

JACOB'S CHOICE

Return to Northkill, BOOK 1

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Part I

1. As someone committed to nonresistance, Jacob feels some discomfort about taking shelter at the fort after the attack on their neighbors. At the fort, he and his sons come under hard questioning from a neighbor and a soldier. Do you think Jacob's decision to seek protection for his family is inconsistent with his nonresistant ideals?
2. When Anna Yoder, a traditional healer in the Amish settlement, gives Jacob a foot treatment and neck rub, Jacob's wife, Lizzie, gets upset. Do you think she has a right to be frustrated at Jacob? Why or why not?
3. Lizzie frequently expresses worry about a possible attack by French soldiers or Native American warriors, and tells her daughter Barbara that she hadn't actually wanted to come to America. Do you think Jacob takes his wife's concerns seriously enough?
4. Worrying that his own and his family's commitment to nonresistance is waning, Jacob travels to Philadelphia to buy a copy of *Martyrs Mirror*, a collection of stories about Anabaptist martyrs from earlier centuries. How do books like *Martyrs Mirror* serve to remind us to remain faithful?
5. Jacob doesn't have a good answer when his young children question him in Philadelphia about how their family, instead of the Indians, ended up owning their plot of land. How do you think the Amish settlers in the 1700s made sense of that question? What answer might you have offered?
6. One evening, after reading the story about martyr Dirk Willems, Jacob prays for strength and tells God that he will respond peaceably if his family is attacked. What role do you think this prayer plays in the way that the rest of the story unfolds?
7. During the Indian and French attack, Joseph wants to at least fire a warning shot into the air, but Jacob tells him to put down his gun. What do you think you would have done in this situation?

Part II

1. Early on in his captivity, Jacob reflects on what had just happened and, for a moment, second guesses his decision to tell his sons to put away their guns during the attack. How can Christians make sense of decisions made out of deep conviction that end in death or trauma or harm to loved ones?
2. Jacob's commitment to loving his enemies continues to be tested during his time of captivity, especially when he sees the scalp of his beloved daughter Franey. What resources of faith and experience does Jacob bring to this seemingly impossible commitment to loving those who had killed his daughter?
3. Jacob's sons Joseph and Christian, who are taken into captivity with him, respond in their own way to the events. Joseph, for example, wants to take revenge on his captors. How might his sons' accounts of this have been different from Jacob's?
4. During his time on the trail, Jacob begins to learn that his Native American captors are pawns in the larger context of the French and Indian War. How does this growing knowledge likely affect Jacob's relationship with those who kidnapped him and his sons?
5. At home in Northkill, Jacob's daughter Barbara is left to wonder about the fate of her father and two brothers and to grieve the deaths of her mother and siblings. In what ways is her journey toward forgiveness as difficult as that of her father and brothers? In what ways is it easier?
6. At one point during his captivity, Jacob wonders whether God actually expects ordinary people like him to forgive, or only heroes of the faith such as Dirk Willems. What challenges of forgiveness have you faced in your own life? Have you ever been tempted to think that forgiveness is an option, not a requirement, of the Christian faith?
7. Barbara and her husband, Cristy, decide to stay in Northkill despite the fact that her family had been attacked. What do you think you would have done?
8. Jacob's escape from Buckaloons is fraught with danger and the ever-present possibility that he will be found and returned to captivity. What factors do you think motivated Jacob to take the risks necessary to make such a daring escape?

Part III

1. Jacob's return home to Northkill is a partial reclaiming of what he had lost. Now that he is home, how is the task of forgiveness different from or the same as it had been for him on the trail?
2. After her father returns home, Jacob's daughter Barbara is also faced with several adjustments, including coming to terms with her father's nonresistant commitments and her ambivalence about her mother's death. What internal conflicts does Barbara experience, and how does she handle them?
3. The Amish community helps Jacob to rebuild his house and damaged property. When have you experienced the support of the church community? How can churches better respond to the needs of their members?
4. Jacob works diligently to try to get his sons returned from captivity. How do you think he maintains the strength and perseverance and hope necessary for this work?
5. Jacob's budding romance becomes complicated by the community's gossip and prejudice and also his own lingering grief. How does Jacob decide to move forward with pursuing the woman he is coming to love despite these obstacles?
6. The act of reconciliation between Jacob and Scar Face toward the end of the book is startling, considering the violence the Indians had enacted on Jacob's family and the continuing violence against the Indians. How are individual acts of forgiveness and reconciliation like this one connected to larger conflicts like war?
7. How does Jacob's reconciliation with Scar Face free him to move forward in life? In what ways have you experienced forgiveness as freedom?
8. *Jacob's Choice* is based on the historical events of the attack on the Jacob Hochstetler family and the resulting relocation of many in the Northkill Amish settlement. How does the fact that many of these events actually happened affect your experience of reading this novel?
9. *Jacob's Choice* is the first in the Return to Northkill trilogy. What hopes do you have for Jacob, Barbara, and their family members in the next novel?