

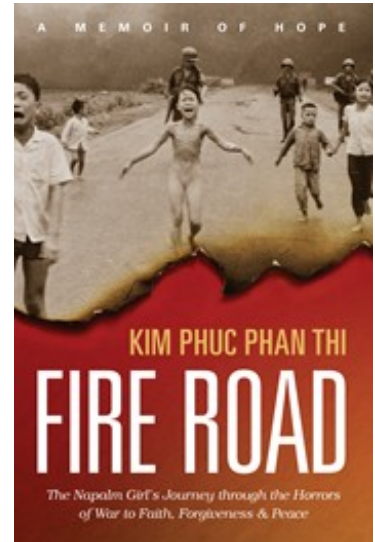
Discussion Guide

This discussion guide is divided up by the sections you will find in the book, *Fire Road*. It can be used for individual reflection at whatever pace is best for you, or can be used for a four-week group study. Within each week, the questions are broken out by several chapters at a time so you can adjust for a shorter or longer study as best fits your needs. Feel free to focus on the questions or issues that resonate the most with your group; the guide is intended to be a starting point for deeper conversation, community, and spiritual growth, so use it as a base and let God guide your time together.

PART 1: A BODY ABLAZE

Read chapters 1-3

1. Before the war came to Kim's specific village, she was utterly unaware of the atrocity unfolding all around her, throughout all of North and South Vietnam alike. This makes sense, given her age—she was just a child, and children have an uncanny ability to focus exclusively on what is before them. Thinking back on your own childhood, describe a situation—in your own family, perhaps, or in the world at large—that you only became aware of years later, once you had informed hindsight on your side. Do you wish you had known back then what you came to understand afterward? Why or why not?
2. What did you make of Kim's parents' decision to work full time, leaving eight children in the hands of another primary caregiver—in this case, Kim's great-uncle? How does this arrangement reflect or differ from the way in which you were raised? If you're a parent, then how does it relate to how you yourself choose to parent?
3. When Viet Cong rebels surfaced at Kim's family home, Kim's mom, Nu, agreed to their demands that she wait until they had built their tunnel before she took her family and fled. Was this the best response, or should she have acted differently? What would you have done, had you found yourself in her situation?
4. For Kim's family, the CaoDai temple was a place of refuge, and its role in the early part of Kim's story is nearly that of a character, as it receives and shelters, comforts and quiets Kim and her loved ones. In what ways did temple life provide hope for Kim, during a time when fear ringed her village of Trang Bang? Do you resonate with the idea of a religious structure possessing seemingly benevolent qualities? Why or why not?
5. Kim spoke of the fearsome experience of hunkering down in the temple as she waited for the war to pass through Trang Bang as an "adventure." What about the situation do you suppose felt especially adventuresome to her? Given your own personality and propensities as a child, do you think you would have felt thrilled or troubled, were you in Kim's shoes?



6. What did you make of Kim's dad's decision to leave the family and temporarily take up residence in the heart of Trang Bang, until things settled down with the war? What risks would he have had to assume, were he to insist on staying with Nu and the children? Would you have assumed such risk? Why or why not?

7. What did you know of this phase of the Vietnam War, prior to reading *Fire Road*? Had you seen Kim's iconic photo before? If so, what do you remember knowing about the circumstances surrounding this little girl running naked up a dusty Vietnamese road?

8. In June of 1972, when confronted with the decision regarding whether to print Kim's picture, the Associated Press wrestled over the appropriateness of publishing a nude image—especially one featuring a young child. Did they make the right call by running the photo? What assumptions, beliefs, or firsthand experiences support your thoughts on this?

