

# **Being the Bad Guys**

## **Application Guide**

**Use this guide individually or as a group to connect the content of the book with your specific ministry context.**

**If you purchase more than 20 copies of the book, you may schedule a free call with Stephen McAlpine to discuss your context and ask questions.**

**Email [publicity@thegoodbook.com](mailto:publicity@thegoodbook.com) for more information.**

# Chapter 1: Why This Sudden Hostility?

**Being considered “the bad guys” can be very confronting, especially after so long being considered “the good guys”. Consider your perspective on this using the following questions. (Circle the number that best applies to you—1 being “not at all” and 5 being “very”).**

1. How well prepared are you emotionally to face being “the bad guy” when it comes to standing up for the biblical view on matters like sexuality and gender?

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

2. How well prepared is your church to equip its people for life in which being “the bad guy” becomes the norm?

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

3. How worried are you that the same hostility that others have experienced will be something that you experience also?

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

*If you are in a group, explain to group members the reasons why you gave the responses that you did. If doing this by yourself, think through why you gave those responses.*

4. On pages 18-19 we read that language around sex and gender employs terms that Christians often use to describe the Christian experience. This new thinking is another “gospel” that offers a pathway to freedom and joy. What other ideas, words and concepts have you heard in discussions of sex and gender identity matters, whether in person or online?

5. On pages 20-21 Dale Kuehne describes the differences in how relationships were viewed in the older traditional world (where they were about obligation) and how they are viewed in the modern individualistic world (where they are about choice).

What features and values around sex and relationships do you think belong to these “worlds”?

**Traditional (tWorld)**

**Individual (iWorld)**

6. What are some features or values from the iWorld that you might not want to give up, even though you might disagree with their eventual conclusions?

7. Many now think that the Christian understanding of sex and gender might be harmful to people and society. What role do you think social media has played in fast-tracking the pace of change in people’s beliefs about this?

## Chapter 2: Why the Surprise?

**The Bible story seems to assume that those who follow God faithfully will often be regarded as “the bad guys”. So we should not be surprised when this happens. But this reality can fall off our radar, especially in the Western world.**

1. If you were trying to convince someone that they should follow Jesus, what would you list as the benefits of doing so? Where might you find those benefits listed in the Bible?

2. If you wished someone to consider the cost of following Jesus in our time, what would you list as the challenges they would face for doing so, and why?

3. The idea of suffering for the sake of Jesus can be confronting. What do you think Peter meant when he said in 1 Peter 4 v 13 that we should rejoice when participating in Christ’s sufferings? How do we do that today?

4. Take another look at the advertisement placed by explorer Ernest Shackleton (p 32). If you were to write a pop-up advertisement on social media calling people to follow Jesus, what would you say? Come up with a headline and some copy that reflects today's reality.

5. On pages 37-38 we read about how Joshua Harris, a celebrity pastor and well-known author, walked away from faith. What are the temptations today that may lead others to walk away? What particular risks do you face?

6. Write a short prayer that you could pray on a regular basis in which you call on God to keep you from throwing in your faith in the face of hostility from the world. Centre it around how Jesus faced hostility for your sake.

# Chapter 3: Binary Beige Versus Diverse Rainbows

**The Christian perspective on sex and gender is now considered reactionary and dangerous to the health of those who see the world differently. The rejection of the Bible’s understanding of these issues is increasingly hostile.**

1. Using Genesis 1 – 2, how would you explain why God’s created order is good to a friend who is either curious about or suspicious of the Christian perspective on sex and gender?

2. Type “JK Rowling” and “gender” into an internet search tool. Have a read of some of the articles—both those that defend Rowling and those that accuse her. List some positive and negative words used around this debate.

<b>Positive</b>	<b>Negative</b>

3. What might be some signs that the church has lost its confidence to engage in the public debate around matters of sex and gender?

4. The church has not always behaved in a godly or appropriate manner when it comes to our response to those who do not see the world the way we do, especially in these areas of sexual diversity. In what ways has the church got it wrong, either by being uncaring for those who are suffering or by failing to clearly stand for biblical truth?

<b>Uncaring</b>	<b>Untruthful</b>
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5. How might the church exhibit a better story to the world around the issues of sexual identity? What practical steps could your church take? Think about the area you live in and the people in it.

