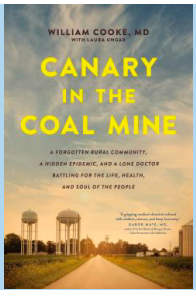
Discussion Guide



Canary in the Coal Mine
William Cooke MD

Tyndale Publishing
2021
320 pages
ISBN: 978-1496446480

Substance Use Disorder

Summary

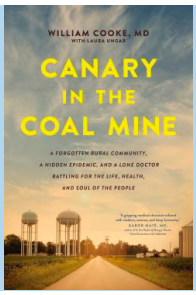
When Dr. Will Cooke, an idealistic young physician just out of medical training, set up practice in the small community of Austin, Indiana, he had no idea that much of the town was being torn apart by poverty, addiction, and life-threatening illnesses. Soon, however, he would find himself at the crossroads of two unprecedented health-care disasters: an opioid epidemic and the worst drug-fueled HIV outbreak ever seen in a rural American community. Confronted with Austin's hidden secrets, Dr. Cooke decided he had to do something about them. But in taking up the fight for Austin's people, he would have to battle some unanticipated foes: prejudice, political resistance, an entrenched bureaucracy—and the dark despair that threatened to overwhelm his own soul. *Canary in the Coal Mine* offers inspiration for anyone fighting in the face of daunting obstacles — and a road map of hope for those concerned about our nation's preparedness to deal with ever more deadly outbreaks of disease.

Questions

1. In the opening lines of this book, Dr. Cooke says: "The COVID-19 outbreak that gained momentum throughout the United States in 2020 highlights how socioeconomic and racial disparities impact the health of people." What disparities do you think became most apparent during the global pandemic and why?
2. As a boy, Dr. Cooke was inspired by the story of Ryan White. What elements of the story meant the most to him? Who were your own heroes growing up, and how did they inform your values as an adult?
3. Dr. Cooke says that the outcome of people born into poverty can often by determined by the answer to a single question: "Was there one person he or she could count on for protection, encouragement, and inspiration?" (page 47). Why does he believe this? Do you agree with him? Why or why not?
4. Why did Dr. Cooke originally believe that addicts can't be helped until they hit rock bottom? What is his view by the end of the book? What were some of the factors that contributed to the shift in his thinking? What is your own opinion on this and why?

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5. What took Dr. Cooke to the Amazon, and what happened there to change the course of his life? Have you ever had a similar experience that caused you to see your life's purpose differently? What happened, and how did it affect you?
6. In chapters 7 and 8, we learn about the reasons for and consequences of needle sharing and the resulting connection between the opioid crisis and HIV. How does this data affect Dr. Cooke's decision to support the needle exchange program? What are the reasons behind the controversy and the arguments for/against the program?
7. Dr. Cooke asks: "How do you address a public health crisis when part of the solution is against the law?" (page 98). Can you think of examples in which someone believed the right course of action in crisis meant standing up against an established system or law? What were the circumstances in that case, and what are the similarities/differences between it and Dr. Cooke's stance?
8. Which stories of Dr. Cooke's patients stand out the most to you and why?
9. "Be the man Austin needs right now," Dr. Cooke's wife advises him (page 183). Who is the person your own community needs right now—what qualities, skills, or areas of focus would he or she have? In what ways are you equipped to be that person?
10. Has *Canary in the Coal Mine* affected any of your own opinions on the opioid crisis, the factors influencing drug use, the impact of drug laws on different racial communities, or the most effective treatment methodologies? Why or why not?

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