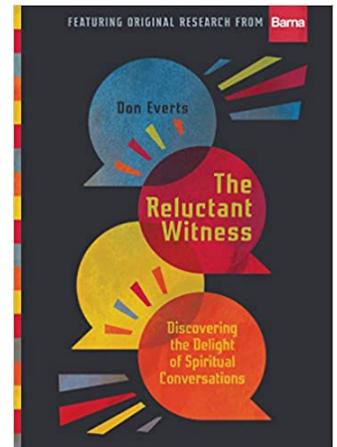


The Reluctant Witness – Study Guide

Book by Don Everts

New research finds that Christians are less involved in spiritual conversations today than we were twenty-five years ago. As society has changed, it seems we have become more uncomfortable talking with people about our faith. We are reluctant conversationalists. The reality is that many of our churches and communities are shrinking instead of growing. What can we do about this?

Don Everts, himself a reluctant witness, grew up assuming that spiritual conversations are always painful and awkward. But after falling into one spiritual conversation after another, he was surprised to discover that they aren't. Don's surprising—and sometimes embarrassing—stories affirm what Scripture and the latest research reveal: spiritual conversations can actually be a delight. Unpacking what God's Word says about spiritual conversations and digging into the habits of eager conversationalists, Everts describes what we can learn from Christians who are still talking about their faith.



With original research from the Barna Group and Lutheran Hour Ministries on spiritual conversations in the digital age, this book offers fresh insights and best practices for fruitful everyday conversations.

Introduction

“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. How then will they call on him and in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And who are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news.’” – Romans 10:13-15

1. After reading the introduction, what are your feelings and expectations about this book?
2. What stuck out to you from this chapter? What did you agree with and disagree with and why?
3. What is it you hope to get from this study? Write out your goals, individually and as a group, so you can review them when your study is over.
4. Take some time to pray and invite God into your study. Ask him what HE wants you to get out of this and add those things to your list. Ask him to speak to you and to give you open eyes, ears, mind, and heart to receive all that he has for you, in humility, as you move forward.

Chapter 1 – Reluctant Conversationalists

“They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.” – Acts 2:42-47

1. What stuck out to you from this chapter? What did you agree with and disagree with and why? Could you relate to the stories and information being presented? What feelings did it evoke in you?
2. Using the criteria in this chapter (and the chart on p.21), are you more of a reluctant conversationalist or an eager conversationalist?
3. How many spiritual conversations did you have over the last year? How often do you talk with others about your faith?
4. How equipped do you feel to talk about your Christian faith (on a scale of 1-10)?
5. What does your church do to equip people to talk about their faith? How successful would you say that equipping is (on a scale of 1-10)?
6. How willing are you personally to start a conversation if you feel your conversation partner might reject you?
7. As you reflect back on the spiritual conversations you have had with non-Christians in the last year, describe what those conversations were like?
8. How comfortable are you talking about Jesus and your own life with Jesus? How comfortable are you talking about God’s word?
9. When conversations get around to Christianity, do you have a “stump speech” that you tend to use every time, or are you more responsive and flexible based on who you are talking to?
10. How often are you getting together for church with other Christians?
11. If you were to characterize your distinctness on a scale of 1 (I am exactly like the surrounding culture) to 10 (I am nothing like my surrounding culture), what would your number be? What do you think might be an ideal target number?
12. Do you believe you need to build a genuine relationship before talking about your faith? Why or why not?
13. Describe the role you believe you have in initiating such relationships and conversations?
14. How do you tend to view and relate to our new digital landscape?
15. What percentage of your relationships would you say has some digital communication involved in it? Do you think that percentage is changing over time? If so, how?
16. What experiences do you have sharing your faith digitally or seeing others do the same?
17. What do you think are the biggest opportunities in this new digital age? The biggest temptations?
18. Do you have any experiences or testimonies that relate to this chapter? Take some time to share them with your group.
19. What more would you like to learn about the topics presented in this chapter? What questions do you still have?
20. Where would you like to grow (personally and as a group) in relation to what you’ve just read and discussed? Take some time to pray and ask God to help you in this, and brainstorm as a group about how you can take action and hold each other accountable in the process.

