



The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert

A Study Guide


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Using This Guide

Perhaps it is rare for people to study someone's personal story. Yet when it comes to Rosaria Butterfield's story, which includes not only her biography but her unique insights, that is what thousands of people have done.

To assist those who wish to dig deeply into the story, or those who are leading a book discussion, here are some questions for consideration. The purpose is not to provide a point-by-point leader's guide but rather to offer the leader or reader some thought-provoking questions to consider.

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Beginning Questions

from the Foreword and Acknowledgments

“This book seeks to uncover the hidden landscape of the Christian life, in its whole context, warts and all.” (xi)

1. Have you ever had a happenstance meeting with someone that turned into a treasured friendship? What changed the relationship from distant to meaningful?

2. Has anyone ever told you that you were an answer to prayer? Have you ever prayed for something for a long time before seeing an answer?

3. If you were to tell your story and what God has done in your life, how would you set the stage for your readers? Would it be hard to include your mistakes in the story?

4. How and why do you share your story with others? What is a good motive for sharing your story? A bad motive?

5. Is there someone in your life you haven't thanked enough for how they have helped you, and why haven't you?

6. Think about someone you know who would be an unlikely convert. In what ways could you begin praying for that person?

Whoever despises the word brings destruction on himself, but he who reveres the commandment will be rewarded. The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life, that one may turn away from the snares of death.

Good sense wins favor, but the way of the treacherous is their ruin.

—Proverbs 13:15



Conversion and the Gospel of Peace

“In the normal course of life, questions emerged that exceeded my secular feminist worldview.” (p. 1)

“I believed then and I believe now that where everybody thinks the same nobody thinks very much.” (p. 3)

1. Do you ever think that, as you go through everyday routines, you might be missing something really important about life?

2. Would your friends and neighbors see you as an “in the closet” or “out of the closet” Christian?

3. “Being wrong and responding to correction with resilience was a higher virtue than covering up your mistakes” (p. 6). What keeps you and others from wanting to practice this “higher virtue”? How does this affect how the broader church is viewed?

They went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing because they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for [Christ’s] name. — Acts 5:41

4. Do you agree with Rosaria that the church is not a victim of the paradigm shift in America so much as a cause of it, because Christians thought they could rest in tradition rather than live in relevance?

5. How would you communicate with someone in order to have them think “it was the kindest letter of opposition I had ever received” (p. 9)?

6. Has anyone ever talked to you like you were erased? Have you talked that way to people? How can you change that?

7. Rosaria had no interest in going to church, but that was OK because Ken and Floy Smith brought the church to her. What did she mean by that?

8. When Rosaria asked for Ken’s help, why didn’t he respond immediately with a to-do list?

Exercises in Outreach

This week make a quick map of your neighborhood.

Who lives next door to you? Write their names on the map. Who lives next door to them? Write down those names. Map out your neighborhood each direction by 3-4 houses. Formulate a prayer list based on those names. Purpose to fill in the names of those you haven’t met yet.

9. How do you think the world would change if Christians and non-Christians read the Bible 5 hours per day to discern what it really said? Comment on Rosaria's words: "How did the Lord heal me? The way that he always heals: the word of God got to be bigger inside me than I" (p. 25).

10. How would your church look to an outsider? Might someone say of your church, the way a struggling person did about another church to Rosaria: "If people in my church really believed that gay people could be transformed by Christ, they wouldn't talk about us or pray about us in the hateful way that they do" (p. 25)?

11. Have you ever recognized your own sin and been ready to "draw near to Jesus, no matter what"? Is there a sin in your life today that you need to go to God about, even with as little faith as a tiny seed?

12. For Rosaria, did her change of heart result in obedience to God, or her obedience to God result in her change of heart? Was her repentance sudden or gradual?

*Providence so orders
the case, that faith and
prayer come between
our wants and supplies,
and the goodness of God
may be the more magni-
fied in our eyes thereby.
—John Flavel*

13. Rather than focus on homosexual identity versus heterosexual identity, as so many people do, Rosaria speaks of her sins of identity versus her identity in Christ. How does that change the whole discussion?

14. Have you ever been a bridge between people or groups of people? Why did you try to be a bridge? Was it costly for you? Was it fruitful?

