



Openness Unhindered

A Study Guide



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To download this guide for free, go to RosariaButterfield.com.



Preface: Conversion, Identity, Community

Take my hand and join me on this journey, please. If you are a Christian and you are struggling with sexual sin, this book is meant to equip and encourage you in your daily walk of faith with Jesus. If you are not yet a Christian, my hope is that I can reach through the pages of this book, take your hand, and put it in the hand of our Savior. —p. 10

1. What does it mean to be “open and unhindered” (p. 2)?

2. What does it mean to repent of sin “at its foundation” (p. 2)?

3. Ontology looks at the nature of existence or reality. What does it mean that God’s story is our ontology (p. 3)? How does this fact change your view of your identity?

4. Why does sexual sin so often become a sin of identity (p. 4)?

[Paul] stayed two full years in his own rented quarters and was welcoming all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all *openness, unhindered*.

— Acts 28:30–31

5. Those who use the first lens to view today’s sexual landscape view “gender and sexuality as cultural artifices, not ontological, God-ordained categories” (p. 5). Why might this lens lead people toward moral pragmatism, believing that anything is okay as long as “consenting adults are hurting no one” (p. 7)?

6. Those who use the second lens understand the Bible to be “inerrant, inspired, and dependable.” What error do they sometimes fall into (p. 7)?

7. Why might some people believe that “if gay people would just come to Jesus, they would all be straight” (p. 7)? What is unbiblical about that belief (see p. 7–8)?

8. Those who use the third lens believe in God’s saving grace, but they use modern “moral logic” to explain away the need to repent from sin (p. 8). Why is it important to believe in original sin and the need for repentance (p. 9)?

Living in *Openness, Unhindered*

It’s hard to ask your friends and family to remember that “God calls [us] to repent of all sin” (p. 8). It’s difficult to confess how truly devastating sin is and to acknowledge that it requires Jesus’ brutal sacrifice on our behalf (p. 9).

God might want you to talk with a friend or family member about sin and repentance. Consider who that person might be. Pray for that person, and pray for God to prepare your mouth to speak truth in love.



Conversion: The Spark of a New Identity

We all stand with the blood of our Savior on our hands. That is the Bible’s story. All who have met the risen Lord are changed. And we are called to forsake the sin that we loved best before we met the Lord. —p. 34

1. Rosaria says she wrote her first book because she “started to look dangerously cleaned up” (p. 11). Is there something valuable about exposing the messy and humiliating truth about your history of sin, or is it more important to “pass” as a cleaned-up Christian?

2. Before she knew Christ, Rosaria still cared about morality, justice, and compassion, and she and her partner were “good citizens and caregivers” (p. 15). Consider friends and family like her, who are “good” but lack salvation. How can you talk with such people about sin and salvation?

3. How did Ken Smith befriend Rosaria? What did he do and what did he *not* do? Which elements of loving unbelievers can you replicate and bring into your life?

He is clothed with a robe
dipped in blood, and his name is
called The Word of God.

— Revelation 19:13

4. Why is homosexuality “not the end-point of the
problem”? What is the root of the problem (p. 20–21)?

5. How did the Bible eventually overflow into Rosaria’s world (p. 21–22)? Has this ever
happened to you? If so, explain.

6. Why is it so important to understand “the treacherous path that others take to arrive in the
pew that we share Lord’s Day after Lord’s Day” (p. 22)?

7. Rosaria felt a conflict between her “real” identity (as a lesbian) and her “true” identity (p. 25).
How have you struggled between what feels “real” and what is “true” on this side of eternity?

8. Why does repentance feel like death to the sexual sinner (p. 27)?

9. Rosaria writes “My conversion left me with a new sense of what sexuality is: a point of
view where I could so love and treasure other image bearers that I sacrificed my lust for their
purity (p. 29).” Compare Christians’, mass media’s, and your own sense of sexuality with
what Rosaria writes.

10. When we claim a sin as a defining character trait, cherishing it, what are we actually doing (p. 31)?

Behold, the LORD's hand is not so short that it cannot save; nor is His ear so dull that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God.

—Isaiah 59:1-2

11. Are you guilty of homophobia? Or the “wholesale writing off” of the souls of any other person or group “because they sin in ways that offend you” (p. 32)?

Living in *Openness, Unhindered*

John 7:17 says, “If anyone is willing to do His will, he will know of the teaching.” According to Rosaria, this “verse promised understanding after obedience,” meaning that she would be able to understand God’s will only after she followed God’s will (p. 24).

Consider what flummoxes you about God’s commands, and pray for the willingness to obey before you understand. Ask for the strength to repent of sin at its root.