Chapter 2 – Why We Stopped Talking

“They seized [Jesus] and led him away, bringing him into the high priest’s house, and Peter was following at a distance. And when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat down among them. Then a servant girl, seeing him as he sat in the light and looking closely at him, said, ‘This man also was with him.’ But he denied it, saying, ‘Woman, I do not know him.’ And a little later someone else saw him and said, ‘You also are one of them.’ But Peter said, ‘Man, I am not.’ And after an interval of about an hour still another insisted, saying, ‘Certainly this man also was with him, for he too is a Galilean.’ But Peter said, ‘Man, I do not know what you are talking about.’ And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, ‘Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times.’ And he went out and wept bitterly.”
– Luke 22:54-62

1. What stuck out to you from this chapter? What did you agree with and disagree with and why? Could you relate to the stories and information being presented? What feelings did it evoke in you?
2. Think about a time when you held your tongue about your faith for fear of social repercussions. How often would you say that happens?
3. What is your primary fear at such times? What’s the worst-case scenario you imagine in your head?
4. Think about your social circles; how off-limits is talking about faith?
5. Describe a time when you personally didn’t bring up your faith for fear of offending someone?
6. Have you ever offended someone else by bringing up your faith? If so, what was it like? How did the conversation end?
7. Do you believe sharing the gospel is the job of the local church, or do you believe that responsibility lies personally with Christians? Or is it a mix?
8. Have your views about evangelism shifted over time? If so, in what ways?
9. How have the Bible passages and research findings in this chapter left you feeling?
10. What are some of your own fears about spiritual conversations?
11. What more would you like to learn about the topics presented in this chapter? What questions do you still have?
12. Where would you like to grow (personally and as a group) in relation to what you’ve just read and discussed? Take some time to pray and ask God to help you in this, and brainstorm as a group about how you can take action and hold each other accountable in the process.

Chapter 3 – Delightful Conversations

“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns.’ The voice of your watchmen – they lift up their voice; together they sing for joy; for eye to eye they see the return of the Lord to Zion. Break forth together into singing, you waste places of Jerusalem, for the Lord has comforted his people; he has redeemed Jerusalem. The Lord has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.” – Isaiah 52:7-10

1. What stuck out to you from this chapter? What did you agree with and disagree with and why? Could you relate to the stories and information being presented? What feelings did it evoke in you?
2. Thinking back over your life, what’s the most pleasant, interesting, or delightful spiritual conversation you’ve ever had? Where were you? How did the conversation start?
3. How did you feel during the conversation? How did you feel afterward? How does it feel to remember, right now, that conversation?
4. Who are the two non-Christians you are closest to?
5. How much time in an average week do you spend nurturing a friendship with a non-Christian? How do you feel about that amount?
6. What about spiritual conversations makes them seem serious or sober?
7. Imagine a conversation between two people of different faiths discussing their faith. What do you imagine that conversation to be like? What emotions do you imagine are present? What’s the general tone of the conversation you picture?
8. List your assumptions about the nature of spiritual conversations, then compare your list with the latest findings.
9. How much do you feel the pressure to have a ready (and convincing) answer to every question non-Christians have?
10. What are the top three questions you are most afraid of being asked? What questions about the Christian faith do you feel least prepared to answer?
11. How does it feel to read that honestly journeying with a friend is often more important than providing a textbook answer? Consider a couple relationships you have with non-Christians: How does the prospect of “honest and humble journeying” with them make you feel?
12. Consider a conflict you experienced while talking about faith. What caused the conflict? How did you feel during the conflict? How did you feel afterward? How does it feel, right now, to recall that conflict?
13. Think of the last spiritual conversation you had with a non-Christian. Are you glad about that conversation? If so, why? If not, what do you think could have changed the trajectory of that conversation to make it more enjoyable?
14. What more would you like to learn about the topics presented in this chapter? What questions do you still have?
15. Where would you like to grow (personally and as a group) in relation to what you’ve just read and discussed? Take some time to pray and ask God to help you in this, and brainstorm as a group about how you can take action and hold each other accountable in the process.

