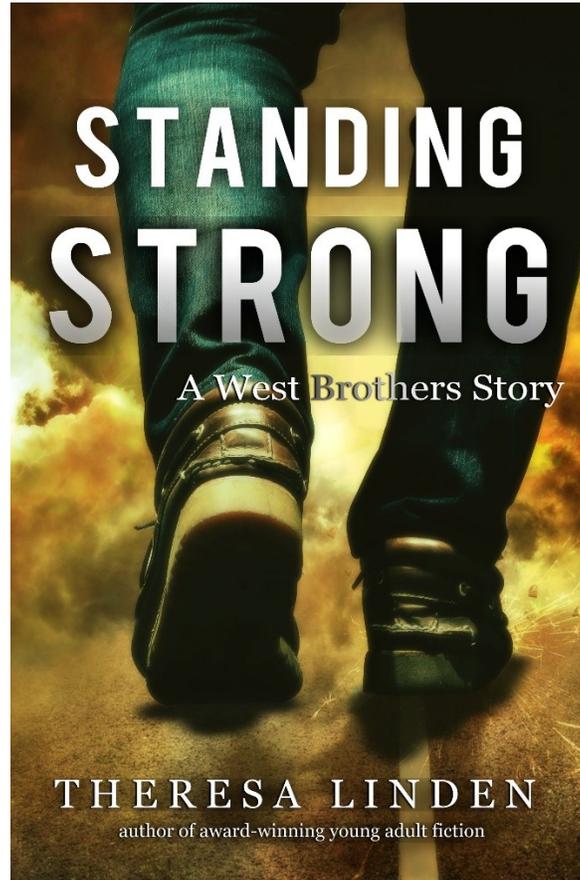


STANDING STRONG

Study Guide

by Theresa Linden

(Teacher edition: includes Answer Key)



Discussion/Study Guide for
Standing Strong,
Book 4 in the West Brothers series
by Theresa Linden

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Cover: Theresa Linden



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Note to Instructor

This study guide is intended to help students analyze the story by providing comprehension questions. These questions are designed to be adaptable and can be answered with one or two sentences or with longer essays. They may also be used as discussion questions, although additional discussion questions are also provided at the end of the book as spring-boards to more in-depth analysis. Select the questions appropriate for your student(s). Suggested answers are provided after the student pages. Discussion questions do not have suggested answers.

Synopsis

Having just confessed his sins to his priest--more sins than a kid his age should have--Jarret jumps in his Chrysler 300 and races to the outskirts of town. Emotion overwhelming him, he pulls off the road and flings himself face down behind an outcropping of rocks. Ever since that life-changing night in the canyon, Jarret has felt the presence of the Lord in his soul. Now that presence is fading. Is it his fault? How will he remain faithful without it when he still struggles against the same temptations?

Meanwhile his twin brother, Keefe, questions whether he has a calling to religious life. He's gone along with Jarret's bad schemes for years. Is he worthy of such a calling? What would he have to give up to pursue a vocation? Keefe reads everything he can about Saint Francis and the Franciscans, but he's afraid to talk to his father about the Franciscans' upcoming discernment retreat because his father seems closed to faith. Is he ready to go all in?

Follow the West brothers in this contemporary teen fiction as they struggle through temptations and trials down paths they can barely see, toward goals they desire in the depths of their hearts.

Note from the Author

A cradle Catholic, I grew up in a two-parent family with an older brother and younger sister. My father was in the Coast Guard, so we moved often, giving me the impression that life was an adventure. We lived in several parts of California, the small island of Guam (it's in the Pacific Ocean near the Philippines and Japan—hard to find on a map), and in Oahu, one of the Hawaiian Islands. We visited many cultural centers and historical sites, enjoyed bananas and coconuts from the trees in our yard, saw wild boars in the woods behind our house on Guam, and we lived through Typhoon Pamela.

My father retired in Ohio, where I currently live with my husband and our three teenage boys. As a teen, the cold weather, flat landscape, difficulty making friends, and knowing that we would not move again dampened my spirit of adventure. God, however, never ceases to care for us, and He soon began to show me an even greater adventure than the ones I previously experienced. Our parish youth group leader's zeal and fiery love for Christ and His Church opened my eyes to the beauty and exciting elements of our Catholic faith. As a young adult, bursting with the desire to share this treasure, I decided I wanted to learn how to write. It has taken years to refine my skills, but I am now pleased to present these books to Catholic teens and adults everywhere. I hope each book sparks in my readers' hearts a greater love for the treasures of our Catholic faith.

Chapters 1-5

1. Name and describe the two main characters of this story. Give each one's strengths and weaknesses and their story goals.
2. Why does Jarret seem so desperate to receive a reply from God?
3. What seems to be the worst temptation for Jarret in the first chapter?
4. What has inspired Keefe to rearrange his bedroom?
5. Why does Keefe hesitate to reply to the Franciscans' email?
6. How does the verse at the beginning of Chapter 2 apply to Keefe? "God enriches the soul which empties itself of everything." ~Saint Pio of Pietrelcina

7. Why does Jarret stop at the bookstore?
8. What character development do you find once Jarret steps inside the bookstore in Chapter 3?
9. When Keefe goes to his father's study, what does he overhear his father say that has him concerned?
10. Explain some of the reasons Keefe thinks his father might not want him becoming a Franciscan.
11. What does Keefe decide to do to get his answer about God's will? Where does the idea come from? How do these plans change?
12. What does Keefe learn about himself as he's sparring with Peter at the Brandts' house?
13. What is Jarret supposed to write in his journal? How can a journal help one on the spiritual journey?

Chapters 6-10

1. What does Jarret's journal entry describe? How important is this moment to him?
2. Describe the way Keefe feels about his relationship with Jarret, and the challenge that brings to his vocation discernment.
3. On the horse ride, what advice do the twins give each other?
4. What does Mr. West announce over dinner, and what do the twins think about it?
5. Describe Keefe's mood as he sets out on his forty hours? What verse inspires him?
6. What does Jarret do when he notices the trouble his friends brought into the house?

7. While his friends form a line to get drinks, Jarret flops onto the couch, frustrated. What image goes through his mind and why?
8. What profound truth does the journal entry after Chapter 9 capture?
9. Share some of the setting details in Chapter 10 and explain how they reveal Keefe's mood.
10. What does Jarret do when faced with Nate's emergency? Does he seem to feel that he acted responsibly?

Chapters 11-15

1. Explain how the river reminds Keefe of the Blessed Mother?
2. When Keefe cracks his leg into something in the dark cave, he thinks about offering up the pain. Why doesn't he? What does it mean to offer up our pains?
3. When Keefe falls in the river, what thoughts go through his mind?
4. How does the story about Brother Bernard from the *Little Flowers of Saint Francis* speak to Keefe in his misery? Define the virtue of humility.
5. When Jarret explains why he came to find Keefe, what advice does Keefe give him? Does Keefe offer good advice? What is Jarret's response?
6. What small victory does Keefe claim at the end of Chapter 12? How important are the little victories in life?

