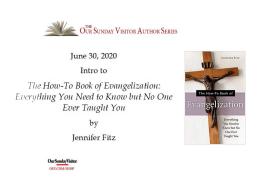
Introduction to The How to Book of Evangelization: Everything You Need to Know but No One Ever Taught You by Jennifer Fitz Our Sunday Visitor, 2020



Thank you for coming today. In preparation for today's presentation, I asked some longtime readers what they'd like to hear about. And these are the topics that were of most interest:



Today's Talk

- Why I Wrote this Book
- Top Four Most Important Topics in this Book
- My First Attempts at Evangelizing (Yikes!)
- When to Speak, When to Hush
- Keeping Jesus Center Stage
 Helping Someone Heal from Church-Induced Disgust
- O&A?





Why did I write this book? What are the most important things to know?

And in terms of specific questions about evangelization:

- What were my first attempts at evangelizing like?
- How do you know when you should speak up about your faith and when you should keep it to yourself?
- How do you prevent yourself from getting self-centered?
- How do you keep Jesus at the center of your mission?

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And finally, and this is a question that to me is one of the most pressing issues facing Catholics today: How can we be helpful to someone who has been hurt by the Church, or who has grown disgusted or disheartened by the many scandals that have happened and continue to happen in the Catholic Church?

In my presentation today I will briefly address each of those points, and if we have time at the end, I'll take questions; if we are short on time, we have another option for continuing with questions after today.



Why I Wrote this Book

- · People keep asking the question!
- "Evangelization" label gets slapped on everything Catholic-brand.
- · Partial solutions are part of the puzzle.
- A big-picture map puts it all together.

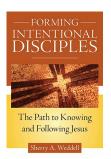




Why did I write this book?

I am an ordinary Catholic. I do not run an amazing ministry. Anyone who knows me can give you a long list of my shortcomings. So I did not write this book because Jennifer Fitz is going to make you a world-famous evangelist. This book is for ordinary Catholics.

My goal with the book is to help you, the reader, discover *your part* in the work of evangelization – whatever that is, no matter how big or small.



Forming Intentional Disciples by Sherry Weddell, *Our Sunday Visitor 2012*, available at: https://www.orderosv.com/product/forming-intentional-disciples-the-path-to-knowing-and-following-jesus

What inspired to me to write the book is that, as a participant in Sherry Weddell's *Forming Intentional Disicples* forum, (her book is the seminal work on the topic of the need to evangelize today and played a huge role in my own formation[show book]), as a participant on her discussion forum,

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over and over again I've seen people arrive who have a very basic question: What exactly is evangelization and how do we do it?

"Evangelization" is one of those labels that gets slapped on any good effort by well-meaning Catholics. There's something to that. Every aspect of our life as Catholics *can* contribute to evangelization.

And yet many of us realize that there's something more specific we need to know about.

Another challenge I've run into is the problem of partial solutions. People will say things like, "What really led me back to the church was the kindness of the volunteers at Catholic Charities, so I think that experience I had is the most important part of evangelization: If we would just be kind to each other." Well, that is important. It's essential.

Someone else says, "It was the fantastic apologetics on the part of the team at Catholic Answers that led me into the Church. If we'd just have good catechesis and good Catholic TV and radio shows, that's the most important thing."

Well, those things are important too.

Someone else says, "My life was changed when I discovered the beauty and power and all-surpassing glory of God in the Mass over at St. Spectualar's Catholic Church. If we'd just have a Mass more like the one at my home parish, I feel sure people would be drawn to Jesus!"

They aren't wrong.

All those things are important to evangelization. What we tend to overlook -- and I am as guilty as anybody on this – is that people are complex, people are different from each other, and people have different types of spiritual needs at different points in their life. *Evangelization*, therefore, can't be just a single type of reform, or a single type of activity, or a single type of spiritual outreach.

So one of the main purposes of this book is to lay out a 'big picture', an overview, think of it like a map, of what evangelization is, and how the different aspects of evangelization all fit together, so that you can see how your personal calling fits into the work of the Church in drawing souls to Jesus Christ.

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Top Four Most Important Parts of Evangelization

- Jesus
- Prayer
- Fasting
- Integrity



OurSundayVisitor

Moving on to the next question . . .

I'm going to tell you up front that the top most important concepts in evangelization are not necessarily what you were hoping to hear.

If you look at the table of contents of the book, you'll see that we cover a bazillion different aspects of evangelization. We look at the liturgy, apologetics, works of mercy, retreats, parish outreach events, Bible studies – all that good stuff. We've got three hundred pages of good things Catholics do to spread the Good News.

