

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Is your book group reading one of Chris's books? Chris would love to join your discussion, either via Skype or by phone. To submit your request, please visit www.chrisfabry.com/contact and fill out the **Book Group Request Form**.

1. At the beginning of the story, J. D. muses that “he was a stranger here, and the thought comforted him.” Why do you think he feels that way? Given what you learn about J. D., what do you think drove him to Arizona in the first place?
2. In many ways, J. D.'s sojourn in the desert parallels stories of biblical characters driven to the wilderness. Can you think of any examples? Have you ever experienced a period of “wandering in the desert”? If so, what did you learn?
3. Why do you think J. D. decided to help Maria instead of calling Border Patrol as Slocum had instructed? Both Slocum and Pastor Ron later accuse him of having the same motive. What is it? Do you agree?

4. Late in the story, J. D. looks back over the events that brought him to this point and begins “to piece the what-ifs together.” What questions and possible outcomes does he consider? If J. D. hadn’t met Maria, how do you think the next five years of his life would have unfolded?
5. Why does J. D. have such a negative view of God? Have you ever experienced a tragedy that caused similar feelings, even on a smaller scale? Were you able to move past it and still believe? If so, how?
6. J. D. remembers his father telling him that “small decisions lead to big ones.” What did he mean by this? How do you see this idea play out in the story? Have you seen it illustrated in your own life?
7. J. D. often refers to the racist attitude prevalent in the small Arizona town. How does Maria turn the tables on him? (See p. 99.) Have you ever had to confront this kind of stereotype, whether in your own thoughts or in other people’s assumptions—even their assumptions about you? How did that feel?
8. On p. 94, J. D. muses that Maria “was a jigsaw puzzle, and the more edge pieces he found, the more he felt like he shouldn’t empty the box. Just put it back on the shelf and walk away.” Were you skeptical of Maria? Why or why not? Did your view of her change as the story went on?
9. Several times throughout the story, characters argue about whether or not it’s right to help an illegal alien. What are the arguments on both sides? What side would you fall

on? Can you think of any stories or passages from the Bible that would apply?

10. On pp. 169-170, J. D. says that he used to think his life was up to chance. And if it wasn't, that would be more frightening to him. What do you think he means? Which do you think is more frightening to believe—that we control our destinies or that God does? Why?
11. Consider Pastor Ron's response to Muerte's question about the existence of evil in chapter 21. What did you think of their conversation? If someone asked you why God allows suffering, how would you respond?
12. When Maria asks J. D. why he helps her instead of going after the million-dollar reward, he replies, "Money can't give me anything I don't already have." How does this compare to the old adage "Money can't buy happiness"? Do you agree with J. D.'s perspective?
13. The desert setting plays a big part in the story. What obstacles does the desert present that the characters must overcome? Are there any ways that the setting also helps them?
14. In chapter 22, Maria tells J. D. that she believes the opposite of fear is love. How does this discussion influence J. D.'s decisions? Do you agree that "you cannot love and fear at the same time"?
15. What struggles do J. D. and Maria have ahead of them as the story concludes? If you were to write a sequel, what do you think would eventually happen?