7. While Jarret is driving home what questions does he think of that we all need to think about?

8. Once he returns home, what consequence does Jarret get for his actions and how does he feel about it?

9. How can an author use a dream to develop a story? What internal battle does Keefe's dream show, and how does the verse "Blessed is he who takes no offense at me" apply to him?

10. On the first day of school, as Jarret stands in the middle of the hallway, what does he seem concerned about? What temptation strikes when he sees Roland? How does he handle it?

11. What two other incidents on the first day of school show Jarret's weaknesses?

Chapters 16-20

1. At the beginning of Chapter 16, while Jarret is storming down the hall, intent on revenge, he sees a figure surrounded by golden light. If you've read *Battle for His Soul*, you can probably identify the figure. What other clue is given? Who is this and why is he here?
2. Before Jarret throws the first punch, a warning flashes in his mind. "It was as if he stood before a closed door, with a choice. He could leave the door closed and walk away, or he could open it and obey the heat of his passion." How does a door symbolize temptation?
3. After hearing the news of what Jarret did, what does Keefe think his dream means? Why does he then change his mind?
4. Once Jarret gets home and up to his bedroom, describe how his actions have made him feel. What positive step does Jarret then take? Explain why it's a good step.
5. When Jarret's father speaks with Jarret, how are his words different from what Jarret expected?

6. What is Jarret's next journal entry about?

7. Keefe is finally ready to ask permission to go on the retreat, but he stops in the hallway near the door to his father's study. What does Keefe overhear that gets him worried?

8. Why is Jarret in such a good mood Friday?

9. What does Keefe give Jarret and how does Jarret respond?

10. At the restaurant, Mr. West suggests they all go on the annual camping trip that the Brandts sponsor. Why don't the twins want to go?

11. What is the meaning of the quote "The sun never hides his light for fear of inconveniencing the owls?" What other Franciscan story gives Keefe courage on his way to finally speak with his father?

12. How does Mr. West respond to Keefe's request to go on the discernment retreat?

Chapters 21-25

1. What does the mysterious text message "*If she knew you, she wouldn't like you*" make Jarret think about?
2. While Keefe and Roland are at the Fire Starters meeting, what does Mr. West do that is unexpected?
3. Jarret calls a meeting with his brothers after school. What behaviors have them all worried about their father? What conclusion do they come to? And what do they plan to do about it?
4. Share a few signs from Chapter 23 that show Jarret is trying to follow his conscience.
5. Who is Tyrone and how does Jarret respond to Tyrone's behavior?
6. How does Keefe's experience at the ice cream shop get him thinking more about the vocation to the religious life?

Chapters 26-29

1. Why do the West brothers find it odd that their father is planning the menu with Nanny?
2. The West brothers planned to talk with their father on Saturday. What happens that makes their plans impossible?
3. How does Miss Meadows reply when Jarret tells her they think something is wrong with their father? Does her answer satisfy Jarret?
4. Share Jarret's notes in his journal about the Brown Scapular. What do you know about the Brown Scapular? Define talisman. What does the Catechism of the Catholic Church say about superstition? See no. 2111.
5. Define juxtaposition. How can an author use this in fiction? Describe how the setting details in Chapter 28 and Keefe's mood create a bold juxtaposition.

6. What happens that affects Keefe's plans? Does he respond the way he should?
7. Why does Keefe hesitate to make the Sign of the Cross when he prays before his meal? What does Piper reveal about herself next? Could there be a connection to his expression of faith and Piper's choice to share her story? Do you think showing one's faith in different circumstances is a common challenge?
8. What makes Keefe anxious on the second half of his trip?

Chapters 30-33

1. What keeps Jarret from wanting to help Roland and why does he change his mind?
2. Why do you think Jarret glances in the rearview mirror when Chantelle is flirting with him? Why is Jarret annoyed when Roland asks Chantelle questions on the car ride?
3. On the ride back home, Jarret wavers between wanting to see Chantelle and breaking up with her. Explain the good points and drawbacks he sees in her.
4. At the beginning of Chapter 31, why does Keefe begin to think that he does not have a vocation?
5. What is the Come & See verse, John 1:39-41? Why do you think this verse given to inquirers?
6. When Keefe hears the Morning Prayer, what does he remember?

7. Once home, Jarret feels like he's won a spiritual victory. In what way has he been victorious? How does he try to make sense out of the memories of his conversion fading? Is he being overconfident?

8. What incident happens the next day that shows Jarret still has a lot of work to do?

9. While Keefe feels a bit insecure, especially after learning about the Brothers and other retreatants, how does he feel about being with the Franciscans?

10. What question does Brother Giles ask that makes Keefe surrender completely to Jesus and why?

Chapters 34-38

1. Once Jarret learns the lies Chantelle told about him, how does he feel and what does he do?
2. What is the meaning of the story "Perfect Joy" from the *Little Flowers of Saint Francis*? What meaning does it hold for Keefe?
3. On the way to the campground, Jarret is so mad at Peter that he decides he's done trying to forgive him. He also thinks of himself as a failure and that it's impossible for him to remain on the right path without the special grace he'd received after his conversion. Explain how everything changes once Jarret strides through the parking lot.
4. How has Jarret grown in this story?
5. While Keefe is playing archery with the others, what new meaning does he get from the verse *Blessed is he who takes no offense at me*?

6. When Keefe is about to say that he's not cut out to be a Franciscan, what does Brother Giles say?
7. What verse does Brother Simon have for Keefe this time? Do you have a verse that you turn to often? If not, consider choosing one.
8. How has Keefe grown in the story?
9. In the last chapter, what do the West brothers learn about their father?

Answer Key

Answers should be in complete sentences but need not contain all the points given here. Answers will vary. The answers provided represent opinions offered from the author's perspective. They are not meant to be definitive, but rather to serve as a guide for teachers to use when evaluating student answers.

Chapters 1-5

- 1. Name and describe the two main characters of this story. Give each one's strengths and weaknesses and their story goals.**

Twain brothers Jarret and Keefe West are the main characters of *Standing Strong*. Jarret is still confident and concerned with appearances, but he's recently had a conversion. His story goal is to do the right thing in the eyes of God, even though he still struggles with the same old faults, including vanity, arrogance, and anger. His strength is that he is turning to God with his problems.

Keefe's goal is to find out if he has a calling to the religious life. His strengths include his zeal for researching the Franciscans and following the discernment advice he's been given. His weakness is that he is worried about his father's reaction to his calling, and even a bit worried about Jarret's reaction to other things (like giving away his possessions).