Our great Pattern hath showed us what our deportment ought to be in all suggestions and temptations. When the devil showed him “all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them” to tempt him withal, He did not stand and look upon them, viewing their glory, and pondering their empire... but instantly, without stay, He cries, “Get thee hence, Satan.” Meet thy temptation in its entrance with thoughts of faith concerning Christ on the cross; this will make it sink before thee. Entertain no parley, no dispute with it, if thou wouldst not enter into it. —John Owen



Repentance and the Sin of Sodom

“Betrayal deepens our Christian vision: The Cross is a rugged place, not for the squeamish or self-righteous.” (p. 59)

1. Do we always understand God’s call when it happens?

2. What is the root of all sin, and why (p. 30)?

3. How do you respond to this statement: “We develop a taste for God’s standards only by disciplining our minds, hands, money, and time.... Undisciplined taste will always lead to egregious sin—slowly and almost imperceptibly” (p. 30)?

4. Rosaria said that her heterosexual past was no more sanctified than her homosexual past. What does she mean?

If anyone’s will is to do God’s will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority. —John 7:17

5. Rosaria went through her church directory and prayed about who she should ask to help her learn how to be a godly woman. Do you have a few people mentoring you in the faith? If not, who could you pray about asking to do this?

6. How can a church be relevant but not compromise the gospel?

7. What type of membership vows or commitment does your church have? How might other people view such a commitment? What about this commitment is especially meaningful to you today?

8. Is there something very important that you need to say to someone but don't want to? How have you handled such communication before?

9. Rosaria told her students, "Knowledge depends on the renewal of our minds. If you fear such renewal and its consequences, then you don't belong in graduate school" (p. 43). Since being a Christian also requires the renewing of our minds (Rom. 12:1-2), how prepared are you to accept the consequences that come with it?

Exercises in Outreach

This week take a prayer walk in your neighborhood. Pray for each home as you walk past. Pray for God to move people in your community toward himself.

He [Moses] considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward.
—Hebrews 11:26

10. What difference did it make to Rosaria when she realized that all she treasured—career, relationships, success—were loans to her from God rather than things she owned? What is the danger when people, including God-fearing people like King Solomon, begin to view these things as owned by them?

11. In evangelism, how does the integrity of our relationships matter more than the boldness of our words (p. 48)?

12. One of the sins Rosaria repented of was people pleasing; yet after becoming a Christian she saw it was easy to fall into that same trap. Is it a trap for you as well?

13. Rosaria felt people saw her as more legitimate as a married convert than a single convert. How do churches demonstrate to singles the legitimacy and sufficiency of singleness in Christ's kingdom?

14. When circumstances cause you to question everything, why is it a valuable thing to focus on God's promises and on keeping your own promises?

15. Is there an area of your life that Ken Smith's words apply as they did to Rosaria: "You can't steer a parked car. If you want to turn your life around, you've got to get moving!" (p. 59)?

16. Why have people related to Rosaria in her difficulties and suffering in a way they wouldn't have if her life appeared perfect from the outside? Do people ever see you as perfect?

I cannot but look upon all the glory and dignity of this world, lands and lordships, crowns and kingdoms, even as some brain-sick, beggarly fellow, that borrows fine clothes, and plays the part of king or lord for an hour on a stage, and then comes down, and the sport is ended, and they are beggars again. —Richard Baxter



The Good Guys

Sanctification and Public Worship

“The domain of Christian witness is not salvation (that is God’s work) but service—selfless love and sacrifice” (p. 67).

1. How would your neighborhood/town appear to an outsider? Is it an accurate appearance?

2. “Why do people publicly post or declare John 3:16? Do placards with Bible verses indicate “welcome” or “insiders only”?”

3. What enabled Rosaria to sleep well during a huge transition in her life (pp. 66-67)? What gave you peace in a turbulent time in your life?

4. “Had my sin not preceded me in a public way and had my repentance not been my lifeboat, had I found myself neatly protected within the confines and choice-making of Christian family and community, I today would probably have been the greatest of all Pharisees” (pp. 71-72). In what ways does the church community cause you to focus on what is important? In what ways does it sometimes distract you from what is important?

5. What did Rosaria believe was her job in responding to a sermon? How does that differ from the unhelpful way many people respond to a sermon?

6. Have you experienced victories over one sin, only to uncover another sin beneath it?

7. One of Ken and Floy Smith's biggest gifts to Rosaria was the sharing of lots of their precious time. Who else did that with Rosaria too? What lesson is in that for us?

