

The background of the entire page is a repeating pattern of stylized, line-art faces. Each face is unique, with various expressions, hairstyles, and accessories like glasses. The lines are simple and clean, creating a dense, textured effect. The faces are rendered in a light gray color against a pale yellow background.

THE TRUTH ABOUT US

Discussion Guide

CHAPTER 1 . . . Dear Everybody

1. If someone asks you if you are a good person, what is your immediate reaction and response?
2. What is self-righteousness, in your own words? Define and discuss.
3. Review Brant's list of six things we should consider while reading the book. Brant remarks in the sixth consideration about the definition of self-righteousness, "*Biblically, the word righteous means approved by God. It's something God judges as good or right. To be self-righteous, then, simply means we've met that standard in our own eyes.*" How is self-righteousness, using this definition, evident in everyday life?
4. In what kind of situation do you believe it would be okay to lie to someone? Okay to steal something? Or to kill? Analyze your truthful answers to these questions and discuss in the context of what it means to be a good person.
5. ". . . I want us to consider the possibility that our lives are largely shaped by this desire to convince ourselves that we're Good People." Do you agree with this statement or disagree, and why?
6. In *Shawshank Redemption*, Tim Robbins's character (Andy) asks his prison pal Morgan Freeman (Red) if he actually committed the murder of which he was accused and imprisoned in Shawshank.

Andy: "What are you in for, Red?"

Red: "Murder. Same as you."

Andy: "Innocent?"

Red: "The only guilty man in Shawshank."

What a great example of the audacity and rarity of actually saying, "I'm not a good guy," when everyone else is lying. Why do you think it is tough for many to admit that they are not good?

7. Are you not impressed that Brant worked in the word comeuppance? You totally should be.

CHAPTER 2 . . . Wronger Than We Think

1. We are really wrong and we are blind to true understanding. Describe a moment when you were so wrong, it was embarrassing.
2. What is your reaction to Brant's stories about people's failed memories concerning Pearl Harbor or the Challenger explosion? How does it speak to your confidence in your past experiences? How does it make you feel?
3. Take some time to read James 1:19–25. Verse 19 says, "Be quick to listen, slow to speak." Why the emphasis on being quick to listen and slow to speak? What did James mean in verse 23?
4. When you hear the word "bias," where does your mind immediately go? What do you think of? Pick something that surprised you from Brant's discussion of the different types of bias, and discuss.
5. Take some time to react to and discuss some of the conclusions that are drawn in this chapter and their importance.
 - We need other people who will speak the truth to us, even when we don't want to hear it. We're wrong about how "in control" of things we are. We see ourselves as a little more God-like than we should.

- We're biased. We don't see things clearly all the time. It sounds like we can no longer confidently divide the world into Good People vs. Bad People. And sure enough, it sounds like the proper response to God is exactly what Jesus was saying it should be, exactly like the tax collector cried out in Jesus's story: "Have mercy on me, a sinner."
6. French revolutionary Maximilien Robespierre wrote this in 1792: "*The more you isolate me, the more you cut off all my human contacts, the more justification I find in my own conscience, and in the justice of my cause.*" Do you think it's true that isolation has this effect? Do you think that the more isolated we are from other viewpoints, the more likely we are to justify our actions or point of view?

CHAPTER 3 . . . Your Very Own PR Firm—and Why You Should Fire Them

1. Try out the "pantyhose experiment" on friends and family and report your findings to the group. You can use something other than pantyhose (tissue brands, water brands, etc.). How did your test subjects react when they found out it was the same brand?
2. What is Brant referring to when he states we all have our very own public relations firm or in-house press secretary?
3. Rationalizing, justifying, and excusing behavior is a favorite pastime in our world. Can you give some examples in our society that have been in public view? What can be our motives behind our own excuse-making?
4. "*We don't have to defend ourselves against the truth about us.*" Read Matthew 11:28–30. What did Jesus mean when he said that his yoke is easy and his burden is light? How does Brant propose that we find rest in Jesus?
5. Brant lists several results when one stops rationalizing, justifying, and excusing. Discuss how accurate you think each result is, and then reveal which one is the most appealing to your life right now.
 - "I can laugh at myself."
 - "I'm free to learn with less of my ego to protect."
 - "It makes me less of a jerk. It makes me less judgmental of others."
 - "I'm more patient with myself."
 - "{I'd be} gentler with others. We'd begin to see them through a new, more merciful lens."
 - "I don't want to decide when and how others should be judged."