- 2. Why does Jarret seem so desperate to receive a reply from God?**

Jarret received the grace of conversion in a powerful way while in Arizona. Ever since the night of his conversion, he's felt the presence of God very close to him. This feeling is now fading, and he is worried that he'll return to his old ways and fall into the same old sins.

3. What seems to be the worst temptation for Jarret in the first chapter?

Jarret struggles to control his angry thoughts about Peter. He'd just confessed indulging in feelings of hate and revenge and even visualizing slugging Peter. Peter played practical jokes on Jarret in the past, and the last one left Jarret's car reeking of Limburger cheese, a smell which won't go away. Jarret has a hard time forgiving him for this.

4. What has inspired Keefe to rearrange his bedroom?

He's been reading books about Saint Francis and thinks he might have a calling. And he's been trying to follow the steps of discernment. Now he wants a prayer corner in his room and to live a simple life, so he's getting rid of things he doesn't need or use anymore.

5. Why does Keefe hesitate to reply to the Franciscans' email?

Keefe is not sure that God is actually calling him to the religious life. He's also reluctant to talk to his father to get permission to go on the discernment retreat because he's not sure his father is open to one of his boys becoming a religious Brother.

6. How does the verse at the beginning of Chapter 2 apply to Keefe? "God enriches the soul which empties itself of everything." ~Saint Pio of Pietrelcina

Keefe is trying to get rid of the extra things in his life, outwardly by cleaning and simplifying his room and belongings. But he also needs to empty himself spiritually by opening himself to God's will and not worrying about others' opinions. He is still a bit concerned about Jarret's opinion of what he does and he's afraid of his father's response to a

possible vocation. When a soul empties itself of everything, it becomes open to God's grace and direction.

7. Why does Jarret stop at the bookstore?

He recently asked Father Carston to be his spiritual director. In addition to meeting regularly, Father Carston asked Jarret to keep a journal. Remembering this as he drove back into town, he stopped at the bookstore.

8. What character development do you find once Jarret steps inside the bookstore in Chapter 3?

Readers learn a bit about Jarret's past and his family. The bookstore reminds him of how his mother used to read to him and his brothers. His mother died years ago and he misses her. The Western books remind him of his father, who has always had a cowboy image. Jarret's vanity also shows in his thoughts and actions. He doesn't want anyone he knows seeing him buy a journal. When a girl about his age does see him, he's a bit offended that she doesn't recognize him from high school, even though he doesn't recognize her. He also flirts with her, writing his number on her arm.

9. When Keefe goes to his father's study, what does he overhear his father say that has him concerned?

His father turns down a job offer and he hasn't been making any real commitments lately, which is out of character for him. His father says he's not making plans for a year or two.

10. Explain some of the reasons Keefe thinks his father might not want him becoming a Franciscan.

After their mother died, their father stopped going to Mass. And he rarely mentions faith or God. Keefe wonders if maybe he blames God for her death. He worries his father might think of Keefe joining a religious order as God taking another loved one from him.

11. What does Keefe decide to do to get his answer about God's will? Where does the idea come from? How do these plans change?

Inspired by Saint Francis and Brother Bernard, Keefe decides to pray and then open the Bible for a random verse. If the verse convinces him this is God's will, he'll ask permission to go on retreat. His plans change when Peter challenges him to go alone into the woods for forty hours. Peter means the challenge to be initiation into the youth group, but Keefe sees it as an opportunity to go all in for God, to pray and fast and get his answer.

12. What does Keefe learn about himself as he's sparring with Peter at the Brandts' house?

While sparring, Keefe avoids making a move that he knows would score a point and he loses the game. He wonders how many times in the past he'd avoided similar opportunities when sparring with his brothers. He questions why he's done this. "Didn't he have that same drive to win? Or had he always worried about the other's pride or seemingly urgent need for victory? Always stepped aside so someone else could win?"

13. What is Jarret supposed to write in his journal? How can a journal help one on the spiritual journey?

The priest asked him to write down the challenges he faced during the day, the choices he made, and what message he thought God was giving him. This can help on the spiritual journey because it encourages daily reflection and self-evaluation. A person can start to see patterns in their life and identify people and circumstances that help or hinder the spiritual life.

Journal entry and Chapters 6-10

- 1. What does Jarret's journal entry describe? How important is this moment to him?**

He describes the way he felt and the sensory details of the "night in the canyon." This moment is special to him because he experienced the love of Our Lord so deeply. He felt safe from danger and temptation. These feelings returned to him often, since that first time, allowing him to see Jesus again in his mind and to feel His love.

- 2. Describe the way Keefe feels about his relationship with Jarret, and the challenge that brings to his vocation discernment.**

Keefe has always felt like Jarret needs him. Over the years, he's helped Jarret turn away from many bad ideas. Because of this, he wonders if he can really leave one day, "head out to wherever God sent him and not look back."

- 3. On the horse ride, what advice do the twins give each other?**

Jarret tells Keefe to just tell their father and go on the discernment retreat. Keefe tells Jarret he shouldn't hate Peter. When Jarret specifically asks how he avoids temptation, Keefe says, "You just do. You try not to do every little thing you're tempted to do. You do the right thing. And everyone thinks you're strange. But you do it anyways." Then Keefe gives Jarret his Brown Scapular and says it helps him stay on track.

- 4. What does Mr. West announce over dinner, and what do the twins think about it?**

Mr. West says he's taking an online teaching job. Jarret and Keefe are surprised because their father has always said he'd never take a job like that. He likes working out in the field.

5. Describe Keefe's mood as he sets out on his forty hours? What verse inspires him?

Keefe is excited and distracted. He marvels over creation as he follows a trail into the woods. He's determined to get through the forty hours, fasting and praying, and even without his phone. He's inspired by the verse: *"Jesus said to him: No one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God"* (Luke 9:62).

6. What does Jarret do when he notices the trouble his friends brought into the house?

Jarret does not do anything concrete to remedy the situation. When Kyle offers him a cigarette, he's tempted to accept it but doesn't at first. Then he wonders what his father will think if he catches kids smoking in the house, but he doesn't say anything to Kyle. He raises his voice when he discovers his friends brought alcohol, but he doesn't do anything about it at first. When he finds that they also brought over bad video games, he stuffs them behind a couch cushion but again says nothing.

7. While his friends form a line to get drinks, Jarret flops onto the couch, frustrated. What image goes through his mind and why?

Jarret has been longing to experience the presence of Our Lord in his soul, but this time he thinks of Jesus bound to a pillar, his bleeding back exposed, and every time a beer can cracks open, the whip cracks again. Jarret's conscience is bothering him but he's too weak to do anything about it. This is his first big temptation with his old friends and he doesn't know how to handle it. He thinks of Jesus because He suffered for every sin we commit.

8. What profound truth does the journal entry after Chapter 9 capture?

No matter how far we fall or what sins we've committed, God still loves us. His love is personal and for each of us individually, despite our failings.

