

THE
OUTSIDER
INTERVIEWS

What Young People Think about Faith
and How to Connect with Them

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APPENDIX

A READING GUIDE FOR GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS

The purpose of this guide is to help you continue processing the content of this book either in a group setting or on your own. We hope it helps you grapple with the implications of *The Outsider Interviews* and incorporate what you have learned into your daily life. For each chapter we offer a few introductory statements and then questions and comments to consider. Enjoy.

Chapter 1: The Backstory

Welcome to our story. Be sure to “watch this book.” Our journey into the lives of outsiders impacted us on a deep level. We think it will do the same for you when you watch the free videos online.

Questions to Consider

1. Craig suggests that various groups inside and outside Christianity have become entrenched in their views. Have you noticed this as well? How?
2. Craig suggests that trying to better understand another's perspective is a useful skill in navigating difference. What has helped you better understand another's perspective in the past? Is there room for improvement?
3. When it comes to adopting new ideas or practices, some of us are bold explorers and more of us are reluctant travelers. Which category do you fit in? How have you struggled with accepting people who are different from you?
4. Who in your life have you found difficult to interact with? Do you think there is any hope for the interactions improving?
5. *The Outsider Interviews* tells stories reflecting the statistics presented in *unChristian*. How do you respond differently to stories than statistics?

Chapter 2: Kansas City Outsiders

Being critiqued is tough. It's hard to avoid reacting and defending ourselves. We don't like it when people compare our worst with their best. But every now and again it's necessary all the same.

Questions to Consider

1. If you're a Christian, having now heard the critique of some outsiders, how does their critique make you

- feel? Do you agree or disagree with their perceptions? Explain.
2. Jesus was easy on outsiders and tough on insiders. How have you seen Christians follow or not follow Jesus's example?
 3. The authors suggest that when it comes to understanding the current culture, some people are natives and others are immigrants. Into which category do you fit? What do you think are the implications of this?
 4. In the clip "Insiders and Gay People," Tony (who is a Christian) says two things: (1) Jesus would have hung out with gay people, but (2) Jesus *would* have had an opinion about their moral choices. How does Tony's view compare with your own view of how Jesus would handle this issue?
 5. Watch the clip "An Outsider's Difficult Choice." Klarisa speaks transparently about her painful decision to have an abortion and the support her Christian friend provided. Have you ever experienced a moral dilemma and sought the support of Christians? What was the response?
 6. Jim talks about the powerful influence "Christian consultants" can have on outsiders. Share about a situation when an outsider invited you to be his or her Christian consultant.
 7. Tell about a time someone listened to you when you really needed it and the impact it had on your life.

Chapter 3: Klarisa Gets Saved

Can people come to faith simply because they are listened to by believers? That's what Kirk wondered, and that's what happened to Klarisa.

Questions to Consider

1. Do you think Kirk and Klarisa's story addresses the questions Jim presents at the beginning of the chapter (Should I invite my friend to church, etc.)? How or how not?
2. Kirk expanded his exposure with outsiders by spending his mornings at one Starbucks location. Are you happy with the amount of exposure you have with outsiders? What does that look like, or how might it improve?
3. Kirk's Starbucks visits are both intentional and non-intentional. How do you balance actively pursuing relationships without being pushy?

Chapter 4: Things Change

Post-Christian. Postmodern. The new atheism. Welcome to *your* culture. Church steeples disappear while cell phone towers rise. Not exactly your grandparents' world, is it?

Just as Paul leveraged Roman culture to advance the gospel in the first century, Billy Graham used "every modern means" available in the twentieth century. Both men were "anchored to the rock and geared to the times." Both men navigated their culture, and even exploited it to advance the gospel, without being consumed or controlled by it.

What about us, the twenty-first-century church? Are we willing to follow Paul's challenge to the Corinthian Christians? "I kept my bearings in Christ—but I entered their world and tried *to experience things from their point of view*" (1 Cor. 9:22, emphasis added).

