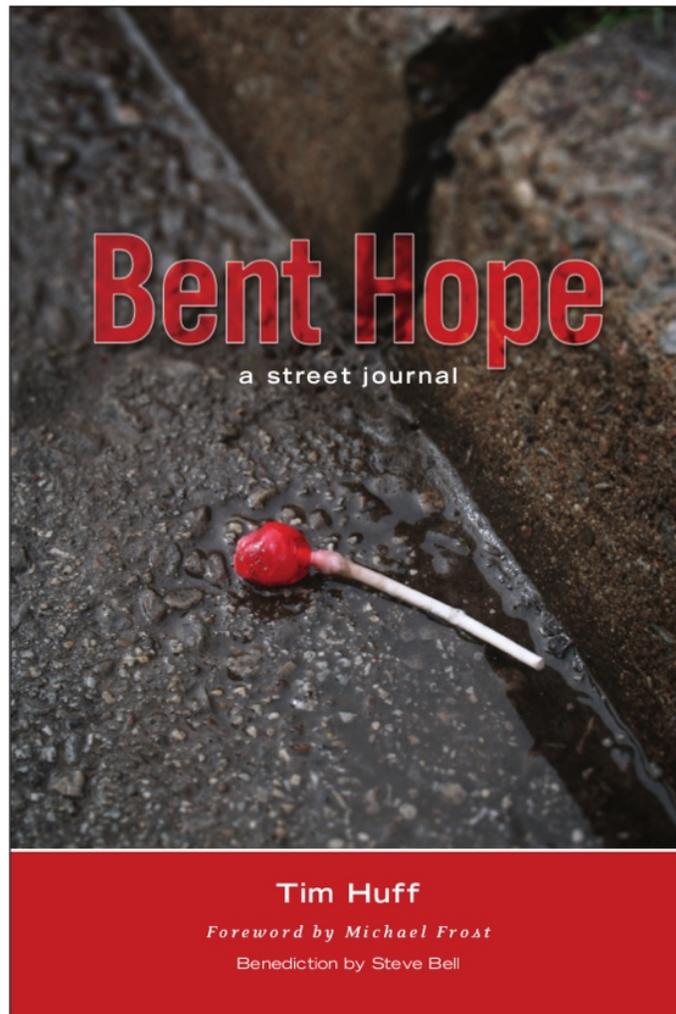


# Bent Hope Discussion Guide

A guide to accompany *Bent Hope: A Street Journal* by Tim Huff



Discussion Guide written by Lori McAuley & Pauline Peneycad  
With special thanks to the Bridlewood Book Club

## About this Guide

To my happy surprise, when my first book *Bent Hope* was released in 2008, a number of community and small group book clubs began taking it on as a book club selection. When the same happened a few years later with *Dancing with Dynamite*, I took the hint and included a chapter-by-chapter discussion guide as part of the subsequent book, *The Yuletide Factor*.

But back in 2008, the first book club to select *Bent Hope* (that I'm aware of) was the Bridlewood book club in north-east Toronto. The Bridlewood book club is not a faith-based book club, but a community-based one; its long time members represent many and varied beliefs. After reading the book, they invited me to do a question and answer time about it - this was the first of many book clubs I would visit.

While my Children's Compassion Series books are written and designed for mainstream audiences, my adult books (still very much intended to engage all audiences) surely dig into matters of faith and ask, "where is God in all of this?" in myriad ways.

Two members of the Bridlewood book club, Lori McAuley, Pauline Peneycad, have been faithful friends of mine for years, and have my complete trust. So as more book clubs were reading *Bent Hope*, I asked these two dear friends if they would create a discussion guide to accompany the book. They agreed, and very thoughtfully and graciously created a meaningful companion to *Bent Hope*, with input from their book club friends.

So with great thanks to Lori and Pauline and the Bridlewood book club, I am honoured and humbled to share this chapter-by-chapter discussion guide with you.

As you lean into *Bent Hope*, my hope is that the thoughts and questions outlined in this little guide will stir your heart and the hearts you share them with in gentle and meaningful ways.

Happy reading!

