

***The Hidden Flame* Discussion Questions**

The Hidden Flame is book two in the Acts of Faith trilogy. Did you read *The Centurion's Wife* before reading this novel? Do you always read a fiction series consecutively? If not, how is your reading affected by not having all the details of the previous story?

This book takes place soon after the day of Pentecost, with many of the characters having been personally present at the descent of the Holy Spirit. What difference does this experience make to the community and to the individual believers? Can you identify how the "fruits of the spirit" are active in your own life?

One of the most dramatic scenes in *The Hidden Flame* describes the apostle Peter's prayer for the healing of Abigail's injured leg. How do you understand miracles? Were they different in New Testament times than they are today? Have you or someone you know ever experienced a medical recovery that was deemed miraculous? How did that affect your faith?

Abigail, the central figure in *The Hidden Flame*, has found meaning and purpose in her kitchen duties among the followers of the Way. She is later given additional responsibility in distributing food to the widows and orphans. What does Abigail's example show us about the nature of Christian service? What are the pressures on her to marry? What cultural dynamics are today's young women facing--both for and against marriage?

Was Abigail's betrothal to Stephen an easy way to resolve the dilemma over the two other men seeking to marry her, or was it divinely directed? Have you ever faced choices that seemed to require an either/or decision but turned out to have much larger implications? Are there some types of choices that require divine guidance and others that warrant working things out on our own?

The story of Ananias and Sapphira is one of the most difficult in the New Testament. Why would a merciful God destroy two people for perpetrating a lie? Has the fictional expansion of the incident helped you understand it more fully?

Acts 6:1–6 describes the selection of the seven deacons in a brief but clear manner. Discuss the fictional expansion of that scene and possible applications in your church and its ministries.

Read the biblical account of Stephen's final address before the Sanhedrin (Acts 7). Might Stephen's life have been spared if he had sounded less accusatory of

his enemies and more conciliatory? Or was God seeking to accomplish a greater plan for the expansion of the gospel? How does this incident give meaning to the phrase, expressed by second-century Christian apologist Tertullian, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church"?

Western Christians today are not often personally confronted with religious persecution. Imagine those early followers of Jesus and their daily concerns: were they going to be rounded up, jailed, beaten, or worse? Evaluate your own pain threshold--both emotional and physical. Consider what you would do under duress if members of your family or other loved ones were being threatened with death if you did not renounce your faith.

One of the hallmarks of the early community of believers was its inclusiveness. Even Linus, a hated Roman soldier, was able to join the followers of Jesus. Can you draw parallels to today's church in welcoming--or refusing--certain types of members? How has your own church community responded to "outsiders"--those of different racial, cultural, national, or religious backgrounds?

We can understand Abigail's wrenching grief over Stephen's death--and the inevitable questions about the hand of God. Hadn't they already witnessed miraculous deliverances from persecution? Why wasn't her husband, such a faithful servant, also spared from a terrible death by stoning? How does Christian faith inform our response to tragedy?

What can this novel teach us about the nature of prayer?

What theme or truth in *The Hidden Flame* was the most thought-provoking or memorable for you?