

## READING AND DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR

# *Why I Left, Why I Stayed:*

Conversations on Christianity  
Between an Evangelical Father and  
His Humanist Son

by

Tony Campolo and Bart Campolo

### CHAPTER 1

#### AN UNUSUAL THANKSGIVING

by

Tony Campolo

1. On Thanksgiving evening, 2014, Tony Campolo discovered that his son Bart “no longer believed in God” (p. 1). Have you ever had a conversation about faith

with your family amid varying viewpoints? What was that experience like?

2. Tony notes that “for most of us, there is no safe place to discuss the difficult issues of faith or to work through doubts or questions” (p. 4). Do you agree? If so, why do you think this is the case? If not, where and with whom have you found such a space?

## CHAPTER 2

### HOW I LEFT: A SON'S JOURNEY THROUGH CHRISTIANITY

by

Bart Campolo

1. In this chapter, Bart describes his journey “through” Christianity to his current position of humanism. In your opinion, what were the key points in his journey? How, when, and why did he leave Christianity behind?
2. “But the truth is that my Christian orthodoxy, and eventually my ability to believe in anything supernatural, actually died the death of a thousand cuts—and ten thousand unanswered prayers—over the course of more than thirty years” (p. 12). How do you make sense of “unanswered prayers” in your own life? How do they affect your faith?

### CHAPTER 3

#### HOW I STAY: A FATHER'S STORY OF KEEPING THE FAITH

by

Tony Campolo

1. In this chapter, Tony describes his journey with Christianity. How does this journey compare with Bart's journey from the previous chapter? What similarities do you notice? What differences do you notice?
2. Tony says this about his family of origin: "We sang hymns together, prayed together, and together experienced the joys of Christian fellowship. Frankly, I can't remember ever not loving and trusting the God my family introduced to me" (p. 30). What would you say about the faith (or lack thereof) of your family of origin? How did their spirituality inform yours?

### CHAPTER 4

#### CAN'T, NOT WON'T: LOSING FAITH IS NOT A CHOICE

by

Bart Campolo

1. "I didn't *choose* not to believe in God," writes Bart. "I just stopped believing. Abandoning the Christian narrative wasn't a joyous, willful decision, but rather the unhappy conclusion of a long battle against all evidence to the contrary" (p. 44). How does this strike you? How do you square his account with Ephesians 2:8–9 and Bart's reflections on those verses (pp. 49–50)?

CHAPTER 5  
YOU REAP WHAT YOU SOW:  
HOW I SEE BART'S DECONVERSION

by  
Tony Campolo

1. "Bart soon began to openly assert that some people are incapable of being saved or transformed in any meaningful way. When this happened, I became even more alarmed," writes Tony (p. 58). Why was this a cause for alarm for Tony?

CHAPTER 6  
LIFE ON THE OTHER SIDE:  
THE HAPPY REALITY OF SECULAR HUMANISM

by  
Bart Campolo

1. According to Bart, "More and more people are losing faith in any kind of supernaturalism, but very few of them are becoming fully enthusiastic, genuinely religious naturalists" (p. 70). Why do you think this is?
2. "No one is coming to save us, after all. Peace and justice are things we human beings carve out of chaos. . . . If we do not solve our many problems, they will overtake and destroy us" (p. 73). How does this statement make you feel? Why do you feel that way, and what do your feelings tell you about what you believe?

CHAPTER 7  
THE HEART OF THE MATTER:  
WHY HUMANISM DOESN'T WORK WITHOUT JESUS

by  
Tony Campolo

1. “I want to become human—fully human,” one of Tony’s students told him in class one day (p. 77). Does this statement resonate with you? Why or why not?
2. In this chapter, Tony recounts a conversation he had with some of his students about what they wanted out of life (pp. 77–87). What did you learn, if anything, from this exchange? Do you agree with Tony’s articulation of humanism? Why or why not?