Identity: The Flame of Our Union in Christ

Sin is treason, not sinus trouble. God forgives sin; he does not heal sin. Indeed, there is something deeply deceptive about praying that God would give me only what I need to be strong in myself. —p. 55

1. How does personal experience matter, especially as it is seen alongside what God has done and is doing (p. 38–39)?

2. How does your union with and identity in Christ protect you from Satan’s accusations (p. 40–41)? What can you say when you are tempted to despair of your salvation and Jesus’ goodness?

3. Consider the idea of total depravity and that “I am not a sinner because I sin. Rather, I sin because I am a sinner” (p. 42). Rosaria describes this as our personal medical history. How does this knowledge change your understanding about yourself?

Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may laid hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.

—Philippians 3:12

4. Rosaria was asked to say “that it is only your opinion that homosexual practice is a sin” (p. 47). Have you encountered any situations in which biblical, universal

truth was relegated to mere personal opinion? How did you respond?

5. Rosaria writes, “I was not converted out of homosexuality. I was converted out of unbelief” (p. 50). How might praying for someone’s conversion, rather than praying for salvation from a particular sin, change the way you interact with that person?

6. “If you are justified by God, you are in the process of being sanctified.” In a practical way, what does this mean (p. 53)?

7. Can we “pray the gay away” (p. 55), or can we triumph over sin all by ourselves (p. 56)?

8. “We should never neglect our Bible reading and prayer time, knowing that we do so only at our own spiritual peril” (p. 57). Why is it so important to spend time with God, and how can you plan to make time with God, using it well?

Living in *Openness, Unhindered*

“God dispenses sanctifying grace in different measures. It is very hard for American Christians to see that God gives some people one cross to bear and others ten. Indeed, this violates our sense of fairness and justice. But we don’t get to choose the portion that God gives to us. And it is not Christian kindness to deny to fellow image bearers that following Christ is hard and will cost you everything.” (p. 56–57)

Wrestle with this idea, pray about it before God, and plan specific ways to encourage and support your fellow struggling Christians.



Repentance: The Threshold to God and the Answer to Shame, Temptation, and Sin

One very difficult aspect about sin is that my sin never feels like sin to me. My sin feels like life, plain and simple. My heart is an idol factory and my mind an excuse-making factory, especially when it comes to dealing with the kind of sin that clobbers me most: indwelling sin. —p. 85

1. After Rosaria experienced forgiveness, why did shame keep returning (p. 59)? Are you frustrated by your plodding progress in growing to be like Jesus (p. 61)?

2. Which of the questions about the Christian struggle with sin (p. 62) most resonates with you? Why?

3. Repentance is a proof of conversion, and Christians are called to repent, which involves mortifying (killing) their sin (p. 64). Are there sin(s) you need to mortify, even if you can't imagine how?

We have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

—Romans 6:4

4. Rosaria writes that “When we only admit [sin]...we posture in blame shifting...we reject the biblical concept that Original Sin renders me both corrupt and guilty” (p. 68). What then does it mean to confess sin, and why is it important to do so?

5. Why does the author say sin is worse than hell (p. 72–73)? How does this perspective reveal the importance of my struggle against sin today?

6. How do the three categories of sin (original, actual, and indwelling) help to explain our tendency to sin, the acts of sin themselves, and the tenacity of certain sins in our lives (p. 73–75)?

7. What is temptation (p. 76)? What are some ways that you see sin being “exonerated, celebrated, or minimized” in our culture (p. 77)? Why should we never do that?

8. What did Jesus use in the wilderness to protect himself from Satan’s temptations (p. 82), and why did Jesus use something so ordinary?

9. What happens when you make an identity out of a temptation (p. 83)? Write down any temptations—sexual, eating, driving, grooming preferences, indulgent negativity or immoderate curiosity, or even your political or sports team allegiance—that might be accepted as part of your identity instead of being submitted to Christ.

10. Popular music and movies often tell us to listen to our hearts. However, the psalmist David, instead of listening to his heart, talked to his heart about who God is (p. 88). What is the difference? What seems to happen when we remind ourselves of God’s character and love?

11. Why do you think Rosaria writes that “loyal fellowship of believers is not an ‘add on’ to good doctrine,” but is “often the vein through which the Savior’s blood pumps us whole and well” (p. 90)?

Living in *Openness, Unhindered*

Indwelling sin is hard to battle, since it often feels like part of your essence. Rosaria cites four recommendations by John Owen for fighting indwelling sin, and offers a few specific suggestions (see p. 85–87).

Over the next week, which tactic(s) would you like to practice? Share with someone. Ask that person to pray for you in your spiritual battles and to check on you when the week is over.



