

The Study Guide
SURPRISED
BY TRUTH



*11 Converts Give the Biblical
and Historical Reasons for
Becoming Catholic*

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in partnership with St. John Paul II Parish

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How To Use This Guide

Reading isn't enough

The human mind has a tendency to think a problem is solved once we have finished reading a book, attended a seminar, read an article, or finished a course.

But as I heard Les Brown once say, “*if information is all we needed, everyone would be skinny, rich, and happy.*”

There is something powerful in taking the information received and reflecting on its meaning and finding ways to apply it in our daily life.

The intention of this “*study guide*” is to help you, the reader of Patrick Madrid’s book, ***Surprised by Truth***, take a moment to internalize what it’s read in each of the 11 testimonies.

The questions in for each chapter are intended to serve as “*thought provokers*” rather than a requirement. Each reader will connect in different ways with each author; so, feel free to come up with your own questions for reflection or discussion.

Partner up

It’s easier to process and internalize information when discussed with other readers. Remember the verse “*when two or more are gathered in my name...*”, there’s something supernatural about sitting down with another person and discuss what they are learning from the concepts in a book. Use it to your advantage.

You’ll notice the questions in this guide are intended for self-reflection and discussion. You are strongly encouraged to find someone with which to share your answers and be open to the possibility of encountering a deeper truth as a result of mixing perspectives.

Be open-minded and willing to challenge your current beliefs

For the believer, be willing to challenge what you think you know about your faith. Be open to reflect on the testimony and explore how their situation could apply to you.

For the non-believer, approach the book and the questions, as a way to explore and discover rather than to prove or disprove something you already believe.

For everyone, the amount of Biblical arguments presented, in combination with the many book references, can serve as a lifetime resource guide to study Christianity and the Catholic church doctrine.

Suggested process to use this guide

As a self-study

1. Before reading any part of the book, set an intention for what you are wanting to get out of your reading.
 1. What would you like to learn?
 2. What are you looking to change in your life?
 3. What do you believe about the subject?
 4. What would you like to be different at the end of the reading?
2. Once the intention is set, read the questions for the specific chapter so you can have them in mind.
3. Read the chapter with the intent to explore and enjoy someone's life story.
4. Write your own questions, ideas, comments, concerns.
5. Answer your questions first. Then move to the questions in this guide.
6. Find someone to share what you are learning...insights, concerns, questions, doubts, and all.
7. Repeat for each chapter.

The important part of this exercise is to take the time to process the chapter before moving on to the next one.

As a group study

1. Find 1 or more people to setup a specific time to meet whether by phone or in-person.
2. Setup one meeting per chapter.
3. Each person reads the chapter in advance and follows the self-study approach.
4. Meet and start by each person sharing their personal insights, questions, doubts, and experience.
5. Use the sharing to expand the conversation. Be curious rather than seeking to agree or disagree.
6. If the conversation reaches a stopping, use the questions in this guide as a starting point.

If you are wanting to setup a book study group, the process is similar as the self-study with the only difference that you will be asking for other's perspectives. A suggested format could be:

The primary objective of the group study is to create conversation and sharing among like-minded individuals to expand perspectives instead of trying to agree or disagree.

Reflection Question Progression

You will notice as you progress through the book that the questions decrease in number. This is because you'll notice a pattern in the testimonies and there's no need to repeat questions.

The intent was to capture differences in each chapter but you are free use your own style. Again, the journey is yours and it's okay to formulate your own questions as you read the book.

Enjoy the learning process, Juan.

BOOK'S INTRODUCTION

Recall the bamboo anecdote.

Once upon a time there was a beautiful garden.

There in the cool of the day the Master of the garden would walk. Of all the denizens of the garden, the most beloved was a gracious and noble Bamboo.

Year after year, Bamboo grew yet more noble and gracious, conscious of his Master's love and watchful delight, but he was always modest and gentle.

Often, when Wind came to revel in the garden, Bamboo would cast aside his grave stateliness, to dance and play merrily, tossing and swaying and leaping and bowing in joyous abandon, leading the garden in the Great Dance which most delighted the Master's heart.

One day, the Master drew near to contemplate His Bamboo with eyes of curious expectancy. Bamboo, in a passion of adoration, bowed his great head to the ground in loving greeting.

The Master spoke, "Bamboo, I wish to use you."

Bamboo flung his head to the sky in utter delight. The day had come, the day for which he had been made, the day to which he had been growing hour by hour, the day in which he would find his completion and his destiny. His voice became low. "Master, I am ready. Use me as You will."

"Bamboo," the Master's voice was grave, "I will have to take you and cut you down."

A trembling of great horror shook Bamboo. "Cut me down? Oh, not that! Use me for Your joy, Master, but please do not cut me down."

"Beloved Bamboo," the Master's voice grew even graver, "If I do not cut you down, I cannot use you."