But here's the reality: I have only four things I consider non-negotiable, and none of them are glamorous:

- Jesus
- Prayer
- Fasting
- Integrity.

If you commit to these four, everything else in the book you can eventually figure out on your own. The book can save you a lot of trial and error, and it can definitely help in communicating with other Catholics you know, but the big four are the must-haves. So let's look at them.



- #1 You Love Jesus Christ in the Catholic Faith
- Evangelization = Helping Someone Grow Into a Deep, Personal Relationship with Jesus Christ
- · You might not be there yet yourself!
- → Paging Deacon Keith Strohm!
- · You might need time to prepare yourself.
- · Jesus Christ is the Savior, not you!





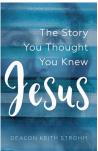
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#1 You love Jesus Christ and You love the Catholic faith.

That's our goal. The point of evangelization is to help others grow into a deep, personal relationship with Jesus Christ in the Catholic faith.

If that's an area where you are struggling, it's okay to be honest about that. You might not, for example, fully have your head around the idea of God being a *person* – three persons, actually, one-God-three-persons-in-God. You might tend to think of God as a *force* or as a *noble ideal*, or as a kind of *general spiritual power* – those are common ways of thinking about God in our society. I talk in the book about the spiritual challenge of reaching the point where you recognize that God is a *personal* God.



Jesus: The Story You Thought You Knew by Deacon Keith Strohm, Our Sunday Visitor 2017, available at: https://www.orderosv.com/product/jesus-the-story-you-thought-you-knew

You aren't a bad person if you aren't there yet. It won't hurt you to read the book, though I recommend another book as a better starting place. That book is *Jesus: The Story You Knew* by Deacon Keith Strohm (and also published by Our Sunday Visitor) [show book]. It may be that you need to give yourself some time, some prayer, some spiritual exploration, and allow yourself to grow closer to Jesus Christ. Keith's books is built around allowing you to do that, whether on your own or as a small group studying together.

In the same way, you might have specific struggles with the Catholic faith that are hindering you. Maybe there is a moral issue that the Church takes a stand on, and you really don't see why the Church teaches as she does. Maybe you are dealing with the hurtful behavior of someone in the Church who has done something really terrible – either to you personally, or to someone you love, or who is just being a horrible example of a Christian, abusing his or her power, neglecting to practice the faith – I think anyone who says that's *not* a challenge for them, or its *never* been a challenge, is either fibbing or they don't get out much.

You're not a bad person because you find these things difficult. It's okay to need some time to work through difficult issues.

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And finally, let me tell you what I have seen among Catholics who want to evangelize: I find that very consistently, Catholics who love Jesus, love the Catholic faith, who want to share that faith with others – their very first reaction is: First I need to work on my own relationship with God.

That's natural. If you skip ahead to the *discipleship* section of the book at the very end, we talk about that need for time to be mentored in your Christian faith. So, if you read the whole book and you say, "Whoa! Slow down! I'm not ready to evangelize yet!" That's okay. Work through it. Don't feel like vou have to be The World's Best Evangelist by tomorrow morning at eight AM. Let God work in your life. Let God show you where He wants you right now.

So that's #1: If you want to be person who brings other people into a close personal relationship with Jesus Christ in the Catholic Faith, you've got to be there yourself. **However**, that does not mean you need to be a perfect Christian saint yet, so don't, on the other hand, rule yourself out because you are still growing in your faith. Evangelization is not about the fact that you are perfect, it's about the fact that Jesus Christ our Savior is perfect and that *He* is able to save us.

[pause to let that final line sink in.] Let me repeat that: **Evangelization is not about** *you* **being perfect.** It is about the fact that Jesus Christ our Savior is perfect, and that *He* is able to save us.



- Fasting = Taking the Way of the Cross
- · Prayer and penance are non-negotiable.



#2 & #3 of our non-negotiables are *Prayer* and *Fasting*.

I promised you this wouldn't be glamorous. I'm not going to spend a lot of time today talking about prayer and fasting – I discuss it a little bit in the book and of course there are so many excellent resources on those topics if you want to go deeper – but here's my bad news: Prayer and fasting are where the heavy lifting of evangelization gets done.

It's *good* news of course because we quickly discover our human limitations. I discover that, in this fallen world, often I'm kept back from doing what I can plainly see needs to be done because of limits on my physical strength, on my time, on my skills, in my budget, perhaps obstacles I face in my community – so many different obstacles get in the way of doing all the wonderful things we'd like to do for Jesus.