CHAPTER 4 . . . Aristotle and My Garage Sale

1. Do you collect anything? If so, what? Explain how your interest started.
2. Name one possession that you refuse to get rid of, and explain why.
3. Read Luke 6:27–36. Describe the "IKEA effect" and how it relates to Jesus's teaching in this passage. (Read this hint from Brant after discussion: "*I will invest others with value. That's literally what it means to 'bless'—to add value to someone. I will regard them as more and more valuable as I actively serve them. My obedience changes my heart.*")
4. Take some time right now to name and pray for someone for whom you need to gain love. Discuss what else you might be able to do to serve that person this week.

CHAPTER 5 . . . Follow Your Heart: The Worst Advice Ever

1. What is *rationalization*? Give a specific example, if you can, of a recent self-rationalization (e.g. buying something you didn't need, talking yourself in or out of doing something).
2. Discuss what was meant by Haidt's "elephant and rider." Do you agree or disagree with the analysis? Why?
3. Take some time to read the following verses from Proverbs: 12:15, 14:12, 16:2, 25, and 21:2. What do all these proverbs have in common? What do they teach us about the human heart?
4. Read Jeremiah 17:5–10. What speaks to you in this passage? What main message do you receive from it? How does this passage actually make you *feel*?
5. Read Luke 18:9–14 and then read Brant's comments on the passage. "*Remember the prelude to the story Jesus tells about the self-deluded Pharisee and the humble tax collector? It says the audience for the story was a group that 'trusted in themselves that they were righteous.'* Jesus is giving us a beautiful alternative: *Don't trust in yourself that you're righteous.*" Discuss the meaning of this for you personally.

CHAPTER 6 . . . The Flaw in Our Code

1. The phrase "flaw in our code" came from a quote by Jonathan Nolan in *Entertainment Weekly*. To what is Nolan referring, and on what does he base this hypothesis?
2. Give some examples of things you would consider truly *evil* in this world today, and explain why you think so. How do you think things came to be this way?
3. What is *sin*? Why do you think the term is unpopular for most of society?
4. React to the statement, "you are evil." Do you agree or disagree, and why? How does this statement make you feel?
5. Seek to answer Brant's question, ". . . if we're all pretty good . . . what was the cross all about? It was all too bloody, too violent. It was muscle and bone and sinew and, once you think about us being generally good people, did we really need all that?"
6. Two major understandings come out of embracing the truth about ourselves:
 - One, when we acknowledge how broken we are, God is not diminished but desperately needed.
 - Two, we will see just how astonishing God's love really is for us evil and broken people.

Take some time in your group to pray specifically in gratitude and humility, thanking God our Father for loving us despite the truth about us.

CHAPTER 7 . . . Mixed Motives

1. List some of the worst sins in our culture as it pertains to the impact on our society. Please explain your choices as you make them.
2. Read Matthew 7:21–23. What strikes you most in this passage? Discuss Jesus's use of the word *evildoers*. Why do you think he used this word in this context?
3. "*But according to Jesus, there are no good people; only humble people and proud people. He favors the humble and opposes the proud.*" How can we do good things and still manage to own proud hearts? Is it possible to do bad things and have a good heart?

4. Rhetorical question: If we cannot trust our own motives/judgment for the good we do, how can we trust our judgment of the motives of others?

Group question: What are some common threads of teaching in Luke 7:36–50, Matthew 15:21–28, Matthew 18:1–4, and Luke 18:9–14? (Leader: humility, acknowledgment of who Jesus is, acknowledgment of who we are, direct comparisons to what God seeks in us—pride vs. humility.)

CHAPTER 8 . . . So Why Are We Like This?

1. When you hear the word *blessing*, where does your mind go? In what context do you usually use the word in your conversations?
2. Taking into account how Trent and Smalley defined blessing (“*Giving meaningful and appropriate touch, a spoken message, and the picturing of a special future of the one being blessed.*”), how have you been blessed by someone? Have you blessed someone? How did Jesus bless others?
3. If blessing is an affirmation of value, then cursing is a subtraction of value. Have you ever been cursed by someone? Have you cursed someone? Describe your observance of cursing (as described by Brant) in our everyday world.
4. “*I believe we have a self-righteousness problem because of our disaffection from the blessing God offers.*” Explain and discuss the connection between self-righteousness and our lack of trust in the blessing we have in Jesus.
5. Read Romans 7:15–20 and discuss how you might relate to Paul. Now read Matthew 11:25–30 and Luke 5:32. How can we actually have peace and rest in our lives?
6. Remember how blessed you are . . . now, how can you be a blessing to others? Give some specific examples of how you can bless someone this week. The next time you meet, report back to each other about these experiences!