Sexual Representation: Freud's Nineteenth-Century Mistake

While you must repent of sexual sin, you cannot repent of sexual orientation, since sexual orientation is an artificial category built on a faulty premise. You have a better shot of putting Humpty Dumpty together again than reinventing sexual orientation as a biblical category. —p. 107

1. Sexual orientation is commonly understood as “an enduring pattern of emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attractions to men, women, or both sexes” (p. 94–95, as defined by the APA). Who first called sexual orientation a category of existence? How did Romanticism affect how people view truth (p. 96)?

2. How does the category of sexual orientation redefine people (p. 96)?

3. Rosaria explains how sexuality went from a verb (practice) to a noun (people), and how sexual orientation went from a categorical invention to an unchallenged “immortal truth.” Why are these shifts so significant and their results so disastrous (p. 97–98)?

4. What is heterosexual blindness, and why is it dangerous (p. 99)? What happens when we think in terms of comparative sin?

5. Why is natural law not the “trump card” in arguing against homosexual practice (p. 103)? What more is needed (p. 103–104)?

6. What’s the problem with the “gag reflex” argument (p. 103–104)? Is this sort of tactic also off the mark when used for other sins, such as heterosexual sin, illegal drugs, or violence?

7. What is a Bible term that best expresses the concept underlying sexual orientation (p. 106)? How does seeing sexual orientation in that light change the conversation?

8. Why is it unhelpful to define anyone by, or reduce anyone to, an “orientation linked to a pattern of even persistent temptations” (p. 108)?

Truly I say to you there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mothers or father or children or farms, for my sake and for the gospel’s sake, but that he will receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life.

—Mark 10:29–30

9. Why is it important to create a church culture where people feel welcomed, safe, and loved (p. 110–111)?

10. If you struggle with sexual temptation, why is it important to tell your brothers and sisters in Christ of the weight you bear?

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them, for God made it evident to them.

—Romans 1:18–19

Living in *Openness, Unhindered*

Sharing who you are, in your sins and struggles as well as your abilities and gifts, is “important, vital, and life-giving for others in your church to know” (p. 110). Vulnerability comes with a risk, but it is freeing and enriching to know that we are together in Christ, no matter our differences.

How can you better share who you are? What is one thing you can do to help ensure that a fellow Christian will “never be or feel alone, isolated, unloved, or unwelcome” (p. 111)?



Self-Representation: What Does It Mean to Be Gay?

It is almost incredible how much ground the devil takes when he has once made sin a matter of controversy.... By this means, good men themselves are dangerously disabled to resist sin, and are the more prepared to commit it. Take heed lest the devil cast you into this sleep of carnal security. —Richard Baxter, qtd. on p. 135

1. What does the word “gay” mean to you? How has the definition of that word changed over time? How has the word been used by gay detractors and gay activists (p. 112–113)?

2. In the term “gay Christian,” how does the adjective “gay” modify and limit the word “Christian” (p. 117)?

3. In what way are some in the church responsible for driving brothers and sisters in Christ into a “gay Christian ghetto”? Have you seen or experienced this (p. 116)?

4. When people presume that opposite-sex desires should replace same-sex desires as the exclusive proof of sanctification, what harm is done to the call of Christ (p. 117)? What do you expect to happen to your gay neighbor as he or she becomes sanctified?

5. Now that any human affection can be perceived as erotic, what is the effect on nonsexual affection like friends leaning on one another (p. 120)? Why is that significant?

6. In what way is the stigma of the word “gay” an act of God’s love (p. 122)?

7. What does Rosaria mean by “sexuality can be fallen in both natural and moral ways” (p. 124–125)? Do you agree that *lust*, not desire, is a moral issue? Why or why not?

8. What is a biblical sexual identity? How do we see the pattern laid out in Scripture (p. 127)?

9. John Piper makes four points that illustrate the value of singleness and the preeminence of a relationship with Christ (p. 129). Which one impacts you the most?

10. Why is it our tendency to find others who sin like we do (p. 133)?

Living in *Openness, Unhindered*

Rosaria mentions that our choice of vocabulary matters and that our words make a difference. Whether or not you agree that “gay Christian” is a poor choice of terms, prayerfully consider how God may want you to change your use of language. Ask a friend or family member to help you root out ungodly speech so that the words of your mouth and the meditation of your heart may be pleasing to God (Psalm 19).



Conflict: When Sisters Disagree

We know all who are washed clean in the blood of Christ are on the same team. We therefore ought to stop and make sure that we are really listening to each other. Not the “yes, but” listening that pounces on every point of contention. But listening with empathy. —p.137

1. Rebecca says she has “wrestled with this question of how to be truthful about [her] reality,” choosing to use the term “gay” to describe her unwanted homosexual desires (p. 138). How can you listen with empathy, even when someone is using terms you disagree with?