6. Would your church be a welcoming place to a transgender person who wanted to explore the gospel? What challenges would you face in welcoming them into your midst?

# Chapter 4: Loud Power Versus Voiceless Victims

**Not that many people still go to church in the Western world (although more still attend in the US than other nations). But are Christians in the West really a persecuted minority, especially when we consider other nations throughout the world?**

1. Think about the state or the nation in which you live. What are the signs (historical and contemporary) that Christianity has held or still holds sway in some form? What buildings, institutions and memorials are there that indicate this?

2. Do you think that Christians have been a force for good or for bad when they have held power? Write down examples of both.

<b>For good</b>	<b>For bad</b>

3. The language of victimhood is potent in our culture. Do you think Christians should see themselves as victims? Why, or why not?



4. Type “Christian” and “hostile” into an internet search tool. Have a read of some articles that confirm a growing trend of hostility towards Christians and some that reject this thesis. What do you think is true and why?

5. Write down the names of one or two friends (or colleagues or family members) who are not Christians. What is their attitude towards your faith—are they hostile, curious, uninterested? How have you approached them with the gospel message? What happened?

6. What might it look like for Christians to no longer have a seat at the cultural table? How would this affect your church? Would people be angry, fearful, upset? What steps would they take to live with this new reality?

# Chapter 5: Self-Denial Versus Self-Actualisation

**The test of personal authenticity in our culture is whether or not you are true to yourself. To challenge someone else's authentic experience is considered an act of aggression.**

1. Hollywood and Netflix (along with other forms of popular culture) often promote "being true to yourself" or "following your heart". List some movies or series that have this philosophy at their centre.

2. Why do you think this authenticity message is so beguiling to people? What part does popular culture play in embedding it as the centre of our cultural narrative?

3. To what degree do you think our Christian culture has bought into the same self-fulfilment "authenticity" story? What signs are there that we may have done so?

4. Read Matthew 16 v 24-25. What challenge does Jesus present to your life when he calls for self-denial? What would be hard for you to give up?

5. Self-denial isn't just about sex, and it isn't just about the culture "out there". What aspects of self-denial might your church need to focus on if it is to offer a better vision of life to our "authenticity" culture?

6. Write out a prayer that you and/or your church might pray to enable you to live a life of self-denial in our culture. Consider what you might need to repent of. Also include goals you might aim for that would make you more like the truly authentic human—Jesus.

## Chapter 6: Don't Renovate the Wrong House

**God's people have always been challenged to fuse their covenant identity with other identities, and so become less identified with God. Haggai the prophet spoke into that situation centuries before the arrival of Jesus.**

1. If you haven't read Haggai 1, go do that now. When you've done so, explain in one paragraph the main thrust of the story.

2. List all of the identity markers in your life (for example, woman, brother, tennis fan, etc). Which ones are the most important in your mind? What place does being a follower of Jesus have in that list?

3. Rank the list you have above by adding ratings. It doesn't have to be an exhaustive or definitive list, but have a go at indicating how important each of these identity markers is in your daily thinking.

Not important    Somewhat important    Important    Quite Important    Very Important

4. In what ways can you honour God in each of these identities?

5. When you have the time, listen to the speech by David Foster Wallace called This Is Water. In the meantime, look at pages 97-98. What do you think it means to “worship” something? How might you know if you are?

6. What distractions might keep you busy and prevent you from honouring and worshipping God and finding your identity in him?

7. What might be some markers of a church that preferences God’s people, proclaims God’s praises and promotes God’s promises?

# Chapter 7: When the Culture War Comes to You

**We all live in a culture. Workplaces, schools and neighborhoods now champion social policies and invest time and resources in publicly promoting causes which are contrary to the ethics of the gospel.**

1. Think about your paid work or about the places and people to which you give time and attention. How do these shape your thinking? For example, what are their attitudes towards money, towards fairness, towards equality issues?

2. Have a look at Daniel chapter 6. The only charge against Daniel was related to his faith. Have you felt pressure (or do you know of someone who has felt pressure) around matters of faith in the workplace or social circle? If so, what did that pressure look like?

3. On pages 112-113, we read that the promotion of sexual identity politics in our workplaces has a religious fervour to it. In what ways might sexuality or other identity markers have replaced traditional religion as a means of “finding our true selves”?

