

BO'S CAFÉ

DISCUSSION STARTERS FOR GROUPS

The questions in this document are intended to help you further explore what living in the kind of authentic, healing relationships presented in *Bo's Café* is all about. Use them with your family, friends, small group, or book club.

We call them discussion starters because that's what they are. They are not designed or intended to be a formal study guide.

If these questions are going to be used as the basis for a series of discussions, we suggest that each person who will be participating read the entire book *before* the first discussion. Doing so will help provide the context for some of the questions for the early chapters.

We hope you find these discussion starters to be a valuable resource in your journey into the healthiest possible relationships. In return, we highly value your comments and/or questions regarding them. Please provide them to us by visiting the [Contact Us](#) page at www.boscafe.com, where the regulars show up at *Bo's Café* every Thursday.

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John Lynch, Bill Thrall, & Bruce McNicol, co-authors, *Bo's Café*

Chapter 1: Fenton's Ill

1. What is your impression of Steven as he sits in the bar? What do you think is his emotional and spiritual state?
2. Have you ever had an Andy in your life?
3. On page 7, Andy makes this statement: *"See if this fits: it's like you're stumbling around, in a dark room, bumping into furniture. . . . After many experiences, you've learned to memorize paths around the pain... You start reacting to pain more than anything else. You make decisions based on what hurts least. You avoid stuff you know you should face. You avoid interaction with people you suspect might be moving your furniture."* Have you experienced times when you think you have figured ways to insulate yourself from being hurt? In what ways?

Chapter 2: You Really Don't Get It, Do You?

1. Have you ever been in Jennifer's shoes—either waiting for someone to come for you or to fulfill a promise, or overhearing a harsh fight between people you love? What was your response?
2. Give your response to Lindsey's statement on page 16: *"I used to be able to stay in the ring with you. But something inside me has gone away. I've lost my confidence. I've lost who I used to be. I don't even recognize me anymore. So, Steven, you win. You've beaten me down to where I can't help you anymore."*
3. When the argument escalates to Steven becoming physical, how did that affect you? How do you feel about Lindsey's responses? What would you have done in her place?

Chapter 3: She's a Lot of Detroit Magic, She Is.

1. On page 21, Steven reflects on Andy's comment: *". . . until you let someone shine a light into your room, nothing's gonna change. Life's gonna get more painful, more confusing and darker."* Why is this a difficult thing for us to do?
2. How does Andy's "indiscretion" affect your view of him? Is he qualified to help Steven? What qualifies those who "help" you?
3. How would you feel if you were Steven and received Andy's response and had to wait for five days to get together?

Chapter 4: The Marriott, Room 643

1. What are your thoughts about Steven leaving the house at Lindsey's request and going to a hotel?

Chapter 5: *The Bluff Facing South*

1. Andy talks about "Self-protection" with these statements on pages 32 and 33: "*All these people. How many of them will ever get to see their abilities released? They keep slamming up against the same wall because there's no one to protect them in their weak areas. And they end up bitter and cynical. . . . And this isn't even including all the lights that have been intentionally turned off. They're convinced if others can't see an issue, it might not exist. These are the most pitiful ones. They're being eaten alive in secret. It's the hiding that gives their issues power. That's how addictions gain their strength. And slowly, it begins to define their lives.*" What is your response to these words? Is anything eating at you?
2. Andy tells Steven that he is looking for a way in, access to the real Steven. What does he mean by this? Do you have conversations like this in which you are trying to get below the surface of someone's words to the heart or vice versa?
3. Why did Andy say it took courage for Steven to confess that he was living in a hotel? Why was this an important step for the relationship?

Chapter 6: *My Respect for Burglars is Rising By The Moment*

1. What is Steven's reason for calling Andy? Does Andy's response meet his expectations? Why or why not? What do you think of Andy's advice? How do you respond in similar situations?
2. Why do you think Steven followed Andy's advice?