2. How does Rosaria show her solidarity with Rebecca? How does Rosaria show an openness to change her own life according to biblical truth? (p. 140)

3. For some like Rebecca who are struggling with unwanted homosexual desires, why does God not always take those feelings away (p. 140)?

4. Why are we tempted to tell other people that their problems are not big? And why must we stop claiming that singleness experienced by people with unwanted homosexual desires is the same as heterosexual singleness (p. 141)?

5. Do you think Rosaria’s suggestion of “living in chastity with unwanted homosexual desires” is a better form of self-representation than “gay”? How can we “work together on better language” than is currently in use (p. 144)?

6. What does Rosaria mean by saying “our testimonies are not inspired; only the Word of God is”(p. 145)? What is the value of our personal spiritual journey? What are the dangers of holding that experience too highly?

7. Respond to this statement: “People are bigger (and more important) than the positions they take” (p. 146). Why? How can you live that out?

8. Today we are often assaulted with “ideas that divide” (p. 146). What is the best route for addressing ideas that divide?

Living in *Openness, Unhindered*

Consider the final question from Rebecca’s letter: “How do we help a young person come to grips with a potentially lifelong condition so that hope deferred doesn’t lead to disillusionment and abandonment of the faith?” What steps can you practice or suggest, especially as you consider a person in your life with unwanted (or wanted) homosexual desires (p. 140)?



Community: Representing Christ to the World

Doing life together means silence or sadness turns into prayer without “calling for prayer requests” or happening to have your crisis fall within the Wednesday night prayer meeting time frame. It happens when Bibles or psalters flip open as tension or division escalates, not to avoid the conflict, but to ask Jesus to enter it. —p. 163

1. What is the “ground zero of our life in Christ” (p. 147)?

2. Reflect on the statement that “community for Christians rests not in our personal similarities, but in our shared futures” (p. 148). How does a community shaped by similarities differ from a community based on shared futures? How can you refocus your own Christian community on a future in Christ?

3. How do the biblical principles of adoption and of keeping the Sabbath holy strengthen our practice of hospitality?

4. The Ten Boom family in *The Hiding Place* had a practice of hospitality and of reading God’s word that prepared them to minister during the Holocaust (p. 151–152). Do you have such practices? What obstacles inhibit your hospitality (see p. 152)?

5. On page 153, Rosaria offers five reasons why a hospitality home is important. Which one resonates most strongly with you? Why?

6. After the Butterfields were robbed (p. 155–158), they praised God and held a cookout despite the hurt. How were they able to do that? How would you respond?

7. Many parents try to protect their children from harm by sheltering them. Does sheltering children really protect them (see p. 158–159)?

8. Why do you think hospitality seldom includes our real neighbors anymore? Since “God never gets the address wrong,” what could you do to be more hospitable to those who live near you?

9. This book asks you to consider adopting or fostering children, making your home a safe place for the grieving and suffering, or prayer walking in your neighborhood. It challenges us to try “doing life together” (p. 161–168). What parts of “doing life together” excite you? Make you uncomfortable? What is God calling you to live out?

Keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaint. As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

—1 Peter 4:8-10

After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

—Revelation 7:9-10

10. "Loyalty to the church flies in the face of selfish ambition and self-love, as loyalty depends on personal sacrifice and the willingness to reconcile and forgive" (p. 179). What sins tend to disrupt loyalty and church membership? What hinders you from participating more fully as a church member?

Living in *Openness, Unhindered*

The Lord's Day can be a time of devastating loneliness or depression, a time of tremendous temptation to sin because it is a time when many are alone—and many struggle to rest in God when they are lonely. Rosaria writes that Sunday isn't "us-day" or "family day" and instructs, "Ignore the cat hair on the couch (or in the mac and cheese). It likely won't kill anyone as decisively as loneliness will" (p. 160).

What do you do on the Lord's Day? Make a plan to avoid temptation and to participate in hospitality—giving, or receiving, or likely both—on Sunday.



Epilogue: Marriage, Ministry, Children

Some things are a mystery, and God’s work in crafting his people is surely one of the greatest of mysteries. One thing that helped me understand my role in marriage was the reality that marriage is never only about two people. —p. 185

1. After writing her first book, Rosaria’s life changed in some ways she didn’t expect (p. 183). Name a time when you planned a course in your life that also took you down unexpected roads.

2. “Many Christians cannot defend biblical marriage because we cannot define biblical marriage” (p. 184). Do you agree? In what way did Rosaria recently see her understanding of marriage strengthened?

Living in *Openness, Unhindered*

“Each day holds the promises of God for you.... Who knows what great things the Lord has for us today?” (p. 189) What would your day look like if you spent it looking for the promises of God and the things he has for you?