All the best,

Tim Huff

# Bent Hope Discussion Guide

## Chapter 1 – The Kid and the Coffee Cup

1. What role does hope play in Thomas's life? Is it a double-edged sword for him? Discuss.
2. What judgments do people make about the homeless? Does this spill over to other groups such as the elderly, the handicapped, teens, other religions and cultures?
3. Is it naive to always believe the best about people? Discuss.

## Chapter 2 – Left Hand

1. Which emotion does this story most strongly evoke in you? Why?
2. Would you have reacted the same way as Tim? If not, is there a correct response to such ignorant cruelty?
3. Is it okay to be angry at God for the injustices of this world?
4. What does the girl's generosity at the end of the story say about the human spirit?
5. Was the girl's interaction with Tim at the end of the story, an act of resilience or an act of defeat?

## Chapter 3 – Hobo Rails

1. Discuss the similarities and differences of what "home" meant to Smoothy and to the Chinese migrant railway workers.
2. What do you think it meant to Smoothy to "go down swinging?"

3. Smoothy had a profound impact on Tim even though their time together was brief. Has anyone ever impacted your life like this?
4. What's your "ride?" What's your method of escape?

## Chapter 4 – No Jesus

1. This is a story of extreme religious hypocrisy – Jesus weeps for Coreen. Have you ever been negatively impacted by anyone who claims to know God?
2. Did Tim fail with Coreen? Should he have kept his beliefs to himself?
3. Are there any words in your life that are painful to you due to negative associations?

## Chapter 5 – Like Bigfoot, Like Elvis

1. "A person doesn't need much. Just needs the right thing." How do these two sentences affect you?
2. There is a movement towards living in simplicity. Excess and over-abundance has permeated wealthy North American society. Do you agree?
3. How do you feel when your charity is neither welcomed nor wanted? Do we truly give for the sake of the person in need or for our own deep-rooted needs?
4. Why do children often see what adults miss?

## Chapter 6 – A Lucky Bird

1. What do you think of Tim's approach to Elliot in the bus station?
2. Is there a part of you that wishes Elliot never had the bird? Why or why not?

3. "Will my bird go to heaven?" What is the best way to respond to questions we don't have answers for?

## Chapter 7 – Wolf Spoke

1. No matter where we are in life, we all seek validation and crave a sense of belonging. We all have a deep desire to be "known." What was your most painful rejection and what was it based on?
2. We all have a tendency to judge and label people based on who we think they are. Is there anyone in your life right now that you feel you have nothing in common with?

## Chapter 8 – Either Way

1. There are "countless untold stories of splendor and heartbreak." Tim didn't care if Buffalo Hal's story was true or not. Should we?
2. What is behind the statement, "Looks like a bunch of winos and bums"?
3. What does it mean to really see people? In your circle, is there someone whose tall tales you've dismissed? Does this story challenge you to listen?

## Chapter 9 – Dynamite

1. Tara's choice to live in isolation seems especially hopeless, yet she is determined to live on her own terms. Is this fierce determination a good or bad thing?
2. "I used to be pretty." Tara's heart-wrenching, naked cry of despair – no different from any other teenage girl. Why do we have the need to feel that the homeless are different from us? Why is her statement so heart-breaking?

3. The old man gave up his shoes at great cost to himself. If you came across Tara with no shoes on, how would you have responded? How does this challenge you to give?

## Chapter 10 – The Last Time I Saw Ricardo

1. Ricardo falls at the bottom of the human pile – rejected even by the rejected of society. What is the most painful to you about this story?
2. We often think of love as feel-good, but Mother Theresa believes “love, to be real must cost, it must hurt, it must empty us of self.” Do you agree? Discuss.

## Chapter 11 – Gumballs in Russia

1. Tim discovered that the purity of children transcends language and culture. Is this only true in the midst of poverty and scarcity? Would he find this beauty of spirit in the wealthy and privileged?
2. As adults, our main connection with people from other cultures, religions, countries, etc, is our shared humanity, loving our children, wanting peace. Are there practical ways we can demonstrate this as adults?
3. Tim quotes Oscar Wilde: “Ordinary riches can be stolen; real riches cannot. In your soul are infinitely precious things that cannot be taken from you.” Do you agree with this statement?