Read chapters 4-6

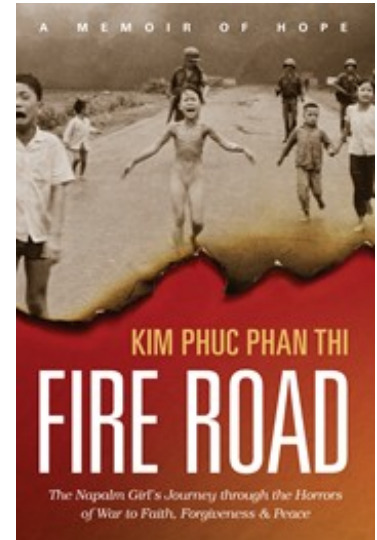
1. A key turning point occurred when Kim's father, Tung, happened upon an old friend from his university days who now worked at the hospital where Kim lay. It was this doctor's request that caused an ambulance to miraculously show up and transport Kim to the burn clinic, where she would find treatment adequate to her wounds. Kim admits that this special treatment wound up costing someone else a bed at the burn clinic, someone who followed the proper protocol for being there. How would you have handled this situation if you were Kim's father? What about if you were the doctor who called for the ambulance?

2. Given the agonizing pain involved in the burn-bath process, how do you think Kim survived her daily routine, and do you think this ability to persevere centered more on physical or spiritual qualities? Describe a time when you have endured hardship on some level and were later amazed that you overcame.

3. How did Kim's mom's prayer asking that the gods of CaoDai would take Kim's life strike you? Considering a mother's uniquely powerful place in a child's life, should Nu have prayed this prayer?

4. After Kim's return home, following her fourteen-month hospital stay, she surveyed the bleakness that used to be her hometown and said that when those bombs were dropped, it was as if everything had exploded—her family's freedom, their resources, their very lives. What words would you use in trying to describe how that reality must have felt to Kim? Replaying seasons of significance in your own life, when have you known a bomb-dropping experience? How did you manage to move ahead?

5. What does Kim's resilience—and the resilience demonstrated by her siblings—during the two years of living in their family's bombed-out home with no electricity, no plumbing, no roof, no consistent food supply, no money, and—for Kim anyway—no relief from pain, tell you about the power of the human spirit?



6. What conclusions did you draw about Kim and about the environment in which she grew up when you learned that her first thought upon feeling the surge of napalm fire overtake her skin was, *I am ugly now*?

Read chapters 7-10

1. When the war returned to Trang Bang and thrust Kim and her family from their hometown once and for all, Kim was twelve years old. What do you imagine to be the significance of being an adolescent—one who is already undergoing meaningful shifts emotionally, physiologically, psychologically, and more—during these wild turns of events?

2. Once the war had ended, Kim admitted that there had been moments of levity along the way, such as when her ma, Nu, lost track of her youngest child, only to discover that he was planted on her hip. When have you had a similar experience, of knowing laughter during a time of great grief? In what ways have you seen humor provide coping energy in stressful situations?

3. How does Kim's account of her trio of attempts to flee Vietnam compare with your previous assumptions regarding the famed "boat people"? Have you ever found yourself in such dire straits that you, too, would consider outright escape?

PART 2: A LIFE EXPLOITED

Read chapters 11-12

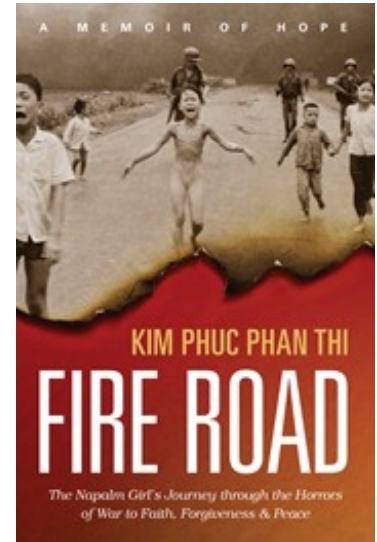
1. When the communist "minders" showed up to collect Kim for the first in what would be round upon round of publicity interviews, should Kim have gone "without protest," as she said of her departure? What recourse did she have that she didn't consider pursuing at the time? What would your reaction have been?

2. Kim confessed that she did not confide the truth of those governmental "visits" to anyone, for fear that punishment for such a betrayal would be more severe than she could handle. Would you have protected the government in this way, or would you have sought out help? Explain why you answer the way you do.