4. Lay out a case for and against becoming involved with the social causes your community, workplace, school or other organizations promote.

<b>Case for</b>	<b>Case against</b>

5. Daniel's hope was in God's covenant promises about Jerusalem, even though it was rubble and Babylon was magnificent. How can we reorient ourselves to God's hope and plans for us in the midst of our own worldly settings?

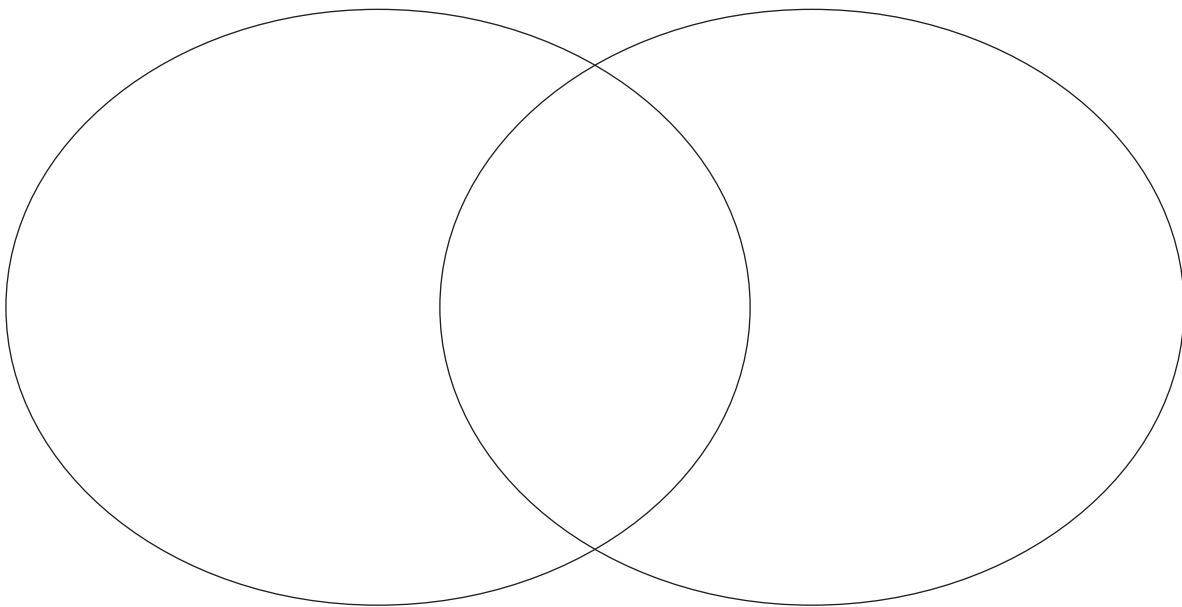
6. Identify some people in your church community who are in different work, school or social settings. What pressures do you think they face? Write down some questions you might ask them in order to encourage them as they live for Christ in these places.

## Chapter 8: The City and The City

**Like it or not, our lives intersect with many people who do not share our values and vision of human flourishing. Some are even hostile to the gospel. We are citizens of one city yet must live in another.**

1. Write a list of the people you interact with on a weekly basis in a meaningful way (think about work, study, family, leisure, church and other settings).

2. Think about what percentage of those you interact with from the list above belong to the city of God and what percentage do not. Where are the most common meeting points for you with those who do not follow Jesus? Use the Venn diagram below to map out where your two groups intersect (if at all).



Where I meet Christians

Where I meet non-Christians



3. Think about the city or culture you live in. Come up with a list of the “old city” values that shape where you live. Then think about the gathered people of God (the “new city”) that you belong to. What values shape that new city? Is there any overlap?

<b>Values of the “old city”</b>	<b>Values of the “new city”</b>

4. What does the gospel message proclaim that could be offensive to the culture in which you live? (For example, think about how Corinth valued impressive speech, wisdom and power. What does your “city” value and how does this conflict with the gospel?)

5. Are you ever tempted to give up on the tension of living in two cities at the same time? What circumstances might tempt you to reshape your life towards the values of the “old city”?

6. How might your church better prepare its people for the increasing tension of living in a culture that holds to a very different understanding of the world? What is it doing well? How could you be involved in encouraging fellow Christians to do better?

