

## Book Club Discussion Questions for *Unexpected*

1. The Elizabeth Smart kidnapping was the biggest news story of its time. It is a miraculous, fascinating, unbelievable story. From the book: *“It is believed that the search for Elizabeth was the largest and most publicized since the search for Charles Lindbergh’s baby in 1932. In the first week alone, approximately ten thousand volunteers from countless backgrounds came together and joined the effort, searching for the missing harp-playing teenager on foot, horseback, by helicopter, motorcycle, boat, airplane, and ATV. Tens of thousands of additional people joined the effort in the weeks and months that followed.”*
  - What was your knowledge of Elizabeth Smart and her remarkable story before you read this book?
  - What did you learn in the book that you were unaware of before?
  - What was different about the author’s depiction of the story than what you believed to be true before you read the book — especially with how the case was portrayed in the media?
  - What did you learn that surprised you the most?
2. The author tells a story about fences coming down in his neighborhood. He then refers to metaphorical fences several times in the book.
  - What do you think the author was trying to portray in the fences coming down?
  - What is symbolic about this and the fences we put up throughout our lives?
  - Baker’s physical and metaphorical fences were stronger, higher, and harder to get through. Have you had any experiences with ‘seeing behind someone’s fence’ and learning something new or unexpected from this experience?
  - Like Baker, how are some people’s fences more difficult to take down than others?
  - What are fences you have put up in your own life?
  - How can taking fences down and seeing behind others’ fences be a powerful thing?
3. The author shares many of his childhood experiences growing up in tightknit, Latter-day Saint (Mormon) neighborhood in East Millcreek, Utah. In a beautiful style of writing, these stories are woven together, jumping from his childhood to working on the Smart case. The author notes that these specific, childhood experiences helped prepare him for his career and working with the Smart family.
  - Was there anything from the author’s stories that you related to, or that was familiar?
  - In what ways was your childhood similar?
  - In what ways was your childhood completely different?
  - What specific experiences taught and prepared him to help on the Smart case?
  - What childhood experience that the author shared stands out to you the most?
  - What experiences in your childhood have prepared you for important or challenging situations in your life?

4. What did you think of the book's title?
  - Do you like it?
  - Does it work in relation to the book's contents?
  - Do you feel it was named appropriately?
  - What was 'unexpected' for you in the book?
  - If you could rename it, what would you call it?
5. Whether you share the author's religion or not, did you learn or realize anything new about Latter-day Saint (colloquially known as Mormon) culture or beliefs that you didn't know before?
6. We can learn so many powerful lessons from the relationship Chris (the author) had with Baker.
  - What stands out to you the most?
  - Were you surprised to see how their relationship changed?
  - Why do you think Baker had so much anger towards Chris and his family early in the story?
  - Have you known a Baker in your own life?
7. Why do you think the author included a lengthy anecdote about Annabelle — the classmate he defended in a mock trial in fifth grade?
  - What do you think he learned most from this experience?
  - Did you pick up on the parallels of this story and his work on the Elizabeth Smart case?
8. There are many examples throughout the Elizabeth Smart story of how media can sometimes be manipulated and frame information in ways that are limiting or confusing, resulting in the public having an unclear view of the real story. Whether it's truthful and accurate information — or disinformation (deliberately false information) and misinformation (unintentionally inaccurate or false information) — anyone can share anything they want much faster now than they could in 2002.
  - If this happened today, how do you think social media and instant access to information would help or hinder finding Elizabeth?
  - Do you think the changes in how information is shared and consumed over the past 20 years has generally been positive or negative in helping to dispel inaccurate or false information?
9. What were some of the most pivotal moments in the book? Do you have any favorite quotes or passages that you marked or that stood out to you?

(For example: “I seen you at my store the other day,” he [Baker] said. “I don’t want you go in that place again. And don’t you ever, ever, try a drop of that stuff, you hear? Never. You’re a good boy. Stay that way. Don’t be like me.”

*Baker extended his hand. I looked awkwardly away, not sure how to respond.*

*“Now shake and promise.... Shake.... I ain’t as bad as you think.”*)

10. Latter-day Saints have many attributes they are known for including, frugality, getting things done, industriousness, competitiveness, trusting easily (and sometimes gullibly), and constantly giving and serving others.
  - What was your favorite story shared by the author where you saw a Latter-day Saint cultural attribute depicted?
  - What one attribute resonated with you the most, and why?
11. Which character (or moment) prompted the strongest emotional reaction for you, and why?
  - Is there a specific person from the book you would like to meet (living or not)?
  - Why would you choose this person?
  - What would you ask them?
12. What unanswered questions do you have from the book?
  - What is one question you would like to ask the author if given the opportunity?
  - What question would you like to ask Elizabeth Smart?