

Jesus Outside the Lines—Chapter Questions

Introduction

1. What new insights did you gain about Jesus, culture, or yourself as a result of reading this chapter? What resonated with you? What troubled you?
2. What are your thoughts on Tim Kreider’s theory that “some part of us loves feeling 1) right and 2) wronged”? How has this theory proven true in your experience, and what have been the results?
3. Similarly, what are your thoughts on Tim Keller’s idea that tolerance “isn’t about not having beliefs. It’s about how your beliefs lead you to treat people who disagree with you”?
4. Sauls writes, “When the grace of Jesus sinks in, we will be among the least offended and most loving people in the world.” Among the Christians that you know, in what ways have you found this to be true? In what ways have you found it untrue?
5. Within Christianity, do you tend to be receptive or suspicious of contributions made by people from other traditions than your own? How does this tendency manifest itself?
6. How did you react to the “atheist chaplain’s” stated desire for Christians and atheists to work together, where they are able, for the common good? Similarly, how did you react to the story about the friendship between Christian businessman Dan Cathy and gay activist Shane Windmeyer? Would Jesus respond similarly? Why or why not?

Chapter 1

1. What new insights did you gain about Jesus, culture, or yourself as a result of reading this chapter? What resonated with you? What troubled you?
2. Sauls writes, “There are few subjects that cause people to become more heated and opinionated than the subject of politics. Yet in the public discourse, the most heated and opinionated people seem to get nowhere with their heated opinions.” What is your initial response to this thought?
3. Citing political diversity among Jesus’ twelve disciples, Sauls says that we should feel “at home” with people who share our faith but not our politics even more than we do with people who share our politics but not our faith. What is your response to this?
4. This chapter suggests that even Christians can manipulate the truth in politics and become willing participants in spin—baptizing their own agendas while demonizing the opposition through caricature. When you have seen this occur, did it lead to positive or negative outcomes? Explain.
5. What is your initial response to the idea that Jesus is neither conservative nor liberal, yet he is also both?
6. If you had to choose, would you want Christians’ role in the world to be that of a “religious majority” or a “life-giving minority”? Do you agree or disagree

with the idea that, as C. S. Lewis once said, the best citizens of the present world are the ones who think the most of the next? Explain.

Chapter 2

1. What new insights did you gain about Jesus, culture, or yourself as a result of reading this chapter? What resonated with you? What troubled you?
2. In the pro-life/pro-choice discussion, do you believe that either or both sides run the risk of privileging one type of human being while dismissing another type of human being? Why or why not?
3. Sauls writes, "A crying infant is as significant and valuable as a famous actor, a homeless person as a president, a student as a teacher, a private as a general, a concessions worker as a quarterback, a patient as a surgeon, and a janitor as a CEO." What is your initial response to this idea?
4. In the Good Samaritan parable, Jesus defined our neighbor as anyone who is near and anyone who is in need. In other words, our neighbor, according to Jesus, is every other human being. How do your personal interactions affirm and/or deny this belief?
5. In what ways do you find it easy to celebrate the "divine imprint" of the image of God in every person? In what ways do you find it difficult?
6. If we all deeply believed C. S. Lewis's declaration that "next to the Blessed Sacrament itself, your neighbor is the holiest object presented to your senses," how would it impact our relationships with those closest to us? How would it impact the manner in which we disagree on important issues?

Chapter 3

1. What new insights did you gain about Jesus, culture, or yourself as a result of reading this chapter? What resonated with you? What troubled you?
2. How would you describe your current relationship with the local church? To what degree does the local church intersect with your spiritual life?
3. What is your response to the idea that the local church is in part to blame for some people's misgivings about participation in the local church? Do you believe that this is a cop-out, or do people who believe this have a point?
4. Sauls writes, "Membership in a local church means joining your imperfect self to many other imperfect selves to form an imperfect community that, through Jesus, embarks on a journey toward a better future...together." What, if anything, has this thought meant to you personally?
5. Do you believe that being part of an imperfect local church helps or hinders a person's ability to draw near to Jesus? How does the way Paul engages with Corinth support (or challenge) your view?
6. Sauls concludes with the thought "Corinth needs the revolutionaries. Something tells me that the revolutionaries need Corinth too." Do you agree or disagree?