9. Share some of the setting details in Chapter 10 and explain how they reveal Keefe's mood.

Keefe notices puffy white clouds, trees in soothing shades of green, wispy leaves of a willow tree that sway in a current, and rippling waves that are mesmerizing. These compliment his peaceful mood. It's early fall and the trees that cling to their green leaves, instead of turning orange and yellow and letting their leaves go, remind him of what he doesn't want to do. He doesn't want to cling to anything of his own. He wants to "let go and let God." He wants to let God transform him.

10. What does Jarret do when faced with Nate's emergency? Does he seem to feel that he acted responsibly?

Jarret takes charge of the situation and finally throws everyone out of the house. He leaves the most responsible person in charge of the clean-up and takes Nate to the hospital himself. Once he drops Nate and Sherman at the ER entrance, he calls Nate's parents to tell them what's going on. While he is acting responsible at this point, he has several regrets. He regrets his decision to let Kyle and his other friends come over. He also wishes he hadn't given Chantelle his number. He feels too weak to avoid temptation.

Chapters 11-15

1. Explain how the river reminds Keefe of the Blessed Mother?

When Keefe gathers firewood, he doesn't want to get lost in the woods so he stays close to the river. This reminds him of

remaining close to the Blessed Mother in order to avoid straying from the truth, from Jesus.

2. When Keefe cracks his leg into something in the dark cave, he thinks about offering up the pain. Why doesn't he? What does it mean to offer up our pains?

Keefe doesn't offer up the pain because he's growing in desperation. All he can think about is getting the lighter so he can make a fire and stay warm through the night. He waited too long to get it, and it's now dark outside and hard to see. When a person is in a desperate situation, it can be hard to hold onto faith and to trust God with the next step.

As members of the Mystical Body of Christ, we can offer up our sufferings and unite them to the redemptive sacrifice of Jesus! The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches us that "The cross is the unique sacrifice of Christ, the one mediator between God and men. But because in his incarnate divine person he has in some way united himself to every man, the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery is offered to all men. He calls his disciples to take up [their] cross and follow [him], for Christ also suffered for [us], leaving [us] an example so that [we] should follow in his steps" (no. 618). See also Colossians 1:24.

3. When Keefe falls in the river, what thoughts go through his mind?

At first, he feels like a failure. Saint Francis spent forty days in the wilderness, but Keefe couldn't even last a few hours. Then he's embarrassed by the thought of having to give up and return to the Brandts' house soaking wet. He wonders if he should take it as a sign, God's way of telling him he doesn't have a vocation. He continues with self-defeating thoughts that feed his doubt that he really is called to the religious life,

but then he whispers Saint Francis' prayer: My God and my all.

4. How does the story about Brother Bernard from the *Little Flowers of Saint Francis* speak to Keefe in his misery? Define the virtue of humility.

Keefe is embarrassed by his failure. In the story, Brother Bernard, mistaken for a madman, was ridiculed by the children and adults of Bologna. Rather than shrink from the humiliation, he embraced it, responding with silence and joy. Soon everyone realized the truth, that he was a saintly man.

A dictionary definition of humility is freedom from pride or arrogance. Saint Bernard defines the virtue of humility as "a virtue by which man knowing himself as he truly is, abases himself." Saint Thomas writes, "The virtue of humility consists in keeping oneself within one's own bounds, not reaching out to things above one, but submitting to one's superior." Another definition: A quality by which a person, considering his own defects, has a lowly opinion of himself and willingly submits himself to God and to others for God's sake.

True humility does not cause a person to think less of himself than others. A humble person recognizes his or her gifts as coming from God. See 1 Corinthians 2:12.

5. When Jarret explains why he came to find Keefe, what advice does Keefe give him? Does Keefe offer good advice? What is Jarret's response?

Jarret tells Keefe what happened at the house, and Keefe suggests that he make new friends because "Bad company corrupts good character." This is good advice because friends can influence a person for good or for bad. But Jarret doesn't seem to think it's necessary. He seems to think that simply not inviting his friends to the house is a good solution.

Keefe also suggests that Jarret tell their father exactly what happened. Jarret knows he should but he decides that their father probably figured it out on his own. When Keefe urges him to do it anyway, Jarret calls home and leaves a message.

6. What small victory does Keefe claim at the end of Chapter 12? How important are the little victories in life?

Keefe could've gone home with Jarret since he already messed up the forty hours by getting help from Jarret. He also could've accepted more of the comforts Jarret brought back with him. Instead, Keefe accepts only the dry clothes and decides to stay for the rest of the forty hours.

The little victories are very important in life. Little moments of sacrifice, hard work, and self-control help us prepare for the bigger challenges of life.

7. While Jarret is driving home what questions does he think of that we all need to think about?

Jarret wonders where his life is headed and what he's going to do after high school. Those are questions every young person needs to consider. Then he thinks of Keefe being ready to join the Franciscans if he thinks it's God's will. Jarret panics at the thought of joining himself, but it leads him to questions we should all consider often. How open are we to God's will? Are we ready and willing to make the necessary changes to stay on the right path? *Personal reflection: What do I need to change?*

8. Once he returns home, what consequence does Jarret get for his actions and how does he feel about it?

Jarret's father shows concern but doesn't seem angry. He does, however, ground Jarret for a week and he suggests he find better friends, repeating the advice Keefe gave him. Jarret seemed to think that being honest about the situation

was all he needed to do. Wanting to make things right, he struggles interiorly to accept this consequence.

- 9. How can an author use a dream to develop a story? What internal battle does Keefe’s dream show, and how does the verse “Blessed is he who takes no offense at me” apply to him?**

Dreams can reveal several things about a character, including the character’s deepest concerns, hopes, and fears. A dream might foreshadow things to come, set a mood, or show a character’s inner struggles. Dreams should only be used in fiction if they have bearing on the overall plot or character arc.

Keefe’s dream shows his struggle to go all in for God. He’s been accustomed to holding back with his skills and abilities, letting others win, instead of going for the victory himself. The dream and the verse also show his reluctance to let others know “his heart,” that he wants to be a Franciscan.

- 10. On the first day of school, as Jarret stands in the middle of the hallway, what does he seem concerned about? What temptation strikes when he sees Roland? How does he handle it?**

Jarret seems very concerned about his image and reputation. He’s worked hard to get and keep the image he wants, and he’s hoping that summer hasn’t weakened it. He briefly wonders if it’s wrong for him to like having this image.

When Jarret sees Roland coming toward him in the hallway, he’s tempted to take off because Roland’s awkwardness might tarnish Jarret’s image. Jarret pushes those feelings aside and talks to Roland.