Questions to Consider

1. What is your perception of how Billy Graham influenced modern-day Christianity? Share *your* Billy Graham story if you have one.
2. In this chapter Todd wrote, "Outsiders believe the only thing Christians care about is being right and proving others wrong. They believe that in conversations with Christians there is an undercurrent of arrogance." Perhaps you feel this is overstated; maybe Todd is taking it too far. How would you compare your perception of Christians to the one Todd describes?
3. Todd wrote, "There is no such thing as effective evangelism that is not reflective of its cultural context." What is your favorite form of evangelism? In what cultural context was that methodology most effective?
4. Todd said risk-free ways of doing evangelism do not exist. What kinds of risks have you taken in the past to reach people with the gospel? How have you changed your evangelism methods over time? In your mind, what are the risks associated with evangelism?
5. Think of someone you would like to see follow Jesus. How have your "evangelistic attempts" gone with them? If this chapter evoked some new ideas you might apply, what are they?

Chapter 5: Phoenix Outsiders

Christians are called *believers*. Our unique set of beliefs is central to our identity. Outsiders are confused about our beliefs, while we're often blinded by them. Do your beliefs blind you?

Questions to Consider

1. Jim asked Beth to find a Muslim between the ages of sixteen and twenty-nine who would be willing to be interviewed in a church. If someone asked you to take on that task, where would you begin?
2. A Christian audience member challenged the way Jim explained the gospel to the outsiders (accept Christ and you go to heaven; reject Christ and you go to hell). Did this offend you as well? Why or why not?
3. Watch the clip “In or Out? Erin Wants to Know.” Erin asks a piercing question: “How much of the Bible do you have to believe to be saved? Sixty percent? Eighty percent?” How would you answer her? What parts of the Bible confuse you?
4. Watch the clip “Navigating Opposing Worldviews.” Alyssa talks about being in relationship with people who don’t agree with her Christian views but are still her friends. Could you name those people in your life? How could you go about making friends with more non-Christians?
5. In the clip “I Never Met a Christian That Wasn’t a Republican,” Brian, a Christian from South Africa, takes issue with American Christians being one-issue voters, and Erin, an outsider, says, “I’ve never met a

Christian that wasn't a Republican." If Brian and Erin made these observations directly to you, how would you respond?

Chapter 6: The Big Question

Outsiders *flocked* to Jesus, even though he told them the truth. Why do you think they wanted to be with him? Was it something in his eyes, his voice, or his body language?

Questions to Consider

1. Recall a time you were invited to have coffee with someone, thinking it was a gesture of friendship, but it turned out to be a sales pitch. How did you feel about being “baited and switched”?
2. Jim suggests that the most important question to ask outsiders is *not* “If you died right now, do you know for sure you’d go to heaven?” Have you ever participated in an evangelism program that trained you to ask something unnatural or awkward? What was that experience like for you?
3. Jim estimates that 90 percent of evangelism programs violate the Golden Rule—they fail to meet the standard of “loving others the way you want to be loved.” Is this too simplistic? How would you modify his statement?
4. Talk about an outsider you *like*—someone you would enjoy spending more time with and learning about.

Chapter 7: Putting *The Outsider Interviews* to Use

One of the most effective uses of this book and video has been in the classroom. Dr. Todd Hunter has used this material many times in his training of young leaders and seminarians.

Questions to Consider

1. Todd discusses how his students and fellow professors have learned from the interviews. What have you learned so far? What have you found most interesting or surprising?
2. Todd relates a story from *Little Bee* where a Nigerian village misunderstands the context of *Top Gun*. Describe a time when you've misjudged a situation or person only to find out the true context later.
3. Todd describes a "my way or the highway" mentality that has often been adopted in evangelism. Do you find it difficult to not control others' views?
4. Todd suggests that *knowing* something doesn't exclude you from being a good conversation partner. Outsiders in our interviews have said that Christians often come across as smug or arrogant. How do you balance knowing with not being smug?
5. Todd attributes one student's response to the interviews to her being raised in a Christian bubble. Did you find the interviews surprising or unrealistic? What positives and negatives come from protecting ourselves and our children from secular culture?
6. What comes to mind when you think of the word *tolerance*? Todd writes, "Tolerance, rightly understood, is an act of love, generosity, and hospitality. Tolerance does

not demand that someone enter the conversation with us the way we wish they were. It accepts others as they are—really.” Does Todd’s definition of tolerance work for you?

