

## DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. In your own words, explain what you think 2 Peter 2:19b means: “A man is a slave to whatever has mastered him.” Stedman’s gambling and Trent’s smoking were strongholds that were easy to spot, but would you have thought of Richard’s and Ralph’s stubborn pride as something that they had become slaves to? Have you ever been involved in or been the victim of an ongoing feud that greatly affected your life? Was it satisfactorily resolved or is it still in progress? Were there deep wounds to be dealt with? Did you feel led to intervene? If so, was that a difficult position to be in?
2. As Christians, we are called to be peacemakers. What is the difference between a peacekeeper and a peacemaker? Which role do you think is easier? Which of the two best describes Ethan’s role in his uncles’ feud? Had you been in Ethan’s place, what would you have done differently?
3. Do you think addictions are sins or sicknesses—or is it possible to make a distinction between the two? If a person is trapped in the cycle of addiction, should that person be absolved from taking responsibility for his or her actions? Did Stedman know right from wrong? Was he capable of choosing better? Why do you think he didn’t? If a person came to you with an addiction problem, what advice would you give him or her?
4. Do you think Stedman became addicted to gambling merely because he had a weakness for gambling, or were



there other factors that might have contributed to his gambling obsession? How do you think a person becomes addicted to something? Do you think there might be fewer addiction problems if more people turned to God and allowed Him to fill their emptiness instead of depending on something else? If emptiness is the culprit that leads us down the path to addiction, how can we fill up with the right things? What are the right things?

5. Are you now or have you ever been guilty of any other excesses, such as overeating, overworking, overspending—overindulgence of any kind? Do you find that the longer you allow the bad habit to go unchecked, the harder it is to get back on track? Do you think this is true merely because it's hard to break a bad habit—or is there something about trying to stop by sheer willpower that intensifies the battle? In your experience, how effective has it been for *you* to try to control the excesses in your life in your own strength?
6. Can you name some activities in our modern world that have become addictive for many people (for example, surfing the web, shopping online, texting)? Do you think that many loving and charitable actions are pushed aside because of such “web” addictions? If everyone cut one hour a week from these self-absorbing activities and did something nice for someone else, do you think it would dramatically affect our world?
7. Why do you think humans tend to do things in excess? It is said that self-control is a virtue, but true self-control is

part of the fruit of the Holy Spirit. How capable do you think we are of controlling our carnal nature? Does that ability seem affected by how much we want something? For example, some of us can stay away from potato chips but can't stop eating chocolate until it's all gone. Others can say no to chocolate but can't stop eating potato chips until the entire bag has been devoured. When we say we "can't stop," what do you think we're really saying? Why is it so hard to say no to our appetites? What do you have a weakness for? At what point should a weakness be considered sinful? Is there anything we truly "can't stop" doing?

8. Are children slaves to the flesh or is the behavior learned? Is it ever too early to teach our children to practice self-control? Why do you think self-control is something we must *practice*? Did you like Ethan's advice to Emily on how to quit eavesdropping (chapter 39), or would you have given her different advice? Would Ethan's advice apply to any number of bad habits?
9. Do you think living in a culture of instant gratification has made us almost oblivious to what we are or aren't dependent on? Is it possible that we think we're totally dependent on God, when the truth is we're not being denied anything, so our dependence isn't being tested? Is there any food, object, or activity that if it were taken from you would leave you feeling empty? Be honest.
10. How inclined do you think we would be to engage in excess if we took seriously 1 Corinthians 6:20, which says, "You were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your



body”? Are there areas of your life that don’t measure up to this admonition?

11. If you could meet one of the characters, who would it be? What would you say to him or her? Was there an idea, thought, or principle you took away from this story?