

Crooked Lines Reading Guide

Discussion Questions & Reflection Prompts

By Shaun Critzer

A companion guide for individual reflection or group discussion of the memoir
“Crooked Lines: Bent, Not Broken”

How to Use This Guide

This reading guide is designed to help you go deeper with the themes, lessons, and insights from *Crooked Lines*. Whether you’re reading alone, with a sponsor, in a book club, or in a recovery group, these questions will help you:

- **Reflect** on your own experiences with trauma, addiction, and recovery
- **Process** difficult emotions that the memoir may bring up
- **Connect** the lessons from my story to your own journey
- **Discuss** meaningful topics with others in recovery

For Individual Use: Journal your responses to the questions that resonate most with you.

For Group Discussion: Choose 3-5 questions per session and allow everyone time to share.

Content Warning: This guide addresses childhood trauma, addiction, and mental health. Please practice self-care as you engage with these topics.

Part I: Childhood Trauma & Building Armor

Chapters 1-6 (Ages 6-17)

Reflection Questions:

1. **The Oxygen Tent:** Shaun describes feeling trapped and powerless as a child in the oxygen tent. What early childhood experiences made you feel powerless or unsafe?
2. **The Cage:** The metaphor of “the caged animal” represents the rage and fear Shaun buried. What emotions did you bury as a child? What would happen if you let them out?
3. **Building Armor:** Shaun used bodybuilding and achievement to build protective armor. What armor did you build? How has it both protected and imprisoned you?
4. **Childhood Sexual Abuse:** Shaun buried his abuse for decades. If you experienced childhood trauma, what prevented you from talking about it? What would it take to finally speak your truth?
5. **Performance vs. Authenticity:** Shaun learned to perform instead of being real. Where in your life are you still performing? What would it look like to show up authentically?

Group Discussion Prompt:

“The armor we build to protect ourselves becomes our prison.” Share one way your protective mechanisms have become limiting in your adult life.

Part II: Love, Competition & First Substances

Chapters 7-12 (Ages 17-20)

Reflection Questions:

1. **First Drink:** Shaun describes alcohol as “liquid courage” that made him feel normal. What did your substance of choice do for you in the beginning? What

promise did it make?

2. **Codependency:** Shaun's relationship with Jennie was built on performance and people-pleasing. How have you used relationships to avoid dealing with yourself?
3. **Achievement Addiction:** Winning the Virginia State Championship and competing for Mr. Teen USA fed Shaun's need for external validation. What achievements or accomplishments have you used to prove your worth?
4. **Ricky's Death:** The loss of his friend Ricky was a warning Shaun didn't heed. What warnings did you ignore on your path to addiction?
5. **The First Line:** Shaun crossed from recreational use to self-medication. When did you cross that line? What were you medicating?

Group Discussion Prompt:

"I thought I was using to have fun, but I was really using to survive." When did you realize your using had become about survival instead of recreation?

Part III: Addiction, Lies & Destruction

Chapters 13-20 (Ages 20-31)

Reflection Questions:

1. **The Decade of Darkness:** Shaun calls 2002-2012 his "decade of darkness." What was your darkest period? What kept you going during that time?
2. **Dry Drunk:** Shaun describes being sober but not in recovery—white-knuckling without addressing the underlying issues. Have you experienced this? What's the difference between sobriety and recovery?
3. **The Affair:** Shaun's affair was a symptom of his deeper brokenness. What destructive behaviors have you engaged in that were symptoms of unprocessed pain?
4. **Protective Orders:** Shaun lost access to his children. What relationships did your addiction destroy? What did you lose that you thought you'd never get back?

- 5. Suicidal Ideation:** Shaun reached points where he wanted to die. If you've been there, what kept you alive? If you haven't, what gives your life meaning when things get hard?

Group Discussion Prompt:

"I was dying from the inside out, but everyone thought I had it all together." Share about a time when your outside life looked fine but you were falling apart inside.

Part IV: Rock Bottom & Path to Recovery

Chapters 21-28 (Ages 31-34)

Reflection Questions:

- 1. The ABC Store Parking Lot:** Shaun's moment of decision in the parking lot was pivotal. What was your "parking lot moment"—the moment you chose recovery over relapse?
- 2. The Ranch:** Treatment at The Ranch cracked Shaun open through EMDR, psychodrama, and inner child work. What therapeutic modality has been most healing for you? What helped you process your trauma?
- 3. The Serpent Vision:** Shaun's spiritual experience showed him he was being protected. Have you had moments where you felt something larger than yourself was at work in your recovery?
- 4. Rigorous Honesty:** Shaun learned that half-measures don't work—recovery requires complete honesty. Where are you still holding back? What truth do you need to tell?
- 5. Meeting Shannon:** Shannon saw Shaun at his worst and chose him anyway. Who has loved you through your brokenness? How did that change you?