3. Many students these days fail to take their education seriously, and yet for Kim, gaining her degree was the fulfillment of a most precious dream. What was it about Kim's culture, her upbringing, or her firsthand experiences that caused her to hold an education as dear?

4. Were you surprised to learn that Kim grew so despondent as to sit on the brink of suicide? Why or why not? Why do you suppose she was able to bear up under such unthinkable pressure and atrocity for so many years, only to finally "snap"?

5. Do you view the circumstances surrounding Kim's coming to faith in Jesus Christ as "divine intervention" or as the logical outcome of a thorough religion-centered research endeavor? Why?



6. The character Anh, Kim's sister's first husband's cousin, played a primary role in Kim grounding her understanding of the Christian faith, which proved to be life-changing, life-giving input for her. Did Anh "do enough" in helping Kim? Why or why not? When have you yourself known the aid of an "Anh," someone who stepped into your life for a profound period of time and then for whatever reason stepped out?

7. In the end, Kim chose her new faith over her allegiance to her family. Was this the right choice? Why or why not?

8. What assistance did Thuy provide for Kim that Anh had not provided? How would you differentiate their contributions to Kim's life? How do these contributions support the words of the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 3:

For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal? Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour. For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building. (kjb)

Read chapters 13-17

1. Upon learning of Kim's faith decision, Kim's mom Nu effectively disowned her. "Then you are not my daughter!" she said to Kim. Why was her reaction so strong and so declarative? How should Nu have responded?

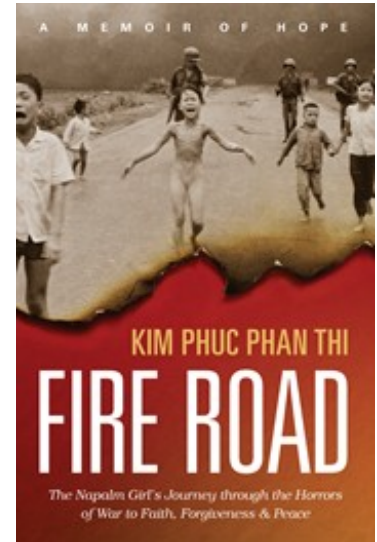
2. What do you make of the fact that Kim is found without schooling, without certain resources such as food and shelter, and, now, without the support of her family, and yet she is no longer contemplating suicide. What has changed for her? Why is she able to withstand such stress now, when before it all seemed to be too much?

3. Kim would come to rely on the aid of Mister Minh along the way, a press photographer who worked for the Vietnamese government. Were you surprised to find such a kind person inside of an unkind regime? Can you think of another time when you have witnessed compassion inside of the broader context of oppression? Describe the circumstances you observed.

4. Why was Kim so willing to accompany Mister Perry Kretz, to her a perfect stranger, to Germany? Would you have gone? Why or why not?

5. Given all of the pressures and obligations of his high office, why did Bac Dong, the prime minister of Vietnam, give Kim an audience—and not once, but dozens of times?

6. When Bac Dong revealed Kim's destination—Cuba—should Kim have pushed back against going to yet another communist country? Why or why not?



