***Ask Him Why***

Book Club Questions

1. The family’s reaction to Joseph’s surprise homecoming is characterized by Ruth’s observation: “This silence was electrical. It had a dark crackle to it . . . This was heavy and sickening.” How does this silence pervade the entire book?

2. Joseph is willing to pay the price for not obeying military orders. Is there ever a time when it is right to go against direct orders? Did he do the right thing?

3. During the trial, Joseph’s honor keeps him quiet so he won’t implicate anyone else, but it also brings the full blame on him. Does Joseph’s silence make it worse or better? If Joseph had told the truth then, how might things have been different?

4. The shame that follows from the media coverage of the trial plays a major part in the deterioration of the family. The media hones in on sensational stories without necessarily knowing all the facts. Can you think of instances in today’s society where this happens?

5. Aubrey hero-worships Joseph at the beginning of the novel and later completely turns against him. In a media interview, he calls his brother a coward. How painful do you think that was for Joseph? How did the bargain Joseph made with his adopted father precipitate this?

6. When Ruth finally asks Joseph what happened, he says, “We were in their country. Can you imagine how we would feel if some foreign army were occupying our country? Setting up checkpoints? Shooting up cars and the people in them if they didn’t stop on command? Breaking down their doors in the middle of the night? That’s what we were doing. That was the duty I finally refused.” How did this situation lead Joseph to make the choices he did?

7. What does Hamish do after encouraging potential jumpers to come inside his home? Why do you think this works so well?

8. When asked about what drives people to attempt suicide, Hamish answers, “When people come here, everything in their life is bad, but that’s not the problem. The problem is, they think it always will be. They can’t see anything new and different down the road. People can bear almost any amount of pain if they think there’s an end to it.” Do you agree with him? Does he make a valid point?

9. Joseph was institutionalized after running away when he was twelve years old. How does that experience come full circle by the end of the book, when Joseph becomes the Keeper of the Cliff?