

CORE Decipher Discussion Questions

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Fear and Trust

How is trust the opposite of fear?

In his book *Trusting God*, Jerry Bridges says, “The sovereignty of God is often questioned because man does not understand what God is doing. Because He does not act as we think He should, we conclude He cannot act as we think He would.” How was this true of Seth and Krystin? How did it change?

In chapter 2, Seth and Krystin have a brief discussion:

“It’s my problem to fix. I never should have allowed this operation to get so big.” [Seth]

“Hey, you did the best you could with what you knew.” [Krystin]

I inch to the edge of the vehicle. “Be sure to pray. I’ll be praying for you all.”

“I’m wondering if God abandoned us a long time ago.”

What does this reveal about their trust in God at this point in the story? Why do you think their perspectives are so different?

In chapter 12, Seth’s dad offers some advice: *“I listed my concerns one by one and found Bible verses to go with each one. Truth has a way of destroying fear. Against the truth of the scripture, fear loses its power.”* Have you ever tried a spiritual warfare tactic like this? Do you think it works well?

Seth references Luke 10:41-42 and Jesus’ words to Martha. *“You are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed. Sitting at Jesus’s feet.”* How was Seth worried and troubled about many things, and what changed as the story progressed?

In chapter 34 Seth learns of a major setback. He’s been using the wrong program or trying to use it for the wrong purpose. *“All my efforts were based on bad information.”* How is this symbolic of some

characters' spiritual struggles? Specifically, who came to wrong conclusions based on insufficient information and what was the result?

Espionage, Morals, and Government

What different espionage tactics were employed throughout the book, and which were your favorite?

Ethics and Espionage:

- When is it right to lie or hack in order to do good?
- How does the book handle the tension between “the ends justify the means” and biblical ethics?
- Which characters were better at making the right choices in this regard?
- What lines do the characters cross, and which ones do they refuse to cross?

In *The Ethics of Smuggling*, Brother Andrew says, “Of course, we must obey our government, but that goes only so far. We must obey unless that government...takes the place of God.”

- What do you think about that statement?
- What scripture supports Brother Andrew's opinion?
- In what ways did Seth and his family and friends follow this advice?

How does CORE represent both protection and control?

In chapter 27 Lasure makes a statement about technology. “A nation built on technology and surviving on technology at its very core can be too easily controlled by those who create and maintain that technology.” Do you agree with his assessment? Why or why not?

What does the story say about the cost of freedom versus the cost of safety?

Also in Chapter 27, Lasure talks about socialism. “The SAP never really achieved the socialist state it was designed to be—the way it's taught in the classrooms. Because it's always been plagued by the greedy, wealthy, powerful

people running things at the top. But I will change that one day soon. I'll ensure a balanced, moral person of the people will sit in the highest position and make all things right."

Those promoting communism and socialism often use situations like "the greedy, wealthy, powerful people running things at the top" as justification for implementing a new form of government. Yet Lasure himself admitted communism/socialism can be corrupted.

- How is Lasure's plan to fix such problems different and superior than other attempts?
- Which socialist or communist nations have yet to achieve their promises of a better government? Offer historical and current-day examples.

Seth

How does the opening scene show the difference between what Seth can control with his ID and what he can't?

What does the empty bullet casing symbolize for Seth in the first part of the story? How does that change by the end, and what causes the change?

Even though Seth won battles with fear in *CORE Deception*, how were his struggles with fear different in *CORE Decipher*?

Consider the opening exfiltration (and supply grab) and rescuing Krystin from the reeducation facility. Which operation followed its plan better? What are the differences in how Seth felt during the operations and afterward?

In chapter 39 Seth narrates, "*But if God is thrusting this on me, I shouldn't fight it. Maybe feeling inadequate is a good thing.*"

- How has Seth's view of responsibility changed from the first chapter to the last?
- What brought about that change?
- How could feeling inadequate be a good thing?

Krystin

When does Krystin's anger, as understandable as it is, start to cross a line?

How does Krystin's grief shape her choices throughout the story?

In chapter 8, Krystin talks with Aliyana about hardship:

"I've wondered 'why us?' many times," [Aliyana] says. "Your sister, your uncle, my mom, and others. It seems like God allows some people to suffer more than others, but I don't know why."

I'm way ahead of her. "It's like he doesn't actually care."

"Or maybe we just don't understand what he's doing...I settle for not fully understanding. Like why did Jesus allow Lazarus to die? That would have been heartbreaking for his sisters. But he had a bigger plan they didn't know about."

- Why does God seem to allow more suffering in the lives of some people?
- How does Aliyana's quiet faith contrast with Krystin's struggle?
- Is Aliyana settling for blissful ignorance, or is she demonstrating faith?

In chapter 21 Krystin tells herself. *"Justice requires more than knowledge. It requires action."* Explain how you agree or disagree with her statement.

How does Krystin's relationship with Jhalak evolve, and why does that matter?

Why is the moment Krystin chooses not to shoot Lasure so important?

In chapter 29, Krystin observes of herself and Lasure, *"We each developed our own moral code to bring about the justice we saw necessary."*

- How does each of us develop a moral code?
- How can it happen unintentionally?
- What are ways to ensure one's moral code has a solid foundation?

In the final chapter, Krystin references Jesus' interaction with Lazarus, Martha, and Mary in John 11. She suggests that Jesus might have appeared uncaring when he didn't arrive in time to heal Lazarus.

And yet His care showed when He wept in verse 35. How do you reconcile these two seemingly contradictory actions of Jesus?

Jhalak

What does Jhalak's reaction to Tina's death reveal about her need for connection? How is this similar to Jhalak's persistent search for her father?

Why do you think Jhalak allowed herself to trust Seth even though he'd been her enemy?

How does Jhalak's distrust of pretty much everyone around her serve her well? How does it create problems for her?

Which scene shows Jhalak at her most vulnerable, and what does it show about her changing character?

Lasure

How does Lasure's tragic past explain (but not excuse) his methods?

What makes Lasure a compelling villain?

How does the firefight in Hardwick's office show the cost of Lasure's obsession?

Lasure and Seth both want to free oppressed people from overbearing control. How are their goals different? Contrast Lasure's worldview with Seth's and how it affects his choices.