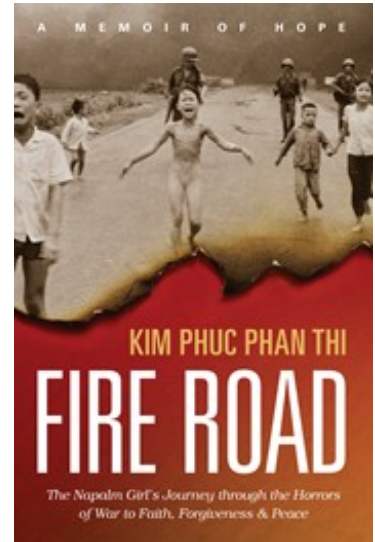
Read chapters 18-19

1. What did Kim hope to accomplish by returning to Trang Bang to see her ma just before she departed for Cuba? Were her expectations met? If so, how? If not, why not?
2. Of all the challenges Kim faced upon arriving in Cuba, which seem the most difficult to face to you, and why?
3. Kim's poorly thought-out plan to carry her own water up multiple flights of stairs landed her in the hospital, but it also paved the way for her meeting her future husband, Toan. Do you view this sort of turn of events as mere coincidence, or as an appointment orchestrated by God? What beliefs fuel your perspective here?
4. What was it about Toan that seemed magnetic to Kim? How did she know she was dealing with "true love" here, given how desperate she was to find *any* love?

PART 3: A PEACE PURSUED

Read chapters 20-22

1. At Gander International Airport, Kim knew she faced a ripe opportunity to defect. But she also knew that her new husband opposed the idea. Should she have followed through with her plan to stay in Canada? Why or why not? Should Toan have given in, as he did, or insisted on returning to Cuba?
2. Which of Kim's firsthand life experiences empowered her scrappy resourcefulness during her first days in Canada, when she and Toan had to put together a go-forward plan for building a new life in a new country, where a brand new language was spoken?
3. What did you make of Kim's assertion that since Toronto sounded like the name of a favorite fruit of hers in Spanish—toronja—it was the destination for Toan and her? Should her process for selecting a new hometown been more methodical than this? Why or why not?
4. Why did the Vietnamese Association of Toronto respond with such vehement vitriol when Kim and Toan sought their aid? Should they have responded differently than they did?
5. Kim's acquaintance in New York, the woman named Merle, put her in touch with Nancy Pocock in Toronto, an introduction that would change everything for Kim and Toan. How would you have responded, had you been in Merle's shoes the day her phone rang with Kim Phuc on the other end of the line?
6. Of all the investments Nancy Pocock made in the lives of Kim and Toan, which do you believe were most valuable, and why?



7. Just as Kim and Toan found Toronto's city-bus-exiting protocol to be quite perplexing, when have you been confounded by the systems and practices of a foreign place? Why are missteps such as these so humorous after the fact?

8. During their month-long stay at Henry's Motel in Toronto, Kim felt certain peace that she and her husband would land on their feet and enjoy this new life they'd found, while Toan was a basket of nerves. Whose response most closely mirrors how you would feel, were you in the situation they were in, and why?

9. Upon devoting himself to following Jesus Christ, Toan stopped drinking, smoking, and using harsh language. Does making such a faith decision always necessitate habit-changes like these? Why or why not? Can a person's faith be "real" if his or her old habits remain? What beliefs or experiences support your answer here?

Read chapters 23-26

1. As Kim and Toan got settled in Toronto, they were told by the Canadian welfare office that it would "illegal" for them to work, until they were confirmed citizens of the land. Should this have been the official policy? Why or why not? What happens in a person's mind, soul, and life, when he or she is denied the opportunity to work?

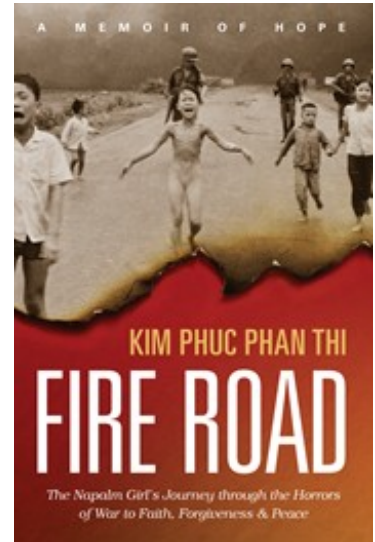
2. In Toronto, Kim attributed her joy in the midst of all the challenges she faced to the fact that at last, she was free. How do you define freedom? Why is freedom such a joy-inducing factor in life?

3. Kim and Toan were understandably moved by the kindness of strangers upon Thomas's birth, when they received room décor and clothing for their newborn boy. When have you been similarly blessed by the power of community? Describe the circumstances at play and the intervention you received. What encouragement is to be gained from the presence of others who take up our cause?

