# STUDY GUIDE

# RESCUING THE GOSPEL FROM THE GAYS-VS.-CHRISTIANS DEBATE

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# HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This free guide is designed to accompany the book *Torn: Rescuing the Gospel from the Gays-vs.-Christians Debate*, first edition (sold in the UK as *Unconditional*). If you don't already have the book, it's available in print, ebook, and audiobook formats. See geekyjustin.com/torn for links. You can use this guide either in a group study or on your own.

## STUDYING WITH A GROUP

Want to start a discussion on the topics in *Torn*? Invite your book club, church small group, friends, or family to commit to read *Torn* 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.

When you discuss, encourage participants to cultivate an environment where everyone feels safe to share their own thoughts, even if they disagree with the author or the others in the group. The purpose isn't to debate or pressure everyone into agreement; the purpose is to allow participants to share their journeys with each other as they work through the ideas in the book.

Be aware of anyone who is dominating the discussion or holding back. Don't pressure anyone to speak who doesn't want to, but make sure they have the opportunity to be heard if they have something to say. Some people are reluctant to jump in or may need extra time to formulate their thoughts.

Some people may also have emotional reactions to the subject matter. Allow them an opportunity to express their feelings, and encourage the group to listen and support them, even where there's disagreement.

At the conclusion of each session, especially if there's been disagreement or emotional sharing, encourage all members of the group to take time expressing gratitude to the others for their participation or (especially if the participants know each other well) expressing what they appreciate or love about the other group members. This can help ensure that the discussion is a positive and encouraging one for all participants even though the subject matter may be difficult at times.

## STUDYING ON YOUR OWN

You can also use this guide for personal study. As you read each chapter of *Torn*, 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.

Some questions may not apply to you. That's okay; feel free to skip over them or adapt them to your situation. (For example, if a question asks about "your church" but you don't go to church, you might think about local churches in your community, a church you used to attend, or a local group you're involved in.)

You may find it helpful to use the questions as a starting point for private journaling or as topics to consider in your personal prayer or meditation time.

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!

## PRINTING, COPYING, OR TRANSLATING THIS GUIDE

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

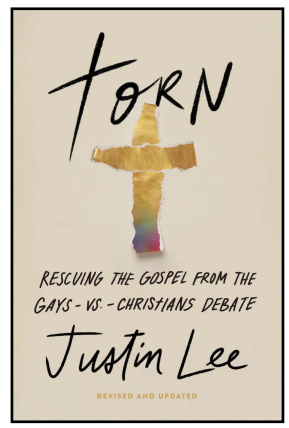
You may also reproduce portions of this guide and/or combine it with your own questions or commentary, as long as you clearly indicate your changes and include a prominent link back to geekyjustin.com for the full guide.

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

# CHECK YOUR EDITION!

There are two editions of this study guide to match the different editions of *Torn*.

## TORN, SECOND EDITION




If your version of *Torn* looks like this, you have the *second* edition, with additional chapters not covered by this study guide. **To download a free study guide for your edition, visit geekyjustin.com/books/torn-v2/.**

## TORN, FIRST EDITION

If your version of *Torn* (or *Unconditional*) features one of these covers, you have the first edition, and this is the correct study guide to match your copy.

## WHAT IF OUR GROUP MEMBERS HAVE DIFFERENT EDITIONS?

If you're leading a group study and members have different editions, **use the second edition study guide** and follow the instructions on page 6 for handling different editions.

# STUDY/DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

## OPENING QUESTIONS

(For the first day of discussion or before reading *Torn*.)

- What experiences have you had with the gay/Christian culture war? Have you ever felt misunderstood?
- If you could correct one misconception about gays or Christians, what would it be? Why do you think people have this misconception?
- Why do you think this subject matters so much?

## CHAPTER 1: BATTLE OF THE CENTURY

- Would someone like Cindy feel comfortable talking openly about her situation and fears in your church? Why or why not? What challenges might she and her son face?
- Do you think Christians' negative reputation on gay issues is justified?
- What might happen if the culture war continues?