Chapter 7: *Angry People Eat, Don't They?*

1. Comment on this from page 52: "*I have no desire to be your fixer. I want to be your friend. And friends learn to trust each other with their stuff so they can stand together. . . . so the more you can let me know the real Steven and the more I can let you know the real Andy, the sooner we can begin to sort things out. That's it. . . . I'm not scared off by your arrogance, your anger, or your rudeness.*" Is there any life situation where you wish you would have had this advice? Explain.
2. How does Cynthia's wisdom affect you? Do you wish for a Cynthia, or do you push away the Cynthia's in your life?
3. On page 66, Carlos says: "*Andy was the first dude I ever met who had more confidence in the grace of God than in the power of the crap I was dragging around.*" What do you think he means? How does the insight in that statement affect you?

Chapter 8: *At a Table a Few Blocks from the Marriott*

1. Is Steven changing? What creates for you the greatest hope of changing?

Chapter 9: Why Do You Enjoy Making Everything I Say Sound Stupid?

1. Comment on this one from pages 86 and 87: *"See, Steven, you're the last person anyone should listen to about solutions for you because you've got it all distorted and you're convinced you're right. You live 24 hours a day in your self-contained world, where everything is about appearances, performance, bottom lines, leverage and control. But the truth is, as confident as you try to appear, my guess is you don't feel adequate for the job. You're pretty sure you're all that, but you're not sure everyone else agrees. So you're worried, afraid that you're failing. You even blame yourself. . . So you create this world where on one hand you hate yourself for what you suspect is true, and on the other hand you idealize yourself and blame others for not acknowledging the brilliance of this idealized person. Both of these make you blind to what God might be trying to tell you. And that's when the lights go out and you start tripping over end tables."* Does any of this sound like someone is reading your mail? If so, describe.
2. How do you respond to this from page 90: *"What if there was a place safe enough to tell the worst about you and still be loved just as much, if not more, for sharing it? Do you know what happens?" "Carlos says your stuff starts to get fixed." "Resolved. . . It's called an environment of grace."* What questions do these statements create for you?
3. Think about these words from Andy on pages 93 and 94: *"I've come to believe there are no together people. Only those who dress better than others. . . . It's a myth about needing superior religious folks to impart truth to the rest of us. Such people do not exist. Only those who think they are. Each of us, Steven, walks with a profound limp. Some have just learned to hide their limps better. Don't ever trust anyone who makes you feel intimidated by their presence because of some aura of religious superiority. People like that are almost always hiding something—incredible arrogance or a secret depravity that would shock you."* How have the "superior" affected you?

Chapter 10: God, What Are You Doing to Me Here?

1. What does Steven mean on page 101 when he says: *"And now, something I can't seem to control or even name is about to sabotage me. And none of my training has prepared me to solve this one. . . . No one in this company knows me. . . But I can't come up with one time when anyone asked me how I was really doing. I've been dying inside these last few months, and no one sees it or wants to see it."* Why is this an important concept to verbalize? Why and when is vulnerability healthy?
2. Andy's email to Steven speaks of trusting another person as the key to finding what he needs. What is your history with trust? What is *Bo's Café* teaching you about trust, relationship, and safety?
3. What does Andy mean by *permission*?

Chapter 11: We Should Talk AND Chapter 12: Out of Excuses

1. Hank and Carlos talk about influence versus authority you get with a title. Describe each and name someone in your life under each category. To which one do you feel closest? Explain.
2. Tackle this quote from Carlos on page 120: *"This relational stuff, the good stuff? Well, it's messy, man. Because it demands that you care about something more than getting better before you can ever get better."* What does this mean? Why does that disturb Steven? How does it strike you?
3. How did the news of Andy selling the Electra hit you? What is your opinion of Andy for selling it?

4. Hank seems to show a new side at this point. What is your impression of him? What do you think of this level of honesty of telling Steven how he comes across, and what the guys think will be his next move? Have you had anyone speak with you that way? How did you respond?

Chapter 13: *This Whole Stinking Thing's a Joke!*

1. What is Steven's conclusion about God and His role in Steven's life? Do you see any fallacy in his thinking? If so, describe.
2. Have you ever come to a similar conclusion? Explain.