Chapter 8: Denver Outsiders

Birds of a feather flock together, and so do Christians. *Difference* makes us uncomfortable, afraid, and sometimes angry. Separating ourselves from difference has even become a sign of maturity for Christians. But what if one of *your* friends “goes different” on you? What then? It’s happening all around us. It may have already happened to you.

Questions to Consider

1. If you watched the Denver interview with a group, share with each other the feelings it prompted or provoked in you. Try not to correct, fix, or analyze each other’s feelings. Just listen. If you’re not in a group, simply note what emotions came up for you when you watched this interview.
2. In the clip “Remaining Open,” Andrew talks about holding some things with a closed hand and others with an open hand. What issues do you hold with a closed hand, and what issues do you hold with an open hand?
3. What do you find most interesting or surprising about the video clip “Backstage in Denver”?
4. Watch the clip “The Christian Label” in the Denver section of the website. What label or description do

you use to explain your faith or beliefs? How do other Christians and/or outsiders respond to this?

Chapter 9: Getting Past Gay

We think this might be the most important chapter of the book. We wrote *The Outsider Interviews* in part to help parents understand their kids. Things change. Today's twenty-somethings are different from those of earlier generations. That's why Craig wrote this chapter.

Questions to Consider

1. Craig said, "I started a process I now call 'recycling my faith,' where I pressed the reset button and started over. I kept some beliefs and discarded others, but I primarily reshaped the things I'd been taught to better reflect my personal experience with God. I call this recycling because I didn't just discard the faith I grew up with; rather, I reused and redeemed parts of it so that it could be useful in my life today. I began to trust myself and Jesus a little more and what I'd been taught a little less." Does Craig's term "recycling faith" work for you? Why or why not? What beliefs have you recycled?
2. Craig said to his father, "I don't see us coming to any conclusions about that topic. I just want to explore whether it's possible for us to talk about something like homosexuality without it resulting in an anger-filled, intellectual debate." We have difficulty talking about differences. The categories that most often trigger these kinds of feelings seem to be religion, politics, and

- sexuality. In what relationships have you been able to talk about these sensitive topics without the relationship falling apart? What is necessary for such an interaction to take place?
3. At one point Craig apologizes to his dad for judging him. Have you ever apologized to your parents or anyone else for judging them? How did that experience change you? How did it impact the relationship?
 4. Craig's dad expresses frustration with homosexuals who "seem hyper-sure of themselves" and "want to shove their lifestyle in our faces by parading their relationships and complaining about not having equal rights." Gay people, of course, accuse Christians of the very same practices. What do you make of this dynamic? How might Christians engage it constructively?
 5. Craig summarizes what he wants from his dad this way: "I just want to feel as though he accepts me even if he disagrees with me." Why do you think this is so important to Craig?
 6. This chapter doesn't have a happy ending. That's because Craig and his dad remain in a process. Lack of resolution is frustrating. Are you in a relationship that is to some extent unresolved? If so, what is difficult about this? What gives you hope about your relationship?

Chapter 10: The Risky Business of Engaging Difference

What happens when there's no happy ending? We don't like it, but the fact is that when we tell the truth, it can cost us. Craig Spinks takes you behind the scenes in his family drama.