## CHAPTER 2: GOD BOY

- Have you known (or been) someone like "God boy" in your life? Talk about that experience.
- Justin says he was blind to "the complexities of the question…the motives of the questioner…the unintentional callousness of my response."
  - What do you think he means by this?
  - What are some possible motives Sean might have had for asking the question?
  - What complexities might Justin have overlooked?
- How do you think Sean's view of Justin might have differed from Justin's view of himself?

## CHAPTER 3: THE STRUGGLE

- Did you have any emotional responses to this chapter? Talk about them.
- Did anything in this chapter surprise or confuse you? Why?
- After reading this chapter, if you could ask Justin any one question, what would it be?

## CHAPTER 4: THE TRUTH COMES OUT

- Throughout this chapter, Justin describes being worried and afraid. What are some things he might have been afraid of? How do you think *you* might have felt in his situation?
- How do you think Justin's parents might tell the story of their meeting in the pastor's office? What might they have been thinking and feeling?
- What advice would you give to Justin's parents in that situation? What support or resources might they need from their church?

## CHAPTER 5: WHY ARE PEOPLE GAY?

- In this chapter, Justin describes several theories about why people are gay, but then concludes that "we don't know." Does it matter? How do you think it might change the conversation if one of these theories were proven to be correct?
- Justin defines the word "gay" according to someone's attractions, not necessarily their romantic or sexual behavior. Have you heard other people define the word differently? Why is it important in this discussion to know how someone defines their terms?
- What one thing surprised you most in this chapter? Why?

## CHAPTER 6: JUSTIN IN EXGAYLAND

- Justin says he felt pressure to proclaim a certain level of "healing" even though it hadn't actually happened. Have you ever felt that you had to hide your struggles, doubts, fears, or other life complexities in church?
- What emotions did you have as you read the stories of Terry, Colin, Michael, Gary, John, and James?
- Do you agree with Justin that it's important for Christians to distinguish between *orientation* and *behavior*? Why?
- If your daughter, sister, or best friend had plans to marry someone like James, the young man at the end of this chapter, how would you respond?

## CHAPTER 7: THAT THE MAN SHOULD BE ALONE

- If you believed God required you to be celibate for life, giving up any current/future spouse or love interest, how would you respond? What would you find scariest or most difficult about a life alone?
- How might the challenges of someone in this position be similar to those of other single people? How might they be different?
- Does this chapter give you any ideas of ways your church might better minister to singles?

## CHAPTER 8: SOUTH PARK CHRISTIANS

- What was the most frustrating moment of this chapter for you?
- What common mistakes did the Christians in this chapter make? What advice would you give them to help them handle situations like this better?
- Have you ever had experiences in the church that made you feel ostracized or misunderstood?

## CHAPTER 9: THE POISONED YEAST

- Justin argues that the "yeast" of misinformation has harmed the church. Do you agree? What examples can you think of?
- What problems do you see with Mark's approach to Justin's question? If one of Mark's suggestions (distant parents, abuse, etc.) had been true of Justin's life, would that change your answer? Why or why not?

## CHAPTER 10: FAITH ASSASSINS

- What reaction do you have to Justin's statement that "the Christians are killing Christianity"? Why?
- Why do you think that grace isn't "the aroma Christians give off in the world"? What, if anything, can be done to change that?
- Can you think of examples in your own life of Christian groups failing to effectively balance Truth and Love? Are there times *you've* failed to balance them well? Why do you think that is?

## CHAPTER 11: THE OTHER SIDE

- Gay teenagers are statistically far more likely than their straight peers to report severe depression and suicide attempts. Does this chapter suggest any reasons to you about why that might be? How would you address those problems?
- Why do you think Justin's attempt to build bridges between GALBA and CCF failed? Do you think there are any similar dynamics at work in your own community?
- What do you think of Justin's comment that "it was easy to see how [the club] could be a welcome place of relaxation and escape"? Why do you think this might be important for some gay people? Where do you go to relax?
- Justin responds to certain images of gay life by saying, "This isn't me!" Do you ever have that feeling when you see stereotypical portrayals of groups you belong to?