Chapter 14: *Good-bye to the Mint-Strawberry Water*

1. What is Steven feeling as the chapter begins? What does he think will happen when he returns home? What do you think will happen? Why?
2. What does Steven see in Jennifer that is like himself? Is there evidence of any change in his attitude or awareness?
3. Reflect on Steven's comments about learning to not be a jerk and telling Jennifer he loves her. Which do you think was harder for him to say? Which do you think meant more to Jennifer?

Chapter 15: *Just Alan*

1. Steven gets upset about the message on the answering machine. What does he assume about Lindsey? At the beginning of the book, Steven went ballistic about being accused of the same thing without a fair checking of the facts. What is different in this case and why does he insist he is right on this?
2. Describe the dynamics in this scene. What changes do you see from the one in the opening chapters? What are your feelings about what is happening? Have you been in a similar situation in which you thought you had overcome some habit or sin, only to fall headlong back into it again? Describe the situation.
3. Steven has a revelation on the bluff, pages 136 and 137: *"I'm struck with the thought that this all may not get better. That I don't have the ability to fix myself and that Lindsey and Jennifer will continue to suffer for it. Why does she stay? Maybe this time she won't. . . I'm so afraid I'll always be like this. . . I no longer trust my own remorse."* What is Steven realizing about his own self-effort to change? How do you think he views himself at this point in time? Do you think this is a good place for him to be? Why or why not?

Chapter 16: *I'm a Mess, Andy*

1. Andy says: *"You're owning the consent you give yourself to control others with your anger"* on page 144. What does this mean? How does anger control other people? Is there anyone you know who does this? How does it affect you? How do you respond to that person?

2. What type of shame-story does Steven realize he has? How has he tried to rewrite his story? What do you think might be the stimulus behind his shame?
3. Andy declares on page 152 that everyone doesn't experience that freedom from shame because *"We haven't learned how to trust that what He says is true about us. . . . It's hard to accept the lies we tell ourselves and replace them with the real identity God's handing us."* What is he talking about?
4. *"This is the greatest lie in the mix—the conviction that we can fix ourselves, the conviction that He wants us to try, the conviction that He's angry at us if we don't try harder."* Andy makes this assertion on page 153. How do you react to this? Does this make sense to you?
5. *" . . . repentance isn't about doing something about your failure. Repentance is admitting you can't do anything about your failure. It's not just agreeing you've done something wrong; it's admitting you can't do what needs to be done to make it right. God waits and yearns for that moment with everything in Him."* What do these words on page 164 say to your heart? Is it comforting or rather frightening? Are there ways in which you have been trying to change behavior without realizing that God is looking for your surrender to Him?
6. When Steven mentions on page 164 that Lindsey doesn't trust him, Andy replies: *"First, she shouldn't trust you, no matter what you tell her. . . . She'll have to watch and see if your repentance is authentic. The heart can't be talked into trust. Though she may not trust that you have yet fully changed, she can believe that you mean the words you're saying. She may not trust that you can make anything change yet, but she can at least believe your sincerity. . . . If you want to get your foot back in the front door, ask her if she's ready to hear from you. If she says no, believe her and wait as long as she needs."* What would this advice mean to you if you were Steven? If you were Lindsey, how would you respond if this were carried out?

Chapter 17: Go Figure. Andy Was Right.

1. Consider the prayer that Steven offers to God on pages 169-171. What is your assessment of these words? If applicable, describe a time when you told God you had reached the end of your own ability to make life work. How did you feel about God and yourself at the time?
2. When you read the encounter between Lindsey and Steven on pages 172-180, describe your thoughts about Lindsey's emotional stages. If you were in her shoes, how do you think you would have responded to Steven?
3. On page 179, Steven gives his wife permission to tell him when he is getting out of line. How would that make you feel in a similar situation? Have you ever had anyone be so vulnerable with you, or have you been so vulnerable with another? What was the result?

Chapter 18: Where Do We Go From Here?

1. *"Something beautiful and fragile has happened. But we both agree that we don't know how to turn this around by ourselves. Reaffirming our love and commitment to each other won't do it alone. There's still so much we're unwilling to touch. We're both afraid that we'll soon figure out how to undo the magic God worked for us several days ago."* Give your comments on this realization from pages 181 and 182. Does it seem accurate to say they need more than their own abilities to turn the relationship around? How would you want to proceed in such a situation?