Group Discussion Prompt:

"Recovery isn't about becoming perfect—it's about becoming whole." What does wholeness mean to you? How is it different from perfection?

Part V: Recovery, Redemption & Purpose

Chapters 29-37 (Ages 34-Present)

Reflection Questions:

1. **Peaceful Co-Parenting:** Shaun and Jennie achieved what seemed impossible—peaceful, respectful co-parenting. What relationship in your life needs healing? What would it take to get there?
2. **Blended Family:** Building a blended family required vulnerability and commitment. What does family mean to you today? How is it different from your family of origin?
3. **Making Amends:** Shaun made living amends through changed behavior over time. Who do you need to make amends to? What's stopping you?
4. **Digital Gravity:** Shaun turned his mess into a message by helping others build businesses. How can you use your story to serve others? What's your purpose in recovery?
5. **Thirteen Years:** Shaun celebrates 13 years sober. What milestones have you reached? How do you celebrate progress without becoming complacent?

Group Discussion Prompt:

“God writes straight with crooked lines.” How have your mistakes, detours, and rock bottoms become part of your redemption story?

Themes for Deeper Exploration

Trauma & Addiction

Key Insight: “Sobriety without trauma work is just white-knuckling.”

Questions:

- How has unprocessed trauma fueled your addiction?
- What trauma work have you done or do you need to do?

- How has addressing your trauma changed your recovery?

Vulnerability & Armor

Key Insight: “The armor we build to protect ourselves becomes our prison.”

Questions:

- What armor are you still wearing?
- What would it feel like to take it off?
- Who in your life has seen you without your armor?

Shame & Honesty

Key Insight: “Shame thrives in secrecy. Healing requires bringing it into the light.”

Questions:

- What are you most ashamed of?
- What would happen if you told someone?
- How has honesty changed your recovery?

Redemption & Purpose

Key Insight: “Nothing is wasted in recovery. Every broken piece can be redeemed.”

Questions:

- What parts of your story do you think are unredeemable?
 - How might those parts actually be your greatest gifts?
 - What’s your purpose in recovery?
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Action Steps

After reading *Crooked Lines*, consider taking these action steps:

- Tell Your Story:** Share your story with one person you trust
 - Process Your Trauma:** Find a therapist who specializes in trauma (EMDR, CBT, etc.)
 - Make Amends:** Identify one person you need to make amends to and take action
 - Find Community:** Join a recovery meeting, support group, or online community
 - Serve Others:** Use your story to help someone else who's struggling
 - Celebrate Progress:** Acknowledge how far you've come, even if you're not where you want to be
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Resources for Continued Growth

Books:

- *The Body Keeps the Score* by Bessel van der Kolk
- *Alcoholics Anonymous (The Big Book)*
- *Getting Past Your Past* by Francine Shapiro
- *Daring Greatly* by Brené Brown

Therapy:

- EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing)
- Trauma-Focused CBT
- Psychodrama
- Group Therapy

Support:

- Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)
- Narcotics Anonymous (NA)
- SMART Recovery
- Celebrate Recovery

Crisis Support:

- 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline
- SAMHSA: 1-800-662-4357

- Crisis Text Line: Text HOME to 741741
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Final Reflection

Write a letter to yourself:

What did this memoir teach you about your own journey? What do you want to remember six months from now? What action will you take as a result of reading this book?

Dear Future Me,

Connect with Shaun

Visit www.shauncritzer.com for:

- Recovery courses and community
- Weekly blog posts and videos
- Free resources and tools
- Speaking and coaching

Social Media:

- YouTube: [Channel TBD]
 - Instagram: [Handle TBD]
 - Facebook: [Page TBD]
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Share Your Story

If *Crooked Lines* impacted you, consider:

- **Leaving a review** on Amazon or Goodreads
- **Sharing the book** with someone who needs hope
- **Joining the community** at www.shauncritzer.com
- **Telling Shaun** how the book affected you

Recovery is possible. You are not alone.

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