

How to Communicate with People
You Disagree with and Maybe Even
CHANGE THE WORLD



**TALKING
ACROSS
the
DIVIDE**

STUDY GUIDE

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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This free guide is designed to accompany the book *Talking Across the Divide: How to Communicate with People You Disagree With and Maybe Even Change the World*. If you don't already have the book, it's available in print, ebook, and audiobook formats. See geekyjustin.com/TATD for links.

You can use this guide to help you make the most of your personal study of *Talking Across the Divide*, but you can also use it in group study.

USING THIS GUIDE FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Talking Across the Divide is designed to be applied to your life, chapter by chapter. As you read each chapter of *Talking Across the Divide*, pause at the end of the chapter to look over the questions for that chapter and spend a few minutes considering your own response to each question.

You are strongly encouraged to use this study guide alongside a paper notebook or digital device for journaling. If possible, don't just think about your answers to the questions; actually take the time to *write your answers down* and use that as a starting point for private journaling about your dialogue attempts.

Strategic dialogue is difficult work; committing ideas to writing can help encourage you to follow through and help you remember many of the specific principles as you seek to apply them in challenging real-world situations.

When you get to chapter 3, you'll be asked to choose a specific person and issue to focus on for many of the questions in following chapters. Don't skip this step; it will help you make the most of your time with the book.

You might also consider using the study guide questions to inspire ideas for blogging, vlogging, sermons, social media posts, or discussions with friends or family. It's all up to you!

USING THIS GUIDE FOR GROUP STUDY

Want to start a discussion on the topics in *Talking Across the Divide*? Invite your book club, friends, or family to commit to read *Talking Across the Divide* with you and then meet—online or offline—to discuss what you’ve read.

Many groups like to read in sections, so you might commit to meet, for example, after every chapter or every three chapters, or you might read the whole book first and then meet to discuss it all at once.

This study guide includes questions for each chapter, so you can choose your favorite questions (or invite group participants to choose their favorite questions) from the chapters you’ve read so far and then discuss your thoughts as a group.

Allow plenty of time for people to share stories related to their own attempts at dialogue—or the people and situations they’d like to address in the future.

Because some of the stories may be sensitive, ensure that all group members are committed to maintaining confidentiality from the beginning—and don’t pressure anyone to say more than they feel comfortable saying.

You might also commit to meet again in the future, after putting the book concepts into practice, to discuss challenges you’ve run into and support one another in the difficult work of dialogue!

PRINTING, COPYING, OR TRANSLATING THIS GUIDE

You are free to download, print, copy, and/or distribute this study guide in its complete form.

You may also reproduce portions of this study guide and/or combine it with your own questions or commentary, as long as you clearly indicate your changes and include a prominent link back to geekyjustin.com for the full guide.

If you wish to translate this study guide into another language, please contact Justin (geekyjustin.com/contact) for permission and details.

STUDY/DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

CHAPTER 1: ECHO-CHAMBER WORLD

- What are some of the most divisive issues you can think of in society today?
- What are the stakes? What could happen if we don't find a way to talk to each other about these issues?
- Who in your life do you find it difficult to talk to because of your differing views?
- What makes those conversations so difficult?

CHAPTER 2: BUT I CAN'T TALK TO THOSE PEOPLE!

- In this chapter, the author mentioned some of his personal bubbles. What bubbles do you exist in? (Think about the groups you most identify with and the spaces where you feel most comfortable.)
- What are some bubbles you struggle to understand or communicate with—the people who make you say, “But I can't talk to those people”? (Think about groups of people who are different from you in terms of politics, race, religion, social views, etc.)
- Pick one or more of the groups you listed above. What are some things you *just don't understand* about members of that group? What, if anything, do you wish they would do differently?
- Can you think of a “Thanksgiving with Uncle John” moment you've had recently—a time you got frustrated with someone you disagreed with and didn't know how to respond? What did they do that frustrated you? How did you respond?
- What are the biggest advantages and disadvantages you can think of for each of the three “tools” at the end of this chapter?

CHAPTER 3: THE FOURTH TOOL

- What kind of gut reactions do you have to the idea of dialogue with the people you disagree with?
- Who is one person you would be willing to try to dialogue with? Write their name here (or in a prominent place in your journal):

For the rest of this study guide, this person will be referred to as “your chosen dialogue partner.”

(Really, do it! This is going to be helpful as you go through the rest of this study guide. If you are going through the study guide with a group, you don't need to share the person's name with the group unless you want to. This is for you.)

- What is an issue or situation you would like to make progress on with that person? Write it here (or in a prominent place in your journal):

For the rest of this study guide, that issue/situation will be referred to as “your chosen issue.”

- What good things do you hope could come out of dialogue with this person?
- How do you feel as you think about dialoguing with this person? Do you have any fears or concerns?

CHAPTER 4: HOW TO PREPARE FOR A SUCCESSFUL DIALOGUE

This chapter offers eight practical tips for preparing for your dialogue. (Hint: Look at the subheadings under the three big “steps.”) As you think about them in the context of the dialogue partner and issue you chose in chapter 3...

- Which pieces of advice do you think will be most important in your particular situation? How will you do those things?
- What frustrating situation(s) might come up during your dialogue? What are some ways you can prepare yourself for them?
- What do you think would motivate that person to be willing to dialogue with you?
- What would be some good ground rules for your dialogue?

CHAPTER 5: SHUT UP AND LISTEN

- What are some questions you might ask your chosen dialogue partner?
- Are there things they might say that would make it difficult for you to keep listening? How might you handle those situations if they arise?
- What do you consider to be the most compelling reasons to keep listening even when it's hard?