CHAPTER 9 . . . Hide the Bud Light Towel: Adventures in Guilt

1. Have you ever lived with *religious guilt or shame*? Can you describe what religious guilt you feel like you still carry to this day? Why do you think you carry it?
2. Concerning the big-time country music performers that Brant described, “*They want someone, anyone, to truly know them and love them anyway.*” Why do you think this was a number-one concern? In what ways can you relate?
3. Tony Campolo wrote, “Christians attach ultimate significance to their struggle to perform *par excellence*. We are constantly judging ourselves in negative ways because we fall short of expectations.” Do you agree or disagree? Do Christians have more of a problem with performance than others? How does social media play into our performances in life?
4. Read Mark 2:13–17. What did Jesus mean in verse 17 in reaction to the performers called the Pharisees? Was he suggesting the Pharisees didn’t need salvation? (Leader: Jesus is concerned with us admitting our sickness . . . he knows us and loves us anyway, but can we admit that we need him?)
5. Read Mark 10:35–45. Why did the 10 get upset with James and John? (Leader: maybe the 10 wanted the positions too.) Brant wrote, “*The more indignant we are about other people, the better we can feel about ourselves.*” What was Jesus’s response to their squabble over their “rightness”?
6. How can noticing and acknowledging self-righteousness in your life help destroy gossip in your life?
7. How can confession of sin to others help us remember the goodness of God?

8. “. . . *guilt can be good, but only for a very short time—enough to drive us right back to Jesus.*” What are some practices that your group can engage in that will help keep the cross in the forefront? What can you do to help remind each other that your value is not in what you do, but in what he has done and continues to do? (Leader: Try to get the group to be specific and discuss how to actually practice this accountability.)

CHAPTER 10 . . . Let’s Freak People Out

1. Why does unity seem to be such an attractive phenomenon in our culture?
2. Read Romans 14:19 and 1 Corinthians 13:1–4. What do these Scriptures challenge us to be? Why are these things so emphasized by Paul?
3. “Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.” Jesus cries this out on the cross while being mocked, spat on, and in tremendous pain. How hard do you think it was for him to utter these words and mean it? How hard would it be for you? (Leader: It would have been more difficult for Jesus to utter, “damn them all.” Love was in him, so forgiveness was in him. Compare this to our ability, or lack of ability, to forgive others.)
4. What if we were kind, full of grace, loving, and forgiving consistently in our culture? Explain and discuss the results that Brant concludes:
 - The world would be freaked out.
 - Jesus said that unity is what proves to the world that we belong to him.
 - Can you think of other ways the world would respond?
5. “*We have a bond that is deeper than public policy, deeper than our misunderstandings, deeper than our wounds. Things fall apart. But we don’t have to.*” What are some of the biggest challenges today that rage against Christian unity? How important to Christian unity is our acknowledgment of our self-righteousness?
6. Read Luke 9:23 and Matthew 10:38–39. Jesus taught some very tough things. What does Jesus mean when it comes to *denying* ourselves? Picking up our crosses?
7. Brant listed several passages from the book of Proverbs, citing that wisdom brings peace. Which of these Proverbs strikes you the most—11:14, 13:10, 15:31–33, 19:20, 24:6, or 27:9—and why? Discuss.

CHAPTER 11 . . . The Worst Wonderful Word

1. What is repentance? Thomas Carlyle wrote, “*Of all acts of man, repentance is the most divine. The greatest of all faults is to be conscious of none.*” Brant mentions that it is “*unnatural*” to us. Discuss what each author meant in these descriptions.
2. Why do you think repentance is so rare in our society?
3. What are some of the key motivating factors in your life that have driven you to repentance? How have relationships in your life played a key role in changing you?
4. Brant mentions two types of fake apologies (fauxpologies) that we tend to give :
 - “Mistakes were made” style—explain and discuss.
 - “Ifpology”—explain and discuss.

5. Darin Hansen said, “My repentance is only true if I actually see my need for Jesus, and that only comes by brokenness.” Read Matthew 5:3. What did Jesus mean by “poor in spirit”? Why is a broken spirit needed for entrance into the kingdom of God?
6. Have you experienced unearned forgiveness from someone? Describe your thoughts and emotions at the time.

CHAPTER 12 . . . A Chainsaw at CVS

1. Take the time to read the following passages: Luke 5:17–24, Luke 7:36–50, Luke 8:43–48, Luke 19:1–10, and Luke 23:39–43. What similarities do you find in these passages? How did Jesus respond in each instance? (Leader: Desperation wins.)
2. *“Desperation is uncouth. It’s undignified. It looks pathetic and weak to others. It’s not reputation enhancing. It’s naked, exposed, and brutally honest.”* Discuss Brant’s statement and compare it to the stories your group just read in question 1; give examples of how this statement is true in those gospel encounters.
3. How is desperation shown in the story of the prodigal son found in Luke 15? How is it shown by the son? By the father? What was the older brother’s attitude?
4. How desperate for God are we? What does it even mean in our day and age to be desperate for God? Why aren’t the self-righteous ever desperate for God?
5. Describe a child and make a list of attributes. Now, after writing the list . . . what do you think Jesus meant for us to have faith like children? Brant turns Eichmann’s intentions around to agree with the statement, “Repentance is for children.” What did Brant mean?

