



## Encounters with the Lost

Adapted from "Tag! You Are It" Series by Jimmy White

It has been suggested that the reason we are not as good at reaching the lost as the church once was is because the church has become disconnected from lost people. Over time we have forgotten what it means to be a lost person. The question we need to answer is, "are we ready to have a chance encounter with the lost?" In his book *The Heart of Christianity* Marcus Borg of Oregon State University describes how his university students have a uniformly negative image of Christianity. "When I ask them to write a short essay on their impression of Christianity," says Borg, "they consistently use five adjectives: Christians are literalistic, anti-intellectual, self-righteous, judgmental, and bigoted."<sup>1</sup>

A recent survey by David Kinnaman provides poignant information to Christians. In a compelling argument, he shows the reasons why the unchurched may be tuning out the believer. Christians might object, rather defensively, that it's unfair to draw sweeping conclusions based upon the report of one person. If you think that way, you'd be right in your logic but wrong in your conclusion. In his book called *unChristian*, Kinnaman presents objective research from a three-year study that documents how an overwhelming percentage of sixteen to twenty-nine year olds view Christians with hostility, resentment and disdain.

Kinnaman describes that the negative views of Christians aren't simply stereotypes with no basis in reality. These are the views of people who have had contact with churches or Christians. He argues that it would be a tragic mistake, for believers to protest that outsider outrage at Christians is a misperception. Rather, it's based upon their real experiences with today's Christians.

According to Kinnaman's Barna study, the percentages of people outside the church who think that the following words describe present-day Christianity are as follows:

- antihomosexual 91%
- judgmental 87%
- hypocritical 85%

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<sup>1</sup> Marcus Borg, *The Heart of Christianity: Rediscovering a Life of Faith*, (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2003).

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- old-fashioned 78%
- too political 75%
- out of touch with reality 72%
- insensitive to others 70%
- boring 68%

It would be hard to overestimate, says Kinnaman, "how firmly people reject — and feel rejected by — Christians."<sup>2</sup> Or think about it this way, he suggests: "When you introduce yourself as a Christian to a friend, neighbor, or business associate who is an outsider, you might as well have it tattooed on your arm: antihomosexual, gay-hater, homophobic. I doubt you think of yourself in these terms, but that's what outsiders think of you."<sup>3</sup>

Gabe Lyons of the Fermi Project who commissioned the Barna research remembers his first look at the data. "I'll never forget sitting in Starbucks, poring through the research results on my laptop. As I soaked it in, I glanced at the people around me and was overwhelmed with the thought that *this is what they think of me*. It was a sobering thought to know that if I had stood up and announced myself as a 'Christian' to the customers assembled in Starbucks that day, they would have associated me with every one of the negative perceptions described in this book"<sup>4</sup> (his italics). Sad to say, Marcus Borg was even more right than he knew.

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<sup>2</sup> David Kinnaman, *unChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity...and Why It Matters*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012), 19.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 93.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 222.



## COURAGE

**C1:** What are some adjectives you think the lost use to describe Christians? Are they valid? Why or why not?

**C2:** On a scale of 1-4, with 1 being very sure and 4 being not very sure, how sure are you of God's power in your life to persuade the lost of God's Sovereignty? Write out a plan to improve.

**C3:** On a scale of 1-4, with 1 being very well and 4 being not very well, rate how well you are connected with lost people. Write out a plan to improve.

## STRENGTH

**S1:** What does the word **ENCOUNTER** mean to you?

Thirty-eight years after Christ died on a cross and rose again, an interesting event occurred. Read and answer the following.

**Acts 8:26–40 (ESV)**

- From these verses, what are three things you glean about encounters?

**S2:** Read and answer the following.

**John 3:1–8 (ESV)**

- From these verses, what do you glean about encounters?

**S3:** Reaching lost people will only happen when Christians catch a personal revelation that goes beyond a building. Read and answer the following.

**Philippians 2:4 (ESV)**

**Jude 22 (ESV)**

- From these verses, what has to happen for encounter to become a reality?

**S4:** We must make a conscious effort to be a person who reaches out to lost people. Read and answer the following.

**Ephesians 5:1 (ESV)**

**Philippians 2:17–18 (ESV)**

- From these verses, what do you glean about encounters with lost people?
  
- On a scale of 1-4, with 1 being very well and 4 being not very well, rate yourself on how available you are to being available to encounters with lost people. Write out a plan to improve.

## ENDURANCE

**E1:** Jesus instructs us to love others and to love him. Read and answer the following.

### **Colossians 4:2–6 (ESV)**

- From these verses, what is needed to be a person who encounters lost people?

**E2:** Some think unless the lost are poor and destitute, they don't need to change. Read and answer the following.

### **Psalm 49:16–19 (ESV)**

- From these verses, what must happen in us to make us available to be used in an encounter in a lost person's life?

**E3:** Read and answer the following.

### **Romans 7:18–20 (ESV)**

### **2 Corinthians 5:16–20 (ESV)**

### **Exodus 33:18 (ESV)**

- From these verses, what are the three types of encounters that lead to salvation?