- 11. What two other incidents on the first day of school show Jarret’s weaknesses?**

Jarret's conscience tells him not to flirt with Chantelle, not to stand so close, and not to touch her hair, but he does it anyway. And he knows that he's going to end up seeing her. Later in the school day, Jarret sees the prank pulled on Roland. Inflamed with rage, he takes off after the kids he assumes did it.

Chapters 16-20

- 1. At the beginning of Chapter 16, while Jarret is storming down the hall, intent on revenge, he sees a figure surrounded by golden light. If you've read *Battle for His Soul*, you can probably identify the figure. What other clue is given? Who is this and why is he here?**

The other clue is that the figure is "someone familiar, someone who cared about him." Jarret glimpses his guardian angel. His guardian angel tries to warn Jarret to control his temper.

- 2. Before Jarret throws the first punch, a warning flashes in his mind. "It was as if he stood before a closed door, with a choice. He could leave the door closed and walk away, or he could open it and obey the heat of his passion." How does a door symbolize temptation?**

Temptation comes to all, but we are not responsible for it unless we actually give in to it. The door represents the temptation, the invitation to sin. If Jarret leaves the door closed, he does nothing wrong. He does not invite sin into his spiritual house. But if he opens the door of temptation, he invites sin into his life. It is his choice.

- 3. After hearing the news of what Jarret did, what does Keefe think his dream means? Why does he then change his mind?**

Keefe thinks that the dream means he is not supposed to win. Instead of pursuing his vocation at this time, he needs to take a fall for someone else: Jarret. Keefe thinks that God has given him his answer through the Bible verse, the dream, and Jarret's trouble. He can't abandon Jarret to pursue a vocation. Jarret needs him. Jarret had already messed up at home, the weekend Keefe went away for his forty hours in the woods. And now he's shown he still lacks self-control.

Those conclusions don't sit right with him. He realizes he's just making excuses out of fear. He's been afraid to speak to his father because he doesn't want conflict. He's kept his calling a secret from his friends out of fear of judgment and failure. He's even been afraid to know for sure if God wants this of him, fearing rejection from God. Now that he's identified all this, he becomes determined to pursue his vocation. He's now willing to fall "flat on his face" and have his faith exposed to all in his efforts to claim the victory.

- 4. Once Jarret gets home and up to his bedroom, describe how his actions have made him feel. What positive step does Jarret then take? Explain why it's a good step.**

Jarret experiences deep regret and a sense of failure. He wishes he had used self-control and found another way to handle the situation. He's disappointed that he ignored the internal warnings and made a conscious choice to beat up C.W. While the guilt weighs heavy in his heart, he still doesn't know what he should've done.

Filled with remorse, he sorts out his thoughts in his journal, writing to God. This is a good step because he's turning to the one who can change him and help him find answers: God. He is open to God's help and direction.

- 5. When Jarret's father speaks with Jarret, how are his words different from what Jarret expected?**

Jarret knows he's let his father down again and assumes his father will be angry with him. He wonders if his father thinks Jarret's "good streak" has ended. In reality, his father calmly reminds him that he's chosen to go to Mass so he should be acting like a Christian. He also tells Jarret that he might've done the same thing if he'd been in a similar situation. Then he offers a word of encouragement and tells Jarret not to let his failure get him down. He knows he's been trying.

6. What is Jarret's next journal entry about?

Jarret laments that the memory of the night of his conversion has faded. He can only remember the general order of things. He remembers how Roland's act of forgiveness—when Jarret hadn't even been sorry—moved him to true repentance. The memory has faded so much that it almost seems like it had not happened to him.

7. Keefe is finally ready to ask permission to go on the retreat, but he stops in the hallway near the door to his father's study. What does Keefe overhear that gets him worried?

Keefe overhears his father talking in an agitated voice to Miss Anna Meadows, an archaeologist friend that he has often worked with. She wants him to come out and work with her, but he says he can't because of his new teaching job. She asks what his real reason is. Mr. West replies that she knows the real reason, but he doesn't want to talk about it on the phone. He then invites her to come out and visit them.

8. Why is Jarret in such a good mood Friday?

Jarret is ready for the weekend and realizes that he's enjoyed being home for the week. He also feels a sense of accomplishment at getting all his homework done by himself, without being told, and without cheating. Having settled into a good routine of waking early, exercising, and then doing schoolwork, he is starting to feel in control of himself. He also

thinks he needed the time to get over what C.W. had done. Finally, he's enjoyed texting Chantelle several times day.

9. What does Keefe give Jarret and how does Jarret respond?

Keefe gives Jarret a brand-new Brown Scapular that just came in the mail. Jarret stuffs it into a jeans pocket because he doesn't understand the purpose of the Brown Scapular. He can't help thinking it is a childish, even superstitious devotion, but he says he'll look into it before he starts wearing it.

10. At the restaurant, Mr. West suggests they all go on the annual camping trip that the Brandts sponsor. Why don't the twins want to go?

Keefe wants to go on the discernment retreat, which is the same weekend, but he hasn't asked yet. Jarret doesn't want to be reminded of the big mistake he'd made with his ex-girlfriend at the campground the year before. Recognizing his weaknesses, he also thinks of the possibility of Chantelle going too, or meeting some other cute girl, and making the same mistake.

11. What is the meaning of the quote "The sun never hides his light for fear of inconveniencing the owls?" What other Franciscan story gives Keefe courage on his way to finally speak with his father?

The saying means that one should not be afraid of saying or doing what they are meant to do. On his way to speak with his father, Keefe thinks about the story of Brother Bernard heading home. While unable to find a way across a great river, he meets a stranger. When Bernard explains that he is too afraid to cross the river, the stranger tells him not to be afraid. Offering his hand, he says, "Let us cross together." An instant later they are on the other side of the river and Bernard realizes the stranger was an angel. Keefe whispers

the same words to his guardian angel before stepping into his father's study.

12. How does Mr. West respond to Keefe's request to go on the discernment retreat?

Mr. West doesn't seem to get what he's asking at first. Then he wants to know when Keefe first felt called. When he learns it was last year in Italy, he admits that Italy left an impression on him too. He tells Keefe, "You don't have to leave the world to live right," and he wonders if maybe Keefe is taking his feelings too far. He also admits that he'd hoped one of his boys would follow his footsteps and become an archaeologist, but he says the Wests have never quite followed their fathers' dreams. Finally, he gives permission.

Chapters 21-25

1. What does the mysterious text message "*If she knew you, she wouldn't like you*" make Jarret think about?

Jarret can't figure out who is sending the message and goes through a list of kids who don't like him. Then he thinks of his ex-girlfriend Zoe and wonders if Chantelle knows about her. He worries that she might want nothing to do with him if she found out. Then he would have to convince Chantelle that he wasn't the same person: he doesn't want to take advantage of her.