The garden grew still. Wind held his breath. Bamboo slowly bent his proud and glorious head, and he whispered, "Master, if you can't use me unless you cut me down, then, do Your will and cut."

"Bamboo, beloved Bamboo, I will have to cut your leaves and branches as well."

"Master, spare me. Cut me down and lay my beauty in the dust, but would You also take from me my leaves and branches?"

"If I do not cut them away, I cannot use you." Sun had hid his face. Listening Butterfly glided fearfully away. Bamboo shivered in terrible expectancy, whispering low, "Master cut away."

"I'll have to cleave you in two and cut out your heart, for if not, I can't use you." Bamboo bowed to the ground in sorrow. "Master, then cut and cleave."

The Master of the Garden took Bamboo and cut him down and hacked off his branches and stripped him of his leaves and clove him in two and cut out his heart. Lifting him gently, the Master carried him where there was a spring of fresh, sparkling water in the midst of His dry fields.

Then, putting one end of broken Bamboo in the spring, and the other end into the water channel in His field, the Master laid down gently His beloved Bamboo. The spring sang welcome, and the clear, sparkling water raced joyously down the channel of Bamboo's torn body into the waiting fields. Then the rice was planted, and the days went by, and the shoots grew, and the harvest came.

In that day, Bamboo, once so glorious in his stately beauty, was yet glorious in his brokenness and humility. For in his beauty he became a channel of abundant life to his Master's world.

Reflection Questions

1. What message did you take from the bamboo anecdote?
2. How often do you fight to keep yourself comfortable without realizing that the uncomfortable change is what will open the doors for you to be an even greater source for good?
3. Recall an uncomfortable situation you resisted, at first, but turned out to be a positive change in your life. What can you learn from that moment and apply moving forward?
4. Can you describe a time where life humbled you but from it came something even greater?

TESTIMONY #1 - PAUL THIGPEN - HIS OPENED ARMS WELCOMED ME

When science becomes stronger than faith.

1. Paul mentions the following statement by Thomas Merton as he shares his encounters with Christians, ***"People whose every action told me something of the country that was my home."*** What does the phrase mean to you? Can you think of examples?
2. In relation to the concept of faith what do you think of the distinction between, Rational, Irrational, and Pararational?
3. In what ways does your logic get in the way of your faith journey?
4. Recall the importance of the crucifix to Paul and the role his upbringing played on his journey back and forth to Christianity. In what ways may you be limiting someone else's growth journey because of your current beliefs?

For years, reason had masqueraded as a god in my life, but now I saw it for what it truly was: only a servant, however brilliantly attired.

— Paul Thigpen

TESTIMONY #2 - MARCUS GRODI - WHAT IS TRUTH?

The protestant minister who wanted to do it right.

1. As Patrick's Protestant faith was being challenged, he stated, ***"For nearly forty years, I labored to construct that wall, stone-by-stone, to protect my Protestant convictions."***
 1. How are your convictions about your faith may be limiting the increase of understanding God's ways?
2. Take a moment to reflect and share in what instances does your logic may get in the way of where the Lord is trying to take you?
3. Pay attention to the turning point: the friend converted catholic. How often has a friend of yours done something opposite to what you expected, and it turn out to be something that changed your life?
4. What do you think is the impact of a love one engaging in the same journey as yours?

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, lean
not unto your own understanding; in all of
your ways acknowledge him and he will
direct your paths.

— ~Proverbs 3:5-6

The Greatest Invention story (Excerpt from page 22)

A New York reporter hits the streets, interviewing people at random, and asking them what's the most amazing invention. He received a variety of answers: the airplane, the telephone, the automobile, computers, nuclear energy, space travel, and antibiotic medicine. The answers went along these lines until one fellow gave an unlikely answer:

"It obvious. The most amazing invention was the thermos.

"The thermos?" The reporter said.

"Of course. It keeps hot things hot and cold things cold."

The reporter blinked and responded, "so what?"

"Don't you think it's amazing it knows which is which?"

- Barring the science that explains this, the question worth discussing is *"how do you know what you believe in and what you share in relation to those beliefs is actually the right thing to believe?"*