Chapter 4

1. What new insights did you gain about Jesus, culture, or yourself as a result of reading this chapter? What resonated with you? What troubled you?
2. Have you ever dealt with money guilt? If so, after reading chapter 4, do you think that your money guilt was justified? Why or why not?
3. If you were asked to reconcile the Bible's warnings about greed and the Bible's affirmation of the enjoyment of wealth, how would you do it? What would you say?
4. Do you think that greed is some people's problem to be conquered, or is it everybody's problem? Why do you answer in the way that you do?
5. Based on your own experience, do you think it is easier to find contentment with a lot of wealth or with a little bit of wealth? How does your own experience confirm (or contradict) the stories of Rockefeller and the woman from Ghana?
6. Respond to the following excerpt from chapter 4: "A shrinking net worth can be one of God's greatest hidden blessings. True freedom is found in the realization that 'everything minus Jesus equals nothing' and 'Jesus plus nothing equals everything.'"

Chapter 5

1. What new insights did you gain about Jesus, culture, or yourself as a result of reading this chapter? What resonated with you? What troubled you?
2. Do you think that the accusation that Christians are typically "*anti-something*" is fair? Why or why not?
3. Can you describe a time when Christians were, like Jesus, seen as offensive by smug, judgmental, religious people, and were also seen as a breath of fresh air by nonreligious people? How have these experiences impacted you?
4. Do you agree with Saul's statement that it is "better to be lumped in with gluttons and drunks than with image-conscious Pharisees" and that "the closer we are to Jesus, the further we will be from sin [and] the closer we will be to sinners"? Why or why not?
5. What is your reaction to the story about two pastors tearing each other apart with words? Did this surprise you, concern you, give you hope, or some combination of all three? Explain.
6. How does the idea of "critiquing without criticizing" manifest itself in the life and ministry of Jesus? What does his approach say about what he wants for each of us?

Chapter 6

1. What new insights did you gain about Jesus, culture, or yourself as a result of reading this chapter? What resonated with you? What troubled you?
2. Does it surprise you to hear that Jesus said more about hell and judgment than he did about love or heaven, or that God's words of doom and judgment were "as sweet as honey" to the prophet Ezekiel? Why or why not?

3. In your view, does the impact of praise and criticism say something about how God created the moral universe? What do our craving for praise on the one hand, and our resistance to criticism on the other, tell us about how we have been created?
4. How did the story of Madonna's fear of mediocrity impact you? Can you relate to her story? If so, how do you relate? Also, in what ways can belief in Jesus resolve this fear?
5. Sauls writes, "To damn anything that Jesus said is to damn ourselves" and "When we call the Bible's teaching about judgment into question...we also put all victims of injustice, violence, and oppression at risk." What is your response to these statements?
6. Do you believe that the biblical fear of God and being afraid of God are mutually exclusive? Why or why not?

Chapter 7

1. What new insights did you gain about Jesus, culture, or yourself as a result of reading this chapter? What resonated with you? What troubled you?
2. Some of the greatest biblical "saints" had severe hypocrisy in their lives. How does this make you feel about Christianity? About your own life in relationship to God and others?
3. Sauls writes, "If there is hope for prostitutes and crooks and adulterers and racists and elitists and murderers and terrible husbands and coveters [in the Bible], then there is hope for somebody like me." What is your initial response to this statement?
4. Do you believe it is intellectually honest to reject Christianity because of the inconsistency of Jesus' followers? Or do you believe that this is a way that some people dodge the discomfort of dealing with Jesus and his claims on their own merits? How should Christians enter this discussion with those who have misgivings about Christianity?
5. Sauls writes that even with their many inconsistencies, "scores of life-giving contributions [by Christians] have left the world better, not worse." Can you think of some ways that this is true?
6. Do you believe, like Anne Lamott, that some of the best people are also "crazy and damaged"? What do you think Jesus would say about a comment like this?