Questions to Consider

1. What were your first reactions after reading the continuation of Craig's story? Who did you find yourself relating to in the story?
2. Do you have a family member you find hard to interact with at times? How do family dynamics help or hinder your interactions with that person?
3. It seems that Craig is trying to change how he interacts with his family to more closely reflect his interaction with people outside his family. Do you think that family interactions should be thought of differently than other relationships, or should all relationships essentially play by the same rules?
4. At the end of the chapter, Craig says that his goal isn't to eliminate pain but to learn how to move through painful experiences in a more healthy way. How do you typically respond to painful experiences? How would you like to respond?

Chapter 11: Seattle Outsiders

This chapter addresses two issues: (1) outsiders' and insiders' perception that Christianity is overly involved in politics, and (2) outsiders' and insiders' desire to serve others.

Questions to Consider

1. How do you make sense of the reality that while most African American Christians vote Democratic, most white Christians vote Republican? How would (or do) you explain this well-known divide to outsiders?

2. In the clip “The Urge to Serve,” Chandra (an insider) and Audrey (an outsider) say essentially the same thing: serving others is a spiritual activity. Many Christians have been taught that outsiders’ only motive for serving others is to earn a ticket to heaven (aka good works). What do you sense is Audrey’s motive?
3. The clarity of Audrey’s plea, “Don’t invite me to church—invite me to serve,” is startling to us. Even though it comes from an outsider, it captures the value shift we sense taking place among young people—both insiders and outsiders. In the past, obeying Jesus was interpreted to mean personal morality; now it includes *servicing others*. Why do you think this shift is taking place? Does it concern or comfort you?
4. In the clip “Bottom Line Beliefs,” Matt, Sarah, and Alex discuss what they see as foundational in Christian faith. What do you think is foundational? Do you have any beliefs that don’t align? If so, how do you reconcile those beliefs with your Christian faith?

Chapter 12: Six Lessons Learned

With the interviews in the rearview mirror, the three of us took time to reflect. What was going on in the minds of Todd, Craig, and Jim on a deeper level? What were the things that impacted us the most?

Questions to Consider

1. Craig said, “I was at an evangelism conference, and it was my turn to share my experiences with Christianity

- with the group. For some reason I decided to take a risk and let them see the uncensored me.” Have you, like Craig, shared your real feelings with some Christians, knowing you were taking a risk? If so, what happened?
2. Todd said, “It is bold to speak up, but it is even bolder to shut up and listen, to make yourself vulnerable to the assertions and questions of young outsiders.” Todd flips the meaning of boldness from preaching to listening. When have you exercised the courage of listening to people say something you really didn’t want to hear? Upon reflection, was it a good decision? How did it impact that relationship?
 3. Jim said, “Audrey, one of our Seattle outsiders, shared a letter with me that she wrote to her boss, outlining five things she’d like him to know about how she sees things (if he was interested).” Review Audrey’s list. Which points do you identify with, and which ones seem over the top? Why?
 4. Craig said, “I could continue to process why some people are harder to dialogue with than others, but the fact will still remain: we will always have people in our lives who seem utterly impossible to talk to. In lieu of solving that problem, I thought I’d offer a few things I’m looking for from people I find difficult to talk with.” Review Craig’s list. Which of his points pushes your buttons, and why do they do so?
 5. Todd said, “Listening and the capacity for dialogue are first a quality of being, not an evangelistic tactic. Working the classic Christian disciplines in pursuit of spiritual transformation, we must become the kind of persons for whom open-hearted, honest, noncoercive

dialogue is natural, normal, and routine.” If, as Todd suggests, evangelism meant the spiritual practice of noncoercive dialogue, how would that change the way you share Jesus with people?

6. What opportunities do you have to stand on common ground and work for the common good with the outsiders in your life? What can you do this week to begin cultivating those opportunities?

Chapter 13: Where Are They Now?

We were able to check back with our original guests to find out how things had or hadn't changed in their lives and perspectives.

Questions to Consider

1. When you reached this chapter, which of the outsiders were you looking forward to hearing from the most? Why?
2. Whose update surprised you the most?
3. A number of the updates included shifts in thought or belief. Do you find this fluidity encouraging or discouraging? Why?