"To be deep in history is to cease to be Protestant." ~John Henry Newman

TESTIMONY #3 - JAMES AKIN - A TRIUMPH AND A TRAGEDY

1. As you read James' beginning of his story, what thoughts come to mind as you see him jump from one "faith" position to another and the reasons for doing so?
2. Once he became protestant, what do you think of his approach with his wife Renée before they got married?
 1. In what ways may you have taken similar approaches with other people in your life in matters of importance to you?
3. As you read the passages used by Leon Holmes, which one do you have the most questions about and why?
 1. John 6:53 – *"Jesus replied to them: In all truth I tell you, if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you."*
 2. Luke 22:19 – *"Then he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.'"*
 3. John 3:5 – *"Jesus replied: In all truth I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born through water and the Spirit;"*
 4. Romans 6:3 – *"You cannot have forgotten that all of us, when we were baptized into Christ Jesus, were baptized into his death."*
 5. 1 Peter 3:21 – *"It is the baptism corresponding to this water which saves you now -- not the washing off of physical dirt but the pledge of a good conscience given to God through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,"*
 6. John 20:23 – *"If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven; if you retain anyone's sins, they are retained."*
 7. Matthew 16:18 – *"So I now say to you: You are Peter and on this rock I will build my community. And the gates of the underworld can never overpower it."*

4. James shares his reasoning behind Baptism, sola scriptura and sola fide. Pick one and study it for a couple minutes. How would you explain the reasoning to someone else?
5. Reflect on how James comes to be part of the Catholic Church.
 1. What took him over the edge?
 2. What propelled him to make a decision?

TESTIMONY #4 - STEVE WOOD - A PRODIGAL'S JOURNEY

From hippie to counterculture catholic

1. In conversation with the Franciscan monastery, Steve is looking for Jesus' church but gets told he had to be a Catholic for a year. He said, *"I thanked him but said I couldn't wait a year to follow Jesus."*
 1. In what ways can the Church be making it inconvenient for seekers to engage with the Church?
 2. What could have been other ways to engage with Steve?
2. Consider Steve's reluctance to consider Catholicism as an option to find Jesus, his approach to research and his protestant friends converting to Catholicism.
 1. What do you think had the greatest leverage in his change of heart?
3. In the latter part of his testimony, Steve talks about how many protestants criticize Catholics and study a lot of theology but never read book explaining catholic tradition.
 1. When you think about your approach to faith, how often do you repeat things without ever studying them yourself?
 2. How often do you speak against something without ever exploring the other person's point of view and reasoning?

TESTIMONY #5 - BOB SUNGENIS - FROM CONTROVERSY TO CONSOLIDATION

The wrong phone number that wasn't

1. Right off the start, Bob's journey begins with a mistaken caller.
 1. How often do good things happen to you by accident?
 2. Have you ever been the creator of the accident that turned into good news for someone else?
2. In Bob's early years, he is passionately seeking to learn more about God, the Bible and Jesus. He finds a Christian radio show and hears how a Catholic practice is unbiblical. This is a turning point for Bob. One that eventually takes him away from the Catholic Church.
 1. As you reflect on your faith journey, have there been similar moments that may have pushed you away or pulled you closer to your current beliefs?
 2. Write them down or share them with someone.
 3. What did you learn and how have they changed your life's perspective?
3. Let's talk about Matthew 19:21, "***If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven.***"
 1. What's your gut reaction to this statement? Be frank.
 2. What do you think Jesus meant?
 3. What do you think this verse means in relation to having riches?
4. Bishop Fulton Sheen's quote, "***There are not a hundred people in the world who hate the Catholic Church, but there are thousands who hate what they mistakenly believe the catholic Church to be.***"

TESTIMONY #6 - JULIE SWENSON - THIS I SEEK: TO DWELL IN THE HOUSE OF THE LORD

Born A Baptist. Grew up Calvinist. Ended up Catholic.

1. What exactly is the church? What is its purpose?
2. Suppose you run into Julie and she asks...
 1. What's the role the Church plays in your life? What's your answer?
3. She then has the follow up question,
 1. What's the purpose of the Church? And
 2. Is there actually a right one Church?
4. On what ways could you be using your faith as a way to think of yourself better than others?
5. Have you ever focused so much on following the rules and doing things the right way that you forgot the intent and meaning behind it all?
 1. What matters more when it comes to living as a believer?
6. Recall when Julie suggests to her friend Bob to become a Catholic monk. Bob decides to pursue the idea and contact a Catholic church that ends up sending him to an Anglican seminary because he was "protestant."
 1. What would you have done if you received Bob's call and why?
7. Julie summarizes her journey in three steps: to be humbled, to be strengthen, and to find peace. What part of her story relates to you the most?

"I had worked hard at cultivating a knowledge of scripture at the expense of cultivating a deeper relationship with the author of scripture" ~Julie

TESTIMONY #7 - RICK CONASON - OY!

From liberal atheist Jew to party junkie to catholic apologetic.

1. Rick shares an interesting experience with Zechariah 14. He had never read the Bible but knew enough it to look up the passage. It ended up directly answering his question about Jesus.
 1. Have you had such an experience?
 2. How often do you listen to your that inner voice or intuition?
2. Rick declares, ***"The prophecies in Revelations and the idea of Jesus were fascinating, but I certainly had no intention of changing my life to meet his demands."***
 1. How easy is it for you to adapt your lifestyle to match what your faith is asking you to do?
3. Rick's intentional about mentioning the relationship with his family after his conversion and the need for "testing" different religions until being convinced of the right fit.
 1. Suppose you took the same approach as Rick and go test different religions, what would be your family's reaction?
 2. What steps would you take to approach the concept?
 3. What emotions would come to you if you were to do it?