Chapter 4 – Eager Conversationalists

“Take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication.” – Ephesians 6:13-18

1. What stuck out to you from this chapter? What did you agree with and disagree with and why? Could you relate to the stories and information being presented? What feelings did it evoke in you?
2. How strongly do you agree with the statement “your religious faith is very important in your life today”?
3. How often do you attend worship services during an average month?
4. How often do you read the Bible in an average week?
5. How often do you pray during an average day?
6. How does trying to quantify your spiritual practices make you feel?
7. What do you believe about heaven? About who gets into heaven? About how people get into heaven?
8. Describe how “buckled” your “belt of truth” is (not at all, loosely, tightly).
9. Describe how qualified you feel to share about your faith (definitely, maybe, not at all).
10. What training have you received about how to talk about your faith (reading a book, taking a class, being mentored)?
11. What equipping does your Christian community offer in this area?
12. What more would you like to learn about the topics presented in this chapter? What questions do you still have?
13. Where would you like to grow (personally and as a group) in relation to what you’ve just read and discussed? Take some time to pray and ask God to help you in this, and brainstorm as a group about how you can take action and hold each other accountable in the process.

Chapter 5 – Everyday Conversations

“Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God’s will, than for doing evil.” – 1 Peter 3:13-17

1. What stuck out to you from this chapter? What did you agree with and disagree with and why? Could you relate to the stories and information being presented? What feelings did it evoke in you?
2. How expectant are you for open doors to spiritual conversations? Describe a time when you felt subtly nudged by God to lean into a moment or a conversation.
3. How prepared do you feel to talk about your faith and Christian lifestyle?
4. Describe your default posture when you are talking with non-Christians about faith (gentleness and respect, anger and defensiveness, something else entirely).
5. Think of the last time you tried to spark a spiritual conversation. How did it go? How did it feel?
6. What do you think is important to keep in mind so that you can spark a spiritual conversation while still being gentle and respectful?
7. When faith comes up in a conversation, what do you tend to say or talk about?
8. How do you discern where a non-Christian friend is in their spiritual journey?
9. Consider a non-Christian in your life through the lens of the “Spiritual Conversation Curve” (p.140). How does this simple model affect how you see or understand where your friend is on the journey? How does it help you discern how you could be most helpful to them?
10. Describe a moment in a conversation when you sensed awkwardness or a potential conflict. What was your knee-jerk reaction? Has that always been your first reaction?
11. Describe a time when you pushed through potential conflict (with gentleness and respect) to get to the joy on the other side. What did that conversation teach you?
12. What more would you like to learn about the topics presented in this chapter? What questions do you still have?
13. Where would you like to grow (personally and as a group) in relation to what you’ve just read and discussed? Take some time to pray and ask God to help you in this, and brainstorm as a group about how you can take action and hold each other accountable in the process.

Conclusion

1. What stuck out to you most from this study? What have you learned about God that you did not know before? What have you learned about yourself? What have you learned about others?
2. Take some time to review your goals from the beginning of your study. What goals have you accomplished, what are you still working on, and what do you need help with?
3. What questions do you still have after completing this study?
4. Take the next week and be intentional to have at least three spiritual conversations. Reconvene next week to share your thoughts, feelings, and the results of each with your group.
5. Spend some time in prayer, asking God to awaken his purposes within you concerning this study. Consider whether you need to spend time in repentance, in a time of commitment and commissioning, or in a time of surrender. Add this to your prayer time as the Holy Spirit guides you.