

Discussion Guide



Summary

The Urge illuminates the extent to which the story of addiction has persistently reflected broader questions of what it means to be human and care for one another. Fisher introduces us to the people who have endeavored to address this complex condition through the ages: physicians and politicians, activists and artists, researchers and writers, and of course the legions of people who have struggled with their own addictions. He also examines the treatments and strategies that have produced hope and relief for many people with addiction, himself included. Only by reckoning with our history of addiction, he argues--our successes and our failures--can we light the way forward for those whose lives remain threatened by its hold.

Questions

1. This book covers a lot of topics, substances, and time periods, going back and forth between historical information and the author's own personal experience. Did you think this was effective? Why or why not? Were you able to see connections between the history and the personal story and have a clear idea of the points the author was trying to make?
2. Were you surprised at how far back in history philosophers and others were writing about addiction (even if they weren't yet using that word for it)? What does this tell you about addiction?
3. The author writes about how his own race, privilege, and class gave him access to better treatment, less discrimination, and more chance for a successful future than people without those privileges who also experience addiction. Have you seen this play out with people you know or in places you live? If so, in what ways?
4. The author writes about addiction being a societal problem that requires community healing. Do you think he made a convincing case for this premise in the book? Why or why not?
5. During some parts of history complete abstinence from drugs or alcohol were seen as the only way to successfully handle addiction. Other approaches suggest moderate use might not necessarily lead to relapse or addiction. Do you think the author made a convincing argument for either side of that debate? Which approach resonates with you and why?

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6. The author states that drug scares historically occur when a new drug moves into the mainstream. How does this point make you think about the current opioid crisis in the U.S.?
7. The author writes that companies that produce drugs usually don't bear the cost of the harm their products cause. Do you think that has changed since the time the book was published? If so, how?
8. This book explores the question of whether addiction is a physical disease, a character disorder, a spiritual sickness or something else entirely. Do you think the author reached a conclusion on this? Did the book give you more clarity on this? How would you categorize addiction after reading this book and why?
9. Which communities or demographic groups do you think would benefit most from reading this book?
10. What, if anything, new did you learn from this book that will affect how you approach issues of addiction for yourself or for people close to you?