4. Upon beginning Bible college, Toan chose to return to Vietnam to minister to his family and friends. Given the inherent risks in traveling back to the communism from which he and Kim had defected, would you have chosen to return, or would you have steered clear for the rest of your life? Why?

5. How was Kim able to marshal forgiveness toward all of the people who had wronged her? Should she have forgiven them? Why or why not?

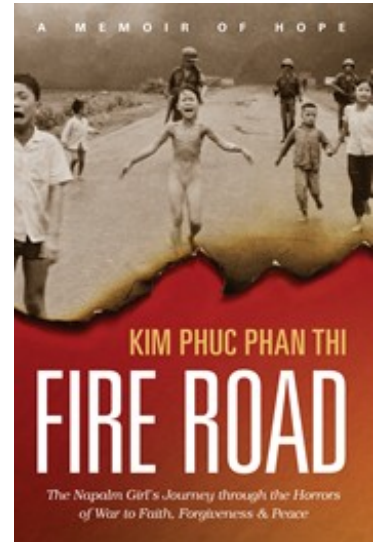
6. Can you relate to Kim's description of her heart, once filled with sludge, now running clear with crystal-clean water? How have you experienced bitterness being removed from your life? Describe the situation and its effects.



PART 4: A STORY REDEEMED

Read chapters 27-28

1. Considering the weighty demands on her body and on her schedule with two young sons at home, should Kim have accepted or declined UNESCO's invitation to become a traveling ambassador for them?
2. Kim's platform with UNESCO became the idea that while "we cannot change the past, with love we can heal the future." Do you believe this to be true? Why or why not?
3. What must their reunion at the Toronto airport have been like for Kim and her ma? Have you experienced a reunion such as this, one drenched in such deep emotion? Describe the experience.
4. Being together after having been apart for so long could have proven a difficult undertaking for Kim and her parents, and yet the relationship seemed only to be strengthened during Ma and Dad's visit to Toronto. What made their time together so smooth?
5. At some point, Kim came to the conclusion that the napalm bombs that had detonated her entire existence had actually led her into the arms of Christ. Do you agree or disagree with this assessment, and why?
6. Were you surprised or unfazed by the fact that Kim's parents—and then her siblings as well—wound up putting their faith in Christ, just as Kim herself had done years before? Why?
7. Should Kim have been so bold about sharing her faith with such prominent leaders as the duke of Luxembourg and the prime minister of Vietnam, Bac Dong? Why or why not?
8. Despite all the healing Kim has found, she still describes her life as "saddled with pain," explaining that "once we live something, we cannot unlive it." How have you seen this dynamic realized in your own life? What is one experience you wish you could "unlive"?
9. Kim took great comfort from the fact that her sons readily forgave the man who stole promised monies from their account. Would this extension of forgiveness have heartened you as well, or would you have hoped your children would stand up for themselves, fight for justice, and work to recoup the lost funds? Discuss the worldview that fuels your response.
10. Eventually, Kim chose to discontinue the use of painkillers, since their effect was minimal at best. What do you make of this decision? Would you have chosen differently?
11. The divinely imparted "pain relievers" Kim came to look to involved simple choices, such as smiling, singing, phoning a friend, and more. Do you think these seemingly inconsequential interventions really could alleviate serious pain? Why or why not?
12. What does Kim's ability to see God's faithfulness throughout a life filled with pain suggest about her perspective on suffering, on faith, and on life?



Read chapters 29-Epilogue

1. By the time Kim was handed the opportunity to participate in Doctor Jill's fractional ablative laser therapy, she had accepted her pain and her scars. Why did she pursue this treatment? Would you have followed suit? Why or why not?
2. What emotions were elicited from you when you read of the audience's reaction at Necker Island to Kim choosing to bare her scars?
3. Upon her return to Route 1 in Trang Bang, why did Kim thank God for the fire road she'd been asked to walk?