Chapter 8

1. What new insights did you gain about Jesus, culture, or yourself as a result of reading this chapter? What resonated with you? What troubled you?
2. Sauls says that sex, a God-given gift to husbands and wives, is among the most delightful of all human activities, and is also among the most dangerous. What are your thoughts on this?

3. In your view, how has society's perspective on good looks, body image, and sexual experimentation impacted our approach to marriage, romance, and sexuality? Is our approach healthy, damaging, or neutral in its impact?
4. Do you believe it is possible to have Jesus as the supreme love of your life and affirm same-sex romantic relationships? Why or why not, and in what ways has Scripture helped to form your view?
5. How does the fact that both the Apostle Paul and Jesus chose singleness impact your view of marriage and sexuality? Similarly, do you agree with the idea that Jesus is "better than sex" and that "his love is stronger than the strongest and deeper than the deepest of human loves"? Why or why not?
6. Sauls writes, "What if the church were filled with unmarried people but had no 'single' people, because married *and* unmarried people were as family to one another—surrogate brothers and sisters and mothers and fathers and sons and daughters to the rest of the church?" Do you believe it is possible in our late modern times for this vision to become reality? Why or why not?

Chapter 9

1. What new insights did you gain about Jesus, culture, or yourself as a result of reading this chapter? What resonated with you? What troubled you?
2. When suffering and disaster occur, in which direction are you most tempted to move—"pie in the sky" or cynicism? Explain why you answer in the way that you do.
3. Sauls writes, "Hopeful realists are also deeply honest about the difficult circumstances of life. While affirming that God is good all the time, they also affirm that in so many ways things are not what they are supposed to be." Have you ever met a hopeful realist? Describe that person.
4. How do you feel about being completely honest with God—even in a very raw way—about your struggles related to suffering and evil? What does God think when we approach him with this kind of honesty?
5. Do you agree with the idea that if we knew and saw everything that God does, we would know with certainty that the absence of God is "apparent, not real"? Why or why not?
6. Jesus did not keep a distance from suffering, but became a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. Does this help you deal with suffering, does it frustrate and bewilder you, or some combination of the two? Explain.

Chapter 10

1. What new insights did you gain about Jesus, culture, or yourself as a result of reading this chapter? What resonated with you? What troubled you?
2. Do you resonate with the idea that every human being craves affirmation? Do you think this is a good thing or a bad thing? Where do you see this idea manifest in real life?

3. Name a time when you saw or experienced the Pharisee's inclination to praise himself while looking at others with contempt. Why do you think we are so prone to do this?
4. Sauls writes that "the root cause of pride and an unhealthy rival spirit is not self-love but self-loathing." Do you agree or disagree? Why?
5. What are some ways that we "pray to our own soul" in order to counter how small we feel? What are some of our culture's shame triggers that cause us to feel either superior or worthless, or both?
6. Have you ever witnessed or experienced how the love and favor of Christ can free a person from self-esteem struggles? If so, describe what you saw or experienced.

Epilogue

1. What new insights did you gain about Jesus, culture, or yourself as a result of reading this chapter? What resonated with you? What troubled you?
2. Up to now, what has been your overall impression of Christians? In what ways, if any, did the epilogue of *Jesus Outside the Lines* change your impression? In what ways did it confirm your impression?
3. How do you account for the fact that Christians in the Bible and also throughout history have been capable of both horrible and shameful, and also lovely and magnificent, things?
4. Were you surprised to read that so many agnostic or atheist "intellectual titans," after looking carefully and objectively into the claims of Christianity, became Christians themselves? Why or why not?
5. If you are a believer in Jesus, are you willing to lovingly listen to the concerns that nonbelieving people have about Christians and Christianity? If you do not believe in Jesus, are you willing to consider Jesus based on his own merits? Why or why not?
6. Sauls gives the last word of his "Christian" book to an atheist. Why do you think he did this? Do you agree or disagree with his approach? Why?