## Chapter 12 – Gun

1. Tim quotes Jesus’ words from Matthew 25:35-36. What challenge is Jesus giving to all who hear his words? What is the type of justice he is espousing?
2. If Tim is not talking about justice of the courts, what does “social justice” mean? What ways can we get involved?

## Chapter 13 - That One Acorn

1. Looking at the successful outcome of Tyson's life, what was the key or formula that changed the path he was heading down?
2. Tim writes, "But only one out of every ten thousand acorns that falls to the ground survives to become a tree. Miraculous. One." For you, what is miraculous?

## Chapter 14 – Exquisite

1. What do you place your trust in? Do you find joy in it?
2. Joy, peace and hope in life all stem from the "radical conviction" of being able to place absolute trust in another person. Do you agree?

## Chapter 15 – And Still Another: The Dealmaker

1. Tim has a gift for seeing the beauty in brokenness. Can you share or have you thought of any beauty that has come out of the brokenness of your life?
2. What are your thoughts on St. Francis's prayer? Do you find it inspiring or overwhelming?

## Chapter 16 – Choking on Lies

1. Hatred is cheap, easy and feels good. "There is only happiness in hate, Tim. Hate is the cleanser, Tim. We fix it. Then, then there is joy." What is Richard getting out of this philosophy?
2. Tim says Richard was "starving for truth and choking on lies." But, Richard believed that he and Tim were not much different. What would you have said to Richard if given the chance?

## Chapter 17 - On-Ramp Angels

1. The three kids who hugged Sarah showed love in action – no words, just love. What small kindnesses have been given to you that were meaningful?
2. Think about a small gesture of love you can give another person who is in need.

## Chapter 18 – Shadow Jumping

1. Pride goes before the fall. Pride was so deeply rooted in Doogan through his father, that even in the midst of his downward spiral, he couldn't ask for help. Is there any area of your life crying out for help but you're too proud to ask?
2. Can you think of any "values" you grew up with but have now discarded?
3. Do you give to panhandlers? Why or why not?
4. What do you think of Tim's position on giving – even if the money is used for drugs or alcohol, it allows the recipient a moment of respite from his or her pain? Discuss?

## Chapter 19 – Never Again

1. Have you ever been "stuck in regret?" How did you move on?
2. Even if only one out of a hundred homeless kids uses the money to be "rescued", is it worth it giving? Discuss.

## Chapter 20 – The Boy I Hated

1. Grace is unmerited, undeserved favour. God has shown us grace. None of us deserve it. Do we really appreciate it?
2. "I chose to really care about him when I finally liked what I saw and heard." How often do we find ourselves doing the same thing?

3. Unconditional grace – have you ever struggled to show grace to your own Desmond?

## Chapter 21 – No One to Touch

1. How much does pride and self-congratulation motivate us in our acts of compassion? Do we truly act out of pure altruism or a deep seated need for recognition and accolades?
2. What do you think a typical day would look like for those who are homeless and are mentally ill?

## Chapter 22 – Five Days of Bottled Claws

1. How often have we heard and said, “But for the grace of God, go I?” Rather, Tim says our lives should show, “But for the grace of God can I extend the grace of God.” Stripped of pride, filled with humility – is it too difficult to do? Worth it?
2. Does it make sense that some are born into cruelty and others loved?
3. Does knowledge of the cruelty inflicted on Des absolve him from responsibility for his own cruelty?

## Chapter 23 – One Pure Moment

1. Do you identify with the mom in the story? By a certain age, we lose the pureness and innocence of a child’s heart. Is it possible to recapture this pureness of spirit?
2. What is the purest memory you can recall from your life?

## Overview Questions

1. Tim says his book was written not for the visionaries and revolutionists, but for the ordinary, everyday person. His challenge is “offering self – whenever, however, wherever, whatever. Perhaps in huge ways you have never imagined. But more likely, and just as poignantly, in small ones.”
2. How have you been challenged upon the completion of Tim’s book?
3. Do you have a clearer perspective on your city’s homeless? Does this spur you to action? Or at the very least, empathy?

*But if all that comes of your time with these pages is that you would consider extending grace with words you choose, the tone of your voice, and the look on your face, then I am humbled and thrilled.* – Tim Huff