I was depressed about the prospect of giving up my freedom if I became a Christian.

— Rick

TESTIMONY #8 - T.L. FRAZIER - INTO THE CRIMSON LIGHT

The human pinball find his true north

1. T.L.'s story starts with a lot of life directions being influenced by environments and first impressions.
 1. Reflect on your life's directional changes.
 2. What role did environment and first impressions play in it?
2. T.L. deeply explores infant baptism and the Eucharist as a symbolism.
 1. What was your interpretation of these concepts before you read T.L.'s testimony?
 2. How has it changed after reading this testimony?
3. T.L. presents a strong case for the consistency of the Catholic teachings. What other ideas or concepts do you know of that have stayed consistent to the original meaning intended by its founders?
4. What thoughts came to mind as you read through T.L.'s explanation of Peter being the 1st Pope? (*Verses shared as reference below*)
 1. Ephesian 1:22 - He has put all things under his feet, and made him, as he is above all things, the head of the Church;
 2. Colossians 1:18 - and He is the Head of the Body, that is, the Church..."

One cannot have a personal relationship with the Head as Lord and Savior in its fullness if one doesn't embrace the Body as well. One can't decapitate Jesus from the Body and expect to have a "personal" relationship with just the severed head. ~T.L. Frazier

TESTIMONY #9 - TIM STAPLES - THE BIBLE MADE ME DO IT

He gave up his dream and found the truth

1. What makes Tim's testimony different is the continuous passionate dialogue among a protestant and a catholic who know their Bible verse very well.
 1. How well do you know the Bible? Not by memory as a recital but as a way to rationalize and internalize the core beliefs of your faith.
 2. If you aren't a believer, what is your assessment of the exchange between Tim and Matt?
2. What are your thoughts about comparing religious Tradition and cultural habits (doing things because that's what we have always done)?
3. At the end of Tim's Marine Corp service, he is relieved because he will no longer need to see Matt.
 1. Where do you think the relief is coming from? What could be wrong about changing faith paths?
 2. Have you been in situations where you are holding back on making a decision even though all logical evidence points to a need for change? What was stopping you?
4. What do you think motivated Tim to "fight" to the last minute to hold his protestant position? What was he gaining from that position?

Please God, show me the truth, but don't
let the truth be Catholic.

— Tim

TESTIMONY #10 - DAVE ARMSTRONG - CONFESSIONS OF A 1980s' JESUS FREAK

It all started with a movie.

Dave's testimony is very familiar. While Dave's story is shorter than the rest, notice how many books he read along the way. He makes an effort to mention everything he read. He mentions at least 20 different avenues of information from magazines and movies to theological books.

1. How much time do you invest in learning about your faith?
2. How does it compare to other hobbies of yours?
3. What do you think would change in your life if you improved the ratio of time/effort invested in knowing more about your beliefs?
4. What is one thing you can do, right now, to get started?

TESTIMONY #11 - AL KRESTA - ALL DETOURS LEAD TO ROME

The one who found wandering was necessary

"It [Evangelicalism] produces some great wine but spills it for want of wineskins. It generates fire but it gets burned because it can't settle on a fireplace. It manages to convert many goats to sheep but leaves them wandering without the shepherds Jesus has appointed for them." ~Al

1. Al has a taste of everything including drug use. As he reaches the breaking point to make a decision, he states the following, *"Not to mention the fact that becoming Catholic would very likely mean unemployment as a pastor and forfeiture of my radio show. I had a wife and family, and needed to keep a job."*
 1. What would you do in this situation of competing commitments?
2. In Al's testimony, the wandering through all kinds of different sets of beliefs and groups was necessary in his conversion. How often do you rule someone out because of one specific period of their life?
3. As we reach the end of the book, the questions worth asking are:
 1. What did you believe before reading it?
 2. What do you believe now?
 3. What is going to be your next step in your journey?

Everyone chuckled when, after being baptized, James did a little dance of happiness and excitement. In my heart, I danced too. My days of wandering were over.

All routes lead to the same place

Many people go through life following the patterns of living that started in their childhood. They live their lives without fully understanding the reason behind why they do what they do.

This is more visible when it comes to matters of faith.

As you read through these 11 testimonies, what you'll discover is that there are many ways to reach the same place. Whether you are a believer, or not, Patrick's book is bound to challenge your thinking and guide you through the process of fully understanding the core tenets of the Catholic faith.

May you use this guide, as a way to help take an in-depth look into one of the oldest religions in history.