8. Have you ever had some of the questions Rosaria did? "Did anyone else see [conversion] as bittersweet? Did anyone else get lost in fear when counting the costs of discipleship? Did anyone else feel like giving up? Did anyone else tire of taking up the Cross daily?" (p. 82).

As I live, declares the Lord God, your sister Sodom and her daughters have not done as you and your daughters have done. Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy. They were haughty and did an abomination before me. So I removed them, when I saw it. — Ezekiel 16:48-50

9. Rosaria says that all sexual sin is predatory. Why won't that be healed simply by changing "orientation" or by getting married?

10. Is worship "the launching pad for life" (p. 86)? Why or why not?

11. Why is world view so important to Rosaria? How can it be more important than life experience?

12. Could you say, with Rosaria, “I don’t mind being offended if I grow in grace through the sock in the chops” (p. 90)? Has this book in any way socked you in the mouth?

Exercises in Outreach

This week, memorize Colossians 4:5-6, “Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation always be full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.”

I am not what I ought to be—ah, how imperfect and deficient! I am not what I wish to be—I abhor what is evil, and I would cleave to what is good! I am not what I hope to be—soon, soon shall I put off mortality, and with mortality all sin and imperfection. Yet, though I am not what I ought to be, nor what I wish to be, nor what I hope to be, I can truly say, I am not what I once was; a slave to sin and Satan; and I can heartily join with the apostle, and acknowledge, “By the grace of God I am what I am.”—John Newton



The Homefront

Marriage, Ministry, and Adoption

“A happy family is not one where each member gets to do his or her own thing. A happy family fears God and strives for obedience.” (p. 109)

*“Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.”
— Matthew 19:4-6*

1. What did you find interesting or challenging about Pastor Doug Comin’s charge (pp. 97-107)?

2. What two kinds of home-based ministry, through hospitality, were the Butterfields doing (p. 113)? Which kind was more natural for Rosaria? Which kind is more natural for you? Why are both needed?

3. Rosaria comments that many who say they lack fellowship in a church actually lack what (pp. 114-115)? Do we fear diversity?

4. How did God “abruptly” act to show Rosaria her call to be a mom (pp. 118-120)?

5. What did Rosaria and Kent pray for, and how did God use them to protect Baby S (pp. 123-124)?

6. What happened to Jessica when she turned eighteen (p. 128)?

Exercises in Outreach

This week, consider the person or persons on your prayer list. Invite one of them to coffee or tea, and pray that God will lead you as you converse.

7. Do you have your own story of slipping and blurting out some hurtful thought to someone who didn't share your view (see p. 117-118)?

8. How has hospitality affected your life?

9. Russell Moore says, "It takes a village to adopt a child" (p. 167). Do you know someone who is considering adoption whom you could help financially, or in other practical ways?

Christ Jesus is the advocate for all true children by adoption. Are you born of God by his Word? Have you the Spirit of adoption? Can you in faith call God—Father? Then, Christ is your advocate to appear in the presence of God for you and to plead the sacrifice he has offered. He pleads for the weak and the strong. —John Bunyan



Homeschooling and Middle Age

Marriage, Ministry, and Adoption

“A boy asked how homeschool is different from public school. Another boy answered: ‘At public school, your mom isn’t yelling at you.’” (p. 134)

1. Whose world is this (pp. 132, 141)? What does that imply for Rosaria’s education of her children and her family activities?

2. What is the advice Rosaria would give to a woman who dreamed of having six children but was diagnosed with infertility (p. 137-138)? How can our dreams become idols?

3. You may have had other plans for your life. Has God crushed some of your “idolatrics” as a fruitful means of “Christ-centered redirection” (p. 137)?

Whatsoever we have over-loved, idolized, and leaned upon, God has from time to time broken it, and made us to see the vanity of it; so that we find the readiest course to be rid our comforts is to set our hearts inordinately or immoderately upon them. — John Flavel

4. What happens when your calendar is too full (p. 142)?

Exercises in Outreach

This week, practice hospitality. Invite an “unlikely convert” into your home, and get to know a little bit more about that person.

5. According to *The Connected Child*, in dealing with a hurt or abused person, you should do everything in your power to do what (p. 144)?

6. Has your family been affected by sins of incest, prostitution, murder, or adultery? Jesus’ family was. Why would God choose this family for Jesus (see Matt. 1:21)?

7. What are some advantages/disadvantages for a Christian to receive a Christian education at home or homeschool cooperative? at a Christian school? while attending a public school?

Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God. —Galatians 5:7