

Crooked Lines Reading Guide

This reading guide is designed for individual reflection or group discussion. Whether you're reading alone or with a book club, recovery group, or therapy group, these questions will help you go deeper with the themes of trauma, addiction, and redemption.

Part 1: Childhood and Trauma

Shaun's story begins with childhood trauma that shaped his nervous system and set the stage for addiction. These questions explore the connection between early experiences and later behaviors.

1. How did Shaun's childhood experiences shape his view of himself and the world?
2. What role did shame play in Shaun's early life? How did it manifest later?
3. Shaun describes his nervous system as "wired for survival, not connection." What does this mean?
4. How did you react to the descriptions of Shaun's childhood trauma? What emotions came up?
5. Can you identify ways your own childhood experiences shaped your coping mechanisms?

Part 2: Addiction and Rock Bottom

Shaun's descent into addiction wasn't a moral failure—it was a nervous system response to unhealed trauma. These questions explore the nature of addiction and what it takes to hit bottom.

1. Shaun describes multiple "rock bottoms." Why do you think one wasn't enough?
2. How does Shaun's understanding of addiction differ from the traditional "moral failure" model?
3. What role did shame and secrecy play in keeping Shaun stuck in addiction?
4. Shaun struggled with process addictions (compulsive behaviors, affairs, bodybuilding) in addition to substances. How are these similar? How are they different?
5. What was the turning point for Shaun? What finally made him willing to change?
6. Have you ever felt stuck in a pattern you couldn't break? What was that like?

Part 3: Recovery and Healing

Recovery is more than just stopping a behavior—it's about healing the nervous system, processing trauma, and building a life you don't want to escape from.

1. How did Shaun's understanding of recovery evolve over his 13-year journey?
2. What role did therapy, 12-step programs, and community play in Shaun's healing?
3. Shaun talks about "nervous system regulation" as central to recovery. What does this mean?
4. How did Shaun rebuild trust with his family after years of broken promises?
5. What surprised you most about Shaun's approach to recovery?
6. What does "bent, not broken" mean to you?

Part 4: Redemption and Hope

Shaun's story doesn't end with sobriety—it continues with a life of purpose, connection, and service. These questions explore what redemption looks like.

1. How has Shaun's past informed his present work and purpose?
2. What does redemption mean in the context of Shaun's story?
3. Shaun is open about his struggles, even the ugly parts. Why is this important?
4. How has reading this book changed your understanding of addiction and recovery?
5. What's one thing you'll take away from Shaun's story?
6. If you could ask Shaun one question, what would it be?

Tips for Group Discussion

If you're using this guide with a group, keep these principles in mind:

- Create a safe, confidential space. What's shared in the group stays in the group.
- Listen without judgment. Everyone's story and recovery journey is different.
- You don't have to share if you're not ready. It's okay to pass.
- Avoid giving advice unless asked. Sometimes people just need to be heard.
- Honor the courage it takes to be vulnerable.

Thank you for reading Crooked Lines. Whether you're in recovery yourself, supporting someone who is, or simply seeking to understand the human experience of trauma and healing—you're not alone. Recovery is possible. Healing is possible. You're worth it.