2. While Keefe and Roland are at the Fire Starters meeting, what does Mr. West do that is unexpected?

Mr. West invites Jarret to ride the horses with him. They ride out to the edge of the property, Mr. West asking Jarret about his plans for the future. Then Mr. West gallops off between

rows of corn in the neighbors' field and Jarret follows, enjoying the chase.

- 3. Jarret calls a meeting with his brothers after school. What behaviors have them all worried about their father? What conclusion do they come to? And what do they plan to do about it?**

They find their Father's recent behavior suspicious. Jarret says he has a bucket list and he thinks the family dinner last Friday was strange. Jarret tells them about the horse ride and the questions about Jarret's future. Keefe tells them about the conversations he's overheard: how he turned down a job offer and how he invited Miss Meadows over because he wasn't able to go see her.

Jarret jumps to the conclusion that their father is dying. Keefe suggests maybe he's having a midlife crisis. They decide to have a family meeting on Saturday.

- 4. Share a few signs from Chapter 23 that show Jarret is trying to follow his conscience.**

Jarret sees Peter in the hallway and he's tempted to pay him back for the practical joke, but he doesn't. He keeps on walking. He also walks past C.W. every day without incident, and he's even started thinking about apologizing. As his thoughts turn to Chantelle, he thinks about whether he should ask her out and whether he's ready to have a new girlfriend. Not wanting to make the same mistakes, he thinks about the consequences of sin and how their priest once said that more souls went to hell for the "sins of the flesh" than for any other reason. When he does ask her out, he turns down her offer to take her home after school, thinking that could lead to trouble.

- 5. Who is Tyrone and how does Jarret respond to Tyrone's behavior?**

Tyrone is Chantelle's brother. When he calls Jarret over to talk to him, Jarret understands why he's worried. Jarret doesn't wait for Tyrone to explain what he wants but tells him he doesn't need to worry, that he'll respect his sister in every way. When Tyrone threatens Jarret, jabbing him in the chest, Jarret forces himself to use self-control and doesn't respond to the threatening behavior. Jarret continues to remain calm and tries to look sincere.

6. How does Keefe's experience at the ice cream shop get him thinking more about the vocation to the religious life?

Keefe likes Rachel, the girl he sits across from in the ice cream shop. As he's walking to the church, he thinks about all the things he'd be giving up if he became a Franciscan Brother: marriage, family, children. He briefly wonders if he's being selfish and seeking to close himself off from others. But his soul stirs and convinces him that he isn't trying to avoid or give up anything. He sees it as giving it all to God. He doesn't want to be divided but "all in" for God. Keefe longs to love God with all his heart, soul, and strength. Yet he is fully convinced that he will only find happiness in God's will alone.

7. When Chantelle wants to go out on a real date, what does Jarret decide?

He's been thinking they could get to know each other by hanging out with her friends after school, but she wants just the two of them to go out. Jarret decides they can't go to each other's houses unless one of their parents is home. He briefly considers talking to his father about not giving Jarret so much privacy when he has a girl at the house. And he considers the possibility of only double dating and also of setting rules.

8. While he's failed in the past, Jarret wants to be chaste. Chastity is a moral virtue, a gift from God which enables us to imitate the purity of Christ (see CCC 2345). What else

does the Catechism teach about this gift? See CCC 2337-2350.

This can be answered briefly or as a several paragraph essay if desired, focusing on any aspect. Example: Other virtues are connected to chastity, chastity is both a personal task and a cultural effort, chastity is ordered toward the gift of self, practice of chastity prepares for marriage, etc.

Chapters 26-29

1. Why do the West brothers find it odd that their father is planning the menu with Nanny?

Mr. West doesn't usually care what he eats. Whenever Nanny asks him, he answers, "Whatever you have a mind to make." Plus, Keefe and Roland had just been talking about all the things Keefe will be doing for the last time if he joins the Franciscans. When a person prepares to transition from one state of life to another, it is normal to think about what will be missed and what will change.

2. The West brothers planned to talk with their father on Saturday. What happens that makes their plans impossible?

Their father informs them that Miss Meadows is coming for a visit. He doesn't want them to go anywhere, but they will also not have the opportunity to speak privately with him while she's visiting.

3. How does Miss Meadows reply when Jarret tells her they think something is wrong with their father? Does her answer satisfy Jarret?

She doesn't seem to agree but suggests that maybe he wants to spend more time with them. Jarret doesn't seem satisfied with her answer. He wonders what Miss Meadows and his

father had been talking about out on the porch and why his father seemed to clam up.

- 4. Share Jarret's notes in his journal about the Brown Scapular. What do you know about the Brown Scapular? Define talisman. What does the Catechism of the Catholic Church say about superstition? See no. 2111.**

Researching the origins of the Brown Scapular, Jarret discovers that the Blessed Mother appeared to Saint Simon Stock in 1251. She gave him the Scapular as a sign of her favor and protection. Jarret comes to realize that the Scapular is not a talisman or a superstitious practice. It is a "silent reminder that the Blessed Mother is right there with you." Jarret sees that wearing it is a prayer, a symbol of devotion and of one's promise to faithfulness.

A talisman is an object that acts as a charm to avert evil and bring good fortune, or something that supposedly produces magical or miraculous effects.

The Brown Scapular is not a talisman because the devotion is connected to the interior dispositions of the person wearing it. It is not magic. It is a sign of the Blessed Mother's promises and of the wearer's faith and promises in return.

- 5. Define juxtaposition. How can an author use this in fiction? Describe how the setting details in Chapter 28 and Keefe's mood create a bold juxtaposition.**

Juxtaposition is the arrangement of two or more ideas, characters, actions, settings, phrases, or words side-by-side to compare or contrast or to create an interesting effect.

An author can use juxtaposition to create contrast or suspense. It can be used to emphasize story themes or draw readers deeper into the character's mood or the storyline. Juxtaposition can be used in character development, creating

characters with opposite traits. It can be used in setting details, as it is in this chapter, to contrast a character's mood or the scene goal. In this way it can hint at the feelings of a character or predict what is to come.

In this chapter, a cloudy sky and the smell of rain hint of an oncoming storm. Keefe, however, is elated with his "spirit soaring above him." Also, he notices a sunbeam stealing through heavy clouds and falling on a lonely hill, and he thinks of how he is not alone. God is with him. Everything about the road trip makes Keefe think about the discernment process. He even thinks how nice it would be to have a blue sky for this journey but how God might have a message for him in the gloominess.

6. What happens that affects Keefe's plans? Does he respond the way he should?

Keefe sees a car and a young woman stranded on the side of the road. Seeing her troubled expression, he is moved to compassion and turns around to help her. He's worried that he's going to be late to the retreat, but she has no one else to help so he does everything he can, including trying to change the tire, then, when that doesn't work, going with her into town to get it fixed.

Keefe has done what Jesus would do and what Saint Francis would do, putting another's needs before his own and sacrificing what he wanted to do.