CHAPTER 8  
THE DARK SIDE OF GRACE:  
WHY JESUS DOESN'T WORK FOR ME

by  
Bart Campolo

1. “In any case, the whole idea of having an intimate, personal relationship with a spiritual being [e.g., Jesus] strikes me as highly unrealistic” (p. 91). Have you ever struggled with this in your own faith journey?

CHAPTER 9  
NOT SO FAST: WHY SECULARISTS  
SHOULD TAKE ANOTHER LOOK AT THE CROSS

by  
Tony Campolo

1. Tony says the “penal substitutionary doctrine of the atonement is only one explanation of how our salvation was accomplished by Jesus on the cross” (p. 97). Why does he make this suggestion? What other dimensions or explanations of the atonement does he highlight?
2. To the “many scientific errors and internal contradictions” of the Bible, Tony has a simple answer: “They don’t really matter” (p. 102). How does he defend this claim? What do you make of his defense?

CHAPTER 10  
GODLESS GOODNESS:  
THE FOUNDATIONS OF A SECULAR MORALITY

by  
Bart Campolo

1. “Unfortunately,” Bart writes, “no matter how articulate a secularist may be on other issues, he or she is apt to become suddenly tongue-tied when asked where his or her sense of right and wrong comes from” (p. 104). Why does Bart think this is the case? What does he propose as a solution?

2. “I believe that besides being essentially subjective, human morality is also a moving target. The only constant, as far as I can tell, is that in the end we all define moral goodness according to whatever makes our own group flourish” (p. 112). Do you agree with Bart’s claim here? What examples can you think of to prove it? What examples can you think of to disprove it?

CHAPTER 11  
AND THEN WHAT?:  
WHY SECULARISTS CAN’T FACE DEATH

by  
Tony Campolo

1. “Young people often refuse to face the fact that they too will die one day. This makes it easier for them to talk about death” (p. 114). Do you agree with Tony’s observation? Regardless of your age, how easy is it for you to talk about death?

CHAPTER 12  
PART OF THE BARGAIN:  
FACING DEATH THE SECULAR HUMANIST WAY

by  
Bart Campolo

1. According to Bart, “Eternity is the enemy. Like it or not, love needs a deadline. That’s my problem with the fantasy of heaven: It distracts people from the most

important reality of life on earth” (p. 125). Have you ever met Christians for whom “the fantasy of heaven” distracted them from “the most important reality of life on earth”? How would you describe them?

2. “I believe the promise of eternal life is a coping mechanism, and I don’t like it,” writes Bart. Do you agree with him? Why or why not?

CHAPTER 13  
NOT FROM NOWHERE:  
WHY TRANSCENDENT EXPERIENCES POINT TO GOD

by  
Tony Campolo

1. “Being a Christian is much more than affirming doctrine, after all, as important as that may be. True discipleship is ultimately about having a personal encounter with the living Jesus, and *mystically* sensing His presence” (p. 134). Is this how you would describe your Christian faith? Why or why not?
2. Tony suggests that Bart’s humanism requires “an act of faith,” just as his own Christianity does (p. 139). What does he mean by this?

CHAPTER 14  
IT'S ALL IN YOUR HEAD:  
HOW I BECAME A RELIGIOUS NATURALIST

by  
Bart Campolo

1. Why does Bart continue to affirm the reality of his religious experiences when he was a Christian, even though he no longer believes in the truth of Christianity or the existence of God?
2. “For better or worse, I’m afraid, my answer to that greatest of all philosophical questions—What is the meaning of life?—is that there isn’t one” (p. 145). How does Bart’s answer sit with you? Do you agree?

CHAPTER 15  
A JOINT CONCLUSION

by  
Bart and Tony Campolo

1. As this book has shown, Tony and Bart certainly disagree on some things. However, they both agree that “Love is the most excellent way” (p. 148). Are you living your life according to this “way”? How could you do so more fully?
2. How has this book impacted you? How has it encouraged your faith? How has it challenged you or your faith?