

The Salt and Light Express discussion questions

Prepared by the author

Spirituality based questions

1. When you close your eyes and think of God, what do you see? How has your upbringing and culture shaped this vision of God?
2. What is prayer for you? How do you pray and what do you pray for? How do you know when a prayer is “answered”?
3. How comfortable are you with silence? How successful are you at leaning into and sitting in silence?
4. What does “mindfulness” mean to you? Is that an easy state for you to achieve? How do you think being more mindful would affect you and those around you?
5. What do you believe are the minimum “requirements” for being a Christian? Is it teachings? Beliefs? Scripture? Practice?
6. How would Jared’s sermon be received in your congregation? Have you ever thought about how Jesus would be treated if he showed up today?
7. Chris always assumed that Jared would “judge” her or “rebuke” her. She was waiting for it. But he did not. What assumptions and actions keep us from truly knowing and understanding each other?
8. Why do you think the American version of Christianity has strayed from the core teachings of Jesus? (particularly, the Beatitudes in Matthew 5: 3-10 and Matthew 22: 37-40). Or you may not agree that it has – why not?
9. What is faith to you? Jared’s definition of faith: *So when we are fearful because someone is different than us and we feel threatened, our faith is clearly telling us to trust that love will deliver us. Not fear. Not hate. Not indifference. Love.* How would that definition play out in today’s world? Is it naïve?
10. Do you think Chris had a viable faith? She struggled with many basic tenets of Christianity, but she held on to the teachings of Jesus. Is that enough?

General questions

1. Do you think a road trip is an effective way to deal with grief? What do you believe Chris was trying to achieve (or forget) by heading west all along?
2. What places have you been (in the United States or elsewhere) that inspire a sense of awe and majesty? If you could live (or at least visit) anywhere, where would it be and why?

3. If you are an older person, especially female, do you sometimes feel invisible to the world around you? Is that a good thing or a bad thing?
4. Where do you find belonging and community apart from your family?
5. The small-town library and its director were community fixtures in the novel. What role does the library play in your community, and how can/do you support it as a citizen? Are you familiar with its programs, book clubs, and other events?
6. Are there episodes of our history in the United States that you now view differently than when you were in school? Do you think it's important to keep re-evaluating our history, or is it harmful?
7. How responsible do you think Chris was for Sally's accident? How does she finally overcome her guilt, or does she?
8. Chris sometimes seemed to be ambivalent, or at least reticent, about her sexuality. She admitted to not being much of a "rainbow flag waver." Why do you think that was?
9. What do you think the book says about forgiveness and our capacity for it?
10. Do you believe Chris grew over the course of the novel? If so, how?