7. Why does Keefe hesitate to make the Sign of the Cross when he prays before his meal? What does Piper reveal about herself next? Could there be a connection to his expression of faith and Piper's choice to share her story? Do you think showing one's faith in different circumstances is a common challenge?

Keefe hesitates because he's with a stranger and he's not sure what she'll think. Maybe he is a bit shy about showing his faith. After he prays, Piper reveals her heart-breaking story, how her father is dying and how she still harbors anger toward him. She also admits that she saw Keefe's offer to help as a sign from God.

Once she sees Keefe as a person of faith, she seems to feel that he will understand and care about her story. Keefe now has the opportunity to pray for her and counsel her. Their little conversation is all Piper needs to encourage her to forgive her father. If he had chosen to keep his faith hidden, she might not have shared this with him and she might not have reached this conclusion. Showing one's faith can open doors to another's faith!

8. What makes Keefe anxious on the second half of his trip?

Helping Piper took over three hours. Keefe is now running very late, driving in the dark, and he's on a highway with four lanes of traffic, which is a new experience for him. He'd already taken one wrong exit and is worried he'll take another. On top of all this, he gets a phone call from Roland, who would never call without a good reason.

Chapters 30-33

1. What keeps Jarret from wanting to help Roland and why does he change his mind?

Keefe calls Jarret on Roland's behalf. Jarret doesn't want to help Roland because he'll be helping Peter, whom he can't stand. He has yet to forgive Peter for his practical jokes. But Jarret finally agrees to help when Roland calls and asks for himself. Still deeply moved by Roland's act of forgiveness this

past summer and sorry for how he's treated Roland over the years, Jarret wants to do whatever Roland asks of him.

- 2. Why do you think Jarret glances in the rearview mirror when Chantelle is flirting with him? Why is Jarret annoyed when Roland asks Chantelle questions on the car ride?**

Jarret's conscience has been stirring and he's probably hoping Roland isn't paying attention to Chantelle's behavior. Roland's questions bring out Jarret's insecurity about sharing his faith and letting Chantelle know the person he is trying to become. He's also forced to realize that Chantelle doesn't share the values he is struggling to make his own. But he can't imagine that a faithful Catholic girl would ever like him after the ways he's messed up.

- 3. On the ride back home, Jarret wavers between wanting to see Chantelle and breaking up with her. Explain the good points and drawbacks he sees in her.**

Jarret likes Chantelle's attitude in the stressful situation of driving through the rain as a favor to Roland, even though it's interrupted their date. Since picking Roland up, she hasn't complained about anything but seems ready to turn the messed-up night into something fun by stopping for coffee on the way home. He also enjoys talking with her.

Jarret doesn't like how forward Chantelle is. Her behavior is too much of a temptation for him.

- 4. At the beginning of Chapter 31, why does Keefe begin to think that he does not have a vocation?**

Keefe begins to believe that God has been giving him signs after signs and he has been misreading them all. Not only is he hours late and unable to notify the Franciscans because his phone died, Keefe can't find the Franciscans' place in the dark. He's hesitant to knock on the door at such a late hour.

He begins to think that God had only wanted him to be there for Piper in her need, to encourage her to reconcile with her father, and to learn to let his own light shine. Roland's need also makes him think that maybe he should've stayed home; he could've helped him or talked Jarret into helping him. When no one answers the door at first, he wavers in his resolve and considers going back home.

5. What is the Come & See verse, John 1:39-41? Why do you think this verse given to inquirers?

In chapter one of the Gospel of John, John the Baptist points out Jesus, saying, "Look, there is the lamb of God." Two disciples hear this and follow Jesus. When Jesus asks what they want, they reply, "Where do you live?" And Jesus says, "Come and see." So the disciples go with Him and stay with Him that day. Andrew, who is one of the disciples, tells his brother Simon, "We have found the Messiah."

This verse is given to inquirers because the disciples represent them in their search for Jesus Christ. And on the discernment retreat, they are called to stay with the Brothers and see what their life and faith is all about. If they are called, they will likely share Andrew's belief that they have found the Messiah. That is, they have found the vocation to which God is calling them, where they can best follow, please, and serve Our Lord.

6. When Keefe hears the Morning Prayer, what does he remember?

Keefe remembers the first time he heard Franciscan Brothers praying Morning Prayer last fall at the Brandts' Bed & Breakfast. He'd followed the friars into the woods and watched them secretly from a tree, until he fell out of the tree and everyone saw him. That experience set him on this vocational discernment journey.

- 7. Once home, Jarret feels like he's won a spiritual victory. In what way has he been victorious? How does he try to make sense out of the memories of his conversion fading? Is he being overconfident?**

Jarret feels good about himself for breaking up with a girl rather than remaining in a situation of temptation. He thinks maybe God let his memory of the night of his conversion fade so that he could figure out how to face temptations on his own. He might be a bit overconfident in his own abilities and still not realize his need to trust himself totally to God.

- 8. What incident happens the next day that shows Jarret still has a lot of work to do?**

When Jarret sees Peter in his bedroom, anger and suspicion arise inside him. Still unforgiving about past offenses, he envisions slamming Peter into the door. And while he uses self-control, his attitude toward Peter is very cold.

- 9. While Keefe feels a bit insecure, especially after learning about the Brothers and other retreatants, how does he feel about being with the Franciscans?**

Keefe feels more at home with them than anywhere he's ever been. He can imagine himself here, living a life of prayer and service, growing in love of God, and fulfilling the promises he'd made to listen to God's voice and live knowing that He is with him and that He loves him. He really wants to live the Franciscan life of poverty and obedience.

Many thoughts come to him while at prayer. He considers how he's always lived a life of obedience, just not to the right person. He also wonders if he is just trying to run away from life or get away from his controlling twin brother. Then he starts comparing himself with the other retreatants. The

others had grown up in two-parent families, surrounded by faith-filled people. They've been preparing all their lives for a vocation of humility and self-sacrifice. But Keefe's life has been less than perfect. His mother died when he was young. His father doesn't practice the faith regularly. Jarret has issues. And Keefe never even thought of a vocation until recently.

10. What question does Brother Giles ask that makes Keefe surrender completely to Jesus and why?

Brother Giles asks who his Confirmation saint is. Keefe realizes that he and his brothers had never received this sacrament. He sees this as "the last nail hammered into the coffin of his Franciscan vocation." Keefe had been thinking all along how far he was willing to go for Our Lord and what he was willing to give up. He accepts now that he must even give up his desire to become a Franciscan. He decides to "give it all up and go all the way." He wants what God wants, and he turns it all over to Jesus in a profound act of trust.

