor has struggled with something? Or did learning that discourage you?
15. Livvy leans hard into prayer throughout her experience at San Quentin. Yet she grapples with where the line lies between man's free will to do evil and God's intervention in answer to prayer. Do you ever feel like that—where you don't question God's *ability* to act but don't have assurance that he *will* act? What does faith look like in this equation?
16. Jesus told us to expect trouble in this world but that he has overcome it (John 16:33). What does that mean when we come up against terrible circumstances? He also said "Ask and it shall be given" (John 7:7), but we know God isn't a vending machine. What do these passages mean to you in your life?