Analysis:

5. On his way home from his meeting with Hester, Dimmesdale experiences some strange impulses. What are some of the things he is tempted to do? Why do you think he is tempted to do these things?

6. Compare Dimmesdale’s physical and mental state in Chapter 20 with Hester’s at the beginning of Chapter 18. Describe the similarities and differences.

7. Why does Dimmesdale suddenly leave the procession from the church and go to the scaffold? Did you expect this action? Is it in character?
Dig Deeper:

8. In Chapter 21, Hawthorne describes the crowd gathered for the holiday and speaks of two groups of "barbarians." What two groups are these and which group does he describe as "wilder"? Note the relation of these groups to the choices Dimmesdale has before him at the end of Chapter 17. What might this say about Hester's and Dimmesdale's choice?

9. At the end of Dimmesdale's climactic confession, Pearl finally gets her wish:

   "My little Pearl," said he feebly, . . . "dear little Pearl, wilt thou kiss me now? Thou wouldst not yonder, in the forest! But now thou wilt?"

   Pearl kissed his lips. A spell was broken. The great scene, of grief, in which the wild infant bore a part, had developed all her sympathies; and as her tears fell upon her father's cheek, they were the pledge that she would grow up amid human joy and sorrow, nor for ever do battle with the world, but be a woman in it. Towards her mother, too, Pearl's errand as a messenger of anguish was all fulfilled.

   What three questions are answered or problems solved in this scene?
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10. At the end, Dimmesdale says, with apparent joy, “God knows; and He is merciful! He hath proved his mercy, most of all in my afflictions. . . . Praised be his name!” It seems strange for Dimmesdale to be joyful and grateful as he faces death and ignominy after so many years of pain and misery. Read Proverbs 3:11, 12; Hebrews 12:5–11; 1 Corinthians 13:12; Philippians 3:8–11. How do these verses illustrate what Dimmesdale may have been experiencing?