CHAPTER 13 . . . Seven Billion Italian Stallions

1. What is the difference between sin and evil? What did Jesus have to say about moral superiority? Can you give examples of an encounter from the Gospels when Jesus confronted those who were morally arrogant?
2. *“We are always becoming something, even when it’s not obvious to others on the outside.”* Read Matthew 5:21–22 and 5:27–28. Discuss the connection of these teachings of Jesus to Brant’s words referring to incremental decisions adding up to “big sins.”
3. Do you agree with Sherri’s idea, “We all think we’re Rocky”? Describe how this mentality helps drive self-justification.
4. Read Romans 3:21–23. According to Scripture, how are we actually justified in God’s eyes?
5. Self-incrimination and self-righteousness can feed each other . . . how might the two be connected? Which one do you think you struggle with more? What is your opinion of yourself most days?
6. What do you think is God’s opinion of you? Be as specific as you can.

CHAPTER 14 . . . A Short Chapter about the Previous Chapter

Explain and discuss the significance of each of Brant’s strategies that keep him from justifying his actions:

1. I try to see everybody ELSE as Rocky.
2. I try to let my “ego’s story drop away.”

3. I remember how GOOD God is.
4. I try not to say, “At least I don’t . . .”
5. I want to drop anger and instead extend forgiveness to others as it’s been extended to me.
6. I need to remember I’m a terrible judge.
7. I try to trust God more.
8. I want to remember there’s hope. God is changing me.

Which of these strategies strikes you as possibly the most effective one for you?

CHAPTER 15 . . . How to Get Kicked Out of the Church of Satan

1. *“We’re both fascinated and frustrated by ourselves.”* Do you get easily frustrated with yourself? Be honest with this tough question. What is it about yourself that consistently frustrates you?
2. Brant writes about how we have a *“shared self-centeredness”* which should make it easier for us to admit this truth about us. In what ways do you think we are self-centered in everyday life and maybe do not even realize it?
3. Mae West said, *“I’ve never loved another person the way I loved myself.”* Read Matthew 22:34–40. What did Jesus mean in the second greatest commandment? Is he commanding us to “love ourselves”?
4. Rick Warren wrote, *“Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it’s thinking of yourself less.”* Take some time to tear into this quote and discuss. What is he implying? Do you agree or disagree? What does it look like for a person to really put Jesus into a position of authority in his or her life?
5. What’s wrong with patting ourselves on the back for being good? Why would the devil like to see this happen?
6. Explain this statement, *“. . . loving our enemies is an antidote to the poison of self-righteousness,”* and discuss. List some specific ways to love an enemy this week.

CHAPTER 16 . . . Even More Good News: The Humble Life Is More Fun Anyway

1. Can you remember the last time and reason you laughed really hard? Please share.
2. Read John 10:7–10. Describe how you imagine the *“abundant life”* that Jesus offers. Spend some time analyzing your answers . . . how many of your answers would you classify as “child-like”?
3. What is one of the worst criticisms you have ever endured? How did it make you feel? If you were hurt, why did it hurt? What did Brant mean by, *“It’s our pride that drives us from God,”* and, *“All the forces of the universe cannot stop us . . . if we finally come to the end of ourselves. No one can truly harm us, if we allow God to be our defender”*?
4. *“There is something about self-righteousness that kills the fun every time.”* Do you think this statement is true, and if so, how is this statement true?

5. Read Matthew 23:1–4. How have others placed heavy burdens on you in the past? How have others “taken the load off” of you?
6. When it is mentioned to remember who you are in Christ, what does that mean to you? If you had to give one answer, what is holding you back from truly living like a child of God?

CHAPTER 17 . . . The Final Chapter: The One Where I Finally Mention Kermit

1. Explain and discuss the significance of each of Brant’s freedoms that come from admitting that you are not a good person:
 - Freedom from confabulating (making up stories—don’t have to trick anyone)
 - Freedom to like people more because I criticize them less
 - Freedom from perpetual resentment
 - Freedom from trying to control everybody’s reactions
 - Freedom from trying to control God
 - Freedom from pretending to be in control when I’m clearly not
 - Freedom from making an idiot out of myself so often
 - Freedom to actually like people
 - Freedom to be more creative
2. Read Psalm 25:4–5 together in unison. *“Show me your ways, Lord, teach me your paths. Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long.”* Pray that this psalm becomes a true song of your heart.

“In the end, I think our autobiographies can be really short. We’ll be able to sum up the entire story with a pause, maybe a laugh, and a simple, ‘I had my doubts, but you know what? God was good to me.’”