## CHAPTER 12: BACK TO THE BIBLE

**(Note: Chapters 12 and 13 can be the most controversial for many groups. It may be helpful to begin discussion with an agreement to keep conversation friendly and grace-filled even if disagreements arrive.)**

- Read the Sodom story (**Genesis 19**) and the Gibeah story (**Judges 19**). Had you read these passages prior to this? Did anything about them surprise you?
- What interpretive assumptions did Justin bring to his analysis of the Bible passages in this chapter? How is his approach to Scripture similar to or different from your own or that of other Christians you know?
- Is it possible for two Christians to read the same passage and honestly arrive at two different conclusions about what it means? (Can you think of examples?) What factors might influence their interpretations?
- Justin concludes this chapter feeling torn and confused. Have you ever felt torn or confused by something you read in the Bible? Talk about that experience.

## CHAPTER 13: WHATEVER COMMANDMENT THERE MAY BE

- In your own life, how do you balance the need for rules with the need for grace? Have you encountered situations where the right thing to do was unclear? Talk about those situations and how you handled them.
- Justin argues that there is no "safe side" in this debate; each side believes the other side is sinning. Is it possible to show grace to someone even if you believe they are doing and teaching something harmful? What does that look like?
- How is this debate similar to or different from other debates the church has faced in the past? What can we learn from those debates?

## CHAPTER 14: LIGHTNING ROD

- Philip Yancey says the church "has managed to gain a reputation for its ungrace." Why is this important for Christians to understand?
- Can you think of a specific time you've failed to show grace to others? Can you think of anything specific you could do in the future to show more grace to others?
- Justin describes how his community came to include people on both "Side A" and "Side B," in spite of their strong theological disagreements. What benefits do you see in having a community where both sides are represented and treating each other with love? What challenges might such a community face? How would you address those challenges?

## CHAPTER 15: THE WAY FORWARD

- Of the seven recommendations Justin makes in this chapter, which ones resonate the most with you? Why?
- What piece of advice from this book do you wish everyone in your church would heed?
- What can we learn from the example of Tony Campolo?

## CONCLUDING QUESTIONS

- Having finished this book and study, how are you feeling right now?
- In this book, Justin focuses primarily on his experience as a gay man. What might be similar/different for people who are lesbian, bisexual, transgender, asexual, etc.? What questions would you have for members of those groups?
- In what ways has this study/discussion been helpful to you? What would you like to discuss or investigate more in the future?
- Do you feel motivated to *do* or *change* anything in your life, family, church, or community? If so, what? How will you do it?
- (Don't forget to check out the "further study and discussion" section on the next page.)

# FOR FURTHER STUDY & DISCUSSION

## WANT TO CONTINUE THE CONVERSATION?

If you've enjoyed discussing *Torn*, here are some other things you might like:

- **Justin's website, geekyjustin.com**, has videos, articles, Bible study resources, and more, including in-depth responses to questions not fully covered in *Torn*.
- **Justin's second book, *Talking Across the Divide,*** is available from Penguin Random House. It's about how to have difficult conversations (like the gay/Christian conversation in *Torn*) with people who disagree with you. Learn more at geekyjustin.com/TATD.
- **Justin's YouTube channel** includes videos on a variety of Bible and Christian-related topics, including deeper dives on some of the topics covered in *Torn*. Find it at youtube.com/@geekyjustin.
- **Justin is available to speak to your group!** Visit geekyjustin.com/speaking to set it up.

## OTHER BOOKS YOU MIGHT ENJOY

- More stories:
  - *Affirming* by Sally Gary—powerful story from the director of CenterPeace, a Christian organization for LGBTQ people and those who love them.
  - *Washed and Waiting* by Wesley Hill—thoughts from a celibate "Side B" gay Christian.
  - *Does Jesus Really Love Me?* by Jeff Chu—interviews of people from various perspectives.
  - *Transforming* by Austen Hartke—stories of transgender Christians.
- The Bible and homosexuality:
  - *God and the Gay Christian* by Matthew Vines
  - *Scripture, Ethics, and the Possibility of Same-Sex Relationships* by Karen R. Keen
- *Walking the Bridgeless Canyon* by Kathy Baldock—a look at the history of this debate.
- *What's So Amazing About Grace?* by Philip Yancey—a powerful Christian look at grace.