Chapters 34-38

1. Once Jarret learns the lies Chantelle told about him, how does he feel and what does he do?

Jarret reaches his lowest point and feels abandoned by God. He complains to God, saying he's been trying and wanting to know why He is letting this happen. He gets on his knees and prays, trying desperately to remember the night of his conversion. He remembers very little of it and wonders if he'd imagined the whole thing. He begs Our Lord not to leave him because he can't do this on his own. Wanting to write down his thoughts, he tries to find his journal but it's missing.

He immediately suspects Peter and sets off for the campground.

- 2. What is the meaning of the story “Perfect Joy” from the *Little Flowers of Saint Francis*? What meaning does it hold for Keefe?**

Perfect joy is not found in being able to heal the sick, or in knowledge, or prophesy, or in any of the things that work out according to our plans. Perfect joy can be found when a person is able to conquer oneself and is willing to endure setbacks, suffering, disappointments, and hardships for the love of Christ. If we can take the insults with joy and bear them patiently with love in our hearts, we can find perfect joy.

The message Keefe takes from it is that he doesn't need to become a Franciscan to find perfect joy. He needs to give everything his best and accept whatever comes his way as God's will. If God allows it, it must be for his good.

- 3. On the way to the campground, Jarret is so mad at Peter that he decides he's done trying to forgive him. He also thinks of himself as a failure and that it's impossible for him to remain on the right path without the special grace he'd received after his conversion. Explain how everything changes once Jarret strides through the parking lot.**

On his way to exact revenge on Peter, Jarret is in the heat of anger when he stuffs his car keys into a pocket and bumps the Brown Scapular. He pulls it out and looks at it, remembering the words the Blessed Mother had spoken to one of her devoted servants. “If you had come to me, you would not have run into such spiritual danger.” Halfway across the parking lot, Jarret finally understands the purpose of the Scapular. It is the Blessed Mother's mantle of protection for her children. “If he asked, if he trusted, if he

believed like a little child, she would help him do what he couldn't by himself." Aware that he's about to do something wrong but feeling powerless to stop himself, Jarret puts the Scapular on and stops walking. He finally realizes the little way of the Scapular and that he doesn't have to fight the spiritual battle all on his own. Jarret decides to forgive Peter the way Roland had forgiven him, the way Jesus forgives. Jarret also decides to accept Chantelle's brothers rage in reparation for beating up C.W. and for other mistakes.

4. How has Jarret grown in this story?

After his conversion, Jarret was very dependent upon the special grace of feeling the presence of Our Lord very close to him. He worried when the grace faded, thinking he hadn't the strength to follow the right path on his own. Then he decided that God had confidence in him and he could do this. Unfortunately, he was trying to do it on his own and not seeking grace from God to remain strong. The Brown Scapular taught him the value of the little way of entrusting one's self to the Blessed Mother and turning to her when in spiritual need. Jarret has grown, now realizing that he can't trust in his own strength. He needs the help of God to remain on the path, and the Blessed Virgin is ever-ready to help him.

5. While Keefe is playing archery with the others, what new meaning does he get from the verse *Blessed is he who takes no offense at me*?

Keefe had been trying to disguise his skill, not wanting to outshine anyone and draw attention to himself. Now he realizes that God has given him the gift—and other gifts—and he should not try to hide these gifts. He should always try his best, regardless of the reaction of others. He now resolves to give all his best for the Lord.

6. When Keefe is about to say that he's not cut out to be a Franciscan, what does Brother Giles say?

After asking Keefe permission to tell his story, Brother Giles shares the reason Keefe arrived late to the retreat. Keefe stopped to help a stranger in need. "He sacrificed his time, money, and even his future to serve Christ in the moment." Brother Giles repeats what Saint Francis once said, "The deeds you do may be the only sermon some persons will hear today." And then Brother Giles says that they would be honored to call Keefe their Brother.

7. What verse does Brother Simon have for Keefe this time? Do you have a verse that you turn to often? If not, consider choosing one.

Isaiah 41:10. Fear not, for I am with you. Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand.

8. How has Keefe grown in the story?

While feeling called to the religious life, Keefe was reluctant to share this calling with his father, afraid of how his father would respond, and reluctant to let his faith and his gifts show. He was also struggling to believe that God would really want this of him. Keefe now trusts Our Lord and has found joy in accepting whatever comes his way, even if it is not the thing he wanted. No longer afraid of others' reactions or the outcomes, he trusts in God's will for his life. Wherever God calls him, he will go.

9. In the last chapter, what do the West brothers learn about their father?

Mr. West is not dying. He's noticed all the changes in his boys and it forced him to do a little self-evaluation. He realizes that he hasn't been much of a family man. He hopes it's not too

late, but he's decided to really work on it now. He also admits that he wants to marry Miss Meadows one day.

Discussion Questions

1. After that night in the canyon in *Battle for His Soul*, Jarret feels the Lord's presence in a powerful way. As the days go by, this gift fades but temptation and weakness remain. When a person turns to Christ after living a life of sin, the temptations might seem to go away for a time. But when they come back, what strategies can a person use to remain faithful to God?
2. Ever since Keefe witnessed a Eucharistic miracle, as shown in *Life-Changing Love*, he's felt God calling him in some way. In *Battle for His Soul*, he meets a group of Franciscan Brothers and his heart is stirred. Thinking God might be calling, he wants to go on a discernment retreat, but he's afraid to tell his father. How important is courage in pursuing a vocation?
3. Jarret and Keefe both feel unworthy at times, when remembering their past mistakes. Jarret convinces himself that he can take charge of his life and stay on the right track, whereas Keefe immerses himself in prayer for discernment. We can't only pray. We must take action. What is the right balance for remaining faithful and knowing God's will? What other virtues are needed?

4. Following the advice of his priest, Jarret began keeping a journal with his personal spiritual reflections and he committed himself to regular spiritual direction. If we truly want to grow in holiness, how important is self-evaluation and seeking the wisdom of a good spiritual director?

5. Jarret goes out with a girl he meets at the bookstore and finds she doesn't share the values he's trying hard to embrace. How important is discernment when deciding whom to date?

6. The Franciscan Brothers in *Standing Strong* are based on the Franciscan Brothers of Peace in Minnesota. Brothers are a lot different from Priests, just as Nuns are different from Sisters. How much do you know about different Orders and types of vocations?

7. One of the Brothers sent Keefe a list of discernment steps. Such lists are often recommended in the spiritual life. Some include such things as: stay close to the Sacraments, get a spiritual director, pray every day, good reading, devotion to the Blessed Mother, and serve your parish. Other lists have things like: know that God created you for a specific mission, say "yes" to His will for you, pray often, be holy, and clear away

obstacles. What steps do you think are important in vocational discernment? Do you think today's trends create challenges for discerning the call of God?

8. Saint Alphonsus tell us: *“Modern heretics make a mockery of wearing the Scapular, they decry it as so much trifling nonsense.”* How does the Brown Scapular teach us to be humble and teachable like “little children” and to not merely rely on our own understanding or abilities?

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