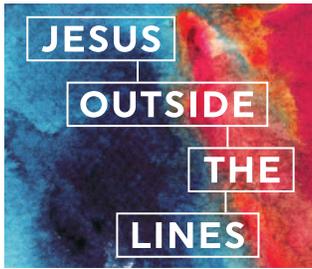


by **Scott Sauls**

## Questions for Discussion

### Week 1 (Intro, Chapters 1 & 2)

1. 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"?
2. 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?
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. Chapter one 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. 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?
7. 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?
8. What additional insights did you gain about Jesus, culture, or yourself as a result of reading these chapters? What resonated with you? What troubled you?

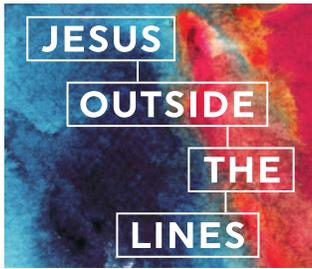


by **Scott Sauls**

## Questions for Discussion

### Week 2 (Chapters 3 & 4)

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. Sauls concludes chapter 3 with the thought "Corinth needs the revolutionaries. Something tells me that the revolutionaries need Corinth too." Do you agree or disagree?
4. 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?
5. Do you think that greed is only some people's problem to be conquered, or is it everybody's problem? Why do you answer in the way that you do?
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.'"
7. What additional insights did you gain about Jesus, culture, or yourself as a result of reading these chapters? What resonated with you? What troubled you?

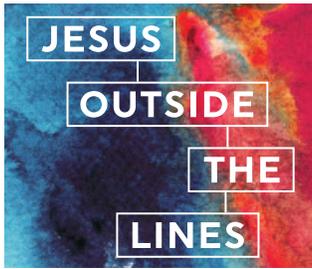


by **Scott Sauls**

## Questions for Discussion

### Week 3 (Chapters 5 & 6)

1. Do you think that the accusation that Christians are typically "anti-something" is fair? Why or why not?
2. Can you describe a time when Christians were, like Jesus, seen as offensive to smug, judgmental, religious people, and were also seen as a breath of fresh air by nonreligious people? How have these experiences impacted you?
3. Do you agree with Sauls'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?
4. 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?
5. 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?
6. 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?
7. 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?
8. What additional insights did you gain about Jesus, culture, or yourself as a result of reading these chapters? What resonated with you? What troubled you?

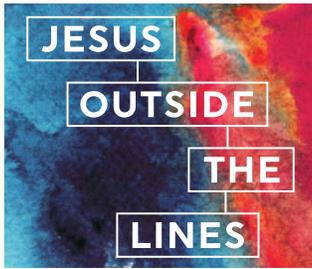


by **Scott Sauls**

## Questions for Discussion

### Week 4 (Chapters 7 & 8)

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?
6. 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?
7. 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?
8. What additional insights did you gain about Jesus, culture, or yourself as a result of reading these chapters? What resonated with you? What troubled you?



## Questions for Discussion

### Week 5 (Chapters 9, 10, & Epilogue)

by **Scott Sauls**

1. 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.
2. 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?
3. 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.
4. 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?
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.
7. 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?
8. 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?
9. What additional insights did you gain about Jesus, culture, or yourself as a result of reading these chapters? What resonated with you? What troubled you?