2. What are your feelings as you read about Steven returning the key to the Electra to Hank at Bo's Café? Does his action surprise you? What's going on with Steven?

Chapter 19: How Have I Missed This Kind of Life?

1. Can you explain the change in Steven?

Chapter 20: So the Suit Found a Date, Huh? What the Deal is With Dat?

1. *"For the first time in a very long time, I am actually in the moment, fully enjoying it, fully a part of it. For so long I was watching my life from a distance, critiquing everyone and everything in it. Standing outside its enjoyment. Today, it's as if that whole way of coping has blown out the top of Andy's convertible"* - page 191. Describe a time when you felt totally "in the moment". If that is not a normal experience for you, are you aware of things that keep your mind preoccupied and distant?
2. What do you think Lindsey is feeling when she sits at the table with "the gang"? Why does her silence get to Steven? What do you think he is feeling? What do you think about his inner monologue regarding Lindsey's motives?
3. What is going on when Steven blows up? How do the others respond to his outburst? If the friends weren't there to stand with him, what do you think Steven would feel and do?
4. Page 202 - *". . . There is really only one solution. You'll have to keep admitting it and let God and some humans who love you begin to protect you. That truth's all you got. . . .if you keep telling the truth, regardless of how embarrassing it is, it'll have a profound effect on you. It'll begin to free and heal you. And you'll actually behave like less of a Neanderthal. I'm thinking she's bound to pick that up. So the gamble is whether she can hold out that long, whether she should hold out that long."* How did Andy and the others demonstrate protection of Steven? How about of Lindsey? How will continuing to tell the truth free and heal Steven so he will act less and less like a "Neanderthal"?

Chapter 21: Why Do You Get So Angry?

1. What are your emotions as you read the encounter between Steven and Jennifer? Can you explain the reasons behind the feelings?
2. How would Steven's note affect you if you were Lindsey?

Chapter 22: There Ain't No Together People, Just Those with Whiter Teeth

1. *"When I was hidden, everybody was paying for it. Even if they didn't know it. Everybody was being robbed of the best of who I was. Even when I was on my game, I couldn't give you the real stuff God put inside me to give away. People wanted to love me, but they couldn't. People wanted me to love them, but I couldn't. Everybody lost. . . . The goal is not just for someone's exposure, but their freedom—so everyone gets the best of you."* from page 214. What does "hiddenness" mean to you? How have you experienced it? What emotional state does it leave you in?
2. How are you impacted by the story that Keith and Cynthia share? What is your response to Cynthia's confession of her feelings of superiority that robbed Keith of his freedom and healing? Do you identify with this Keith and Cynthia in some way?

3. Andy states that the New Testament writers imagined churches that behaved like the friends at Bo's Café. Do you think that is a possibility? What would that look like? Would that be a place you would want to be? Why or why not?

Chapter 23: *I Was Playing You Like a Gibson Hummingbird*

1. Andy finally reveals the heart of his shame issues with his dad. Do you have any relationships in your life that come to mind as you read his story? Do you feel that the issues are still unresolved and you feel defined by the shame of never being good enough?

Chapter 24: *And Back Again*

1. What are your thoughts about the interaction between Lindsey and Steven at this point? Does the new look to the relationship surprise you? Why or why not?
2. How do you view the friendship that has developed between Andy and Lindsey and Steven? Tell about a friendship that you have that has some of the same qualities, and the parts that mean the most to you.

Chapter 25: *I Have Waited For This Moment All Week*

1. Describe your feelings as you read this last chapter. Have you had the opportunity to offer someone who trusts you the privilege of walking together through some difficult unresolved issues?
2. What are some key things that you have learned about yourself while participating in this group? Are there some practical things that can be applied in your relationships?
3. Do you already have relationships of trust and vulnerability in which you can be honest about your struggles and needs? If no, is this something that you would like to try, your own "Bo's Café" with another person or two?