CHAPTER 6: THE VILLAIN'S SIDE OF THE STORY

- Can you think of a real-life situation you've been in where the Ego Protection barrier got in the way of productive dialogue? What happened?
- When you think about your chosen dialogue partner, are you ever tempted to imagine them as a one-dimensional villain? Why or why not?
- Imagine that person were going to explain their side of the story. What do you think they would say?
- If you showed that person what you wrote about them in the question above, do you think they would agree with how you've portrayed them? Why or why not?
- What questions could you ask to help you better understand "the villain's side of the story"?

CHAPTER 7: CHALLENGING US-VS.-THEM MINDSETS

- What are your "teams"?
- What teams are most important to your chosen dialogue partner?
- What stands out to you about the Yale welfare experiment? If you had been a participant, do you think you would have responded any differently than the other participants did? Why?
- This chapter offers four specific ways to fight the team loyalty mindset. For each one, is there a way you could apply it to your chosen issue? How?
- Which of those strategies do you think would be most effective?

CHAPTER 8: WHEN TEAMS GET TENSE

- Think about the perspective of the group you *least* relate to in the conflict between the Southern Baptist conference attendees and the LGBT conference viewers—the team you are most likely to *disagree* with. Using the information provided in the chapter, put yourself in their shoes and make the strongest argument you can in *support* of their perspective.
- Ask the other members of your study group (or, if studying alone, other people you know who might have insight into that team’s perspective) to critique your argument with honest feedback. Have you managed to put yourself in the other team’s shoes, or have you relied on straw men? How do you know?
- Try the same exercise with an issue you’re facing in your personal life.
- Do you find it hard to tell the other team’s story? What additional information would you need to make it easier? How would you get that information?

CHAPTER 9: ARE YOU THE PROBLEM?

- Can you think of a time you’ve fallen for Stage One mistakes? What can you do to avoid these mistakes in the future? How can you help others avoid these mistakes?
- Can you think of a time you’ve fallen for Stage Two mistakes? What can you do to avoid these mistakes in the future? How can you help others avoid these mistakes?
- Can you think of a time you’ve fallen for Stage Three mistakes? What can you do to avoid these mistakes in the future? How can you help others avoid these mistakes?

CHAPTER 10: THE POWER OF YOUR STORY

Think about your chosen issue...

- How has it affected you personally? What emotions has it made you feel?
- When is one specific time you've felt that way? What happened? How did you respond? Jot down some bullet points about that experience.
- What are the stakes involved? What do you worry could happen (or is already happening) if things don't change? Jot down some bullet points about this.
- Think about the person you'd like to raise this issue with. What do you have in common with them? Jot down some bullet points.
- Using the bullet points you jotted down as a personal guide, write or share a short story about your experience, including the commonalities, the emotions, and the stakes.
- Is this a story you'd feel comfortable sharing with the person you'd like to reach? Is it a story that might even be appropriate to share online or in broader circles? What impact might it have if you did?

CHAPTER 11: FIGHTING FALSEHOOD

- What misconceptions do you know or suspect your chosen dialogue partner may hold about your issue? (Consider: What might they think your motivations are? What might they think is causing the problem/tension? What might they think the possible solutions are? What other "false facts" might they have bought into about the situation?)
- How might these misconceptions affect their approach to your issue?
- How could you modify your story from Chapter 10 to address some of these misconceptions?

CHAPTER 12: WHY WON'T THEY ACCEPT THE TRUTH?

- This chapter shows several potential “problems” that could prevent someone from accepting the truth. Which (if any) of these do you think may be affecting your chosen dialogue partner?
- What are some possible solutions to those problems? How would you implement them?

CHAPTER 13: AN UPLIFTING STORY—STARRING THEM

- This chapter offers five key elements of a successful “story of the future.” For each of them, name one way you could incorporate that element when you talk to your chosen dialogue partner about your chosen issue.

CHAPTER 14: MAKING THE ASK

- What are some beliefs you hold in your own “roots”?
- What are some beliefs your chosen dialogue partner might hold in their roots?
- Thinking about the advice in this chapter, what practical “next step” could you ask for without interfering with their roots?

CHAPTER 15: REFLECTION

Think about a time in the past when you tried to talk to someone about an issue you cared about but didn't accomplish what you'd hoped for.

- What had you hoped to accomplish? Do you think those expectations were realistic?
- What, if anything, do you think was motivating the other person to talk to you?
- As you reflect on that situation in light of this chapter, is there anything you would do differently if you were in a similar situation in the future? Why?

CHAPTER 16: HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

- As you think about the challenges of dialogue ahead, what motivates you? What gives you hope?
- What helps you unwind?
- Who can you turn to if you run into challenges and need encouragement?
- Now that you've read this book, what is one major thing you will commit to do differently in the future?



FOR FURTHER STUDY & DISCUSSION

WANT TO CONTINUE THE CONVERSATION?

If you've enjoyed *Talking Across the Divide*, here are some other things you might like:

- Justin will be continuing to explore the material in *Talking Across the Divide* on his website, geekyjustin.com. Visit geekyjustin.com/tatd-conversation to submit your own questions and comments and be part of the ongoing conversation.
- Justin's first book, *Torn: Rescuing the Gospel from the Gays-vs.-Christians Debate*, uses many of the principles discussed in *Talking Across the Divide* to address a Christian audience struggling with questions about sexual orientation. If that topic interests you, you can learn more at geekyjustin.com/torn.
- Justin is available to speak to your group on the subjects in *Talking Across the Divide*! Visit geekyjustin.com/speaking to set it up.