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And yet what does Jesus ask of us? That we love him with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. And by that He can only mean *the amount that He has given us*. If that's a lot of strength – great, use it! If you are super smart – great, use it! But who is the *hero* in the story of salvation? It's God. Let God be the hero.

So *prayer* is our number of act of loving God. It's our act of trusting God. It's our act of *relying* on God. God will put you in circumstances where you have no choice but to turn to Him in prayer, because He wants to use your life to help you grow closer to Him.

When we try to evangelize *without* relying on God in prayer, our efforts fall short. So pray.

Fasting of course is not-eating, but it's not-eating with a very specific intention. Fasting is not-eating for the purpose of seeking God's will and action in your life and the lives of others. In the book I mention there are quite a few situations where not-eating is not a good decision, and so in those cases, and in all cases, we can offer up other kinds of *penance*, other kinds of suffering that might be already in our lives, we can offer up our sorrows, our disappointments, our frustrations – all of that has spiritual power, if we will use it.

So. If you are able to fast, then fast. If you are not able to fast, offer up other kinds of suffering, often unchosen, for the same purpose.

That's not a negotiable. I wish there were a checkbox where I could say, "Give me the suffering-free route in life please?" But that's not what life in a fallen world is like. When we fast, or when we offer up other difficulties, we are taking the Way of the Cross, which is the Way of Salvation. Jesus has made that way for us, and it is powerful, and it is absolutely essential to evangelization.

So that's real exciting, isn't it? I wrote a book in which I have all these chapters about fun things you can do that are so beautiful, or creative, or exciting, and then I say, "Oh, but actually the most important part is prayer and fasting."

Well? I didn't create the universe. That's how it is. I'm just the reporter. That is what works, so that is how we open the book. Love Jesus, pray, fast . . .

and #4 is integrity.

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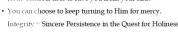
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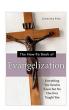
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#4 Integrity

- · Corruption is the spiritual killer.
- · Yes, you and Lare sinners.
- · Your sins are not too big for God.
- · Jesus Christ is able to save you from your sins.







I will tell you right now that I struggled to get this book written. I struggled because I was working with my first editor on what the book should look like, and we finally came up with our overall approach, and our outline, and I had the summer free to get my writing done before school started in the fall – I had a full-time teaching job lined up for the fall – and bam! June of 2018, huge scandals erupt in the Church.

Now I am not naive. I was already well aware that there were problems in the Church. But still, I'm gonna admit it: Summer of 2018 was hard for me. And I'm not the only one. I know people in the Catholic press, and many of us were really struggling.

And that's how we got the chapter on Integrity.

Now somewhere out there are a few priests who have heard my confessions with some regularity over the years, and of course they'll never say a word about it, but I will: I have committed plenty of sins in my lifetime, and I have not managed to quit yet. I am absolutely someone who is *regularly* reminded of my need for the Lord's forgiveness.

So when we say that an evangelist needs *integrity*, either I'm announcing I'm unfit for the job, or I'm announcing that there's hope for us sinners.

The good news is: There's hope.

Your sins are not too big for God to forgive.

You have done things you are ashamed of.

You have done things, maybe, that you feel are too terrible to let anyone know about.

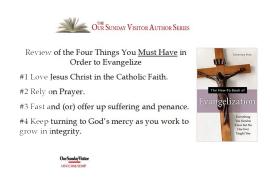
You might be struggling right now with some kind of sin, or addiction, or bad habit that you can never seem to shake. You try to overcome it, and time and time again you get sucked back in.

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Well, that's why we have confession. That's why we have forgiveness. That's why Jesus Christ died on the Cross for us. He died for *you*. You are not more powerful than God. Your sins are not too big for God to forgive.

So when we speak of *integrity* we don't mean that you are sinless. We mean that you are sincere and persistent in seeking after holiness. You confess your sins, you persist in turning away from sin, you seek help in dealing with your sins, and you are honest with yourself about your own weaknesses. You make an effort to avoid situations that make you more likely to sin.

Integrity for an evangelist means recognizing your own sins and weaknesses, uniting yourself with Jesus on the Cross, and cooperating with God in His work of forgiveness. It means turning away from sin again, and again, and again, and again.



So we have those four things:

- 1. You love Jesus Christ in the Catholic Faith
- 2. You rely on prayer.
- 3. You fast, and if you cannot fast you offer up other penances or sufferings.
- 4. You grow in integrity by acknowledging your sins, seeking forgiveness, and turning again and again to the Lord's loving mercy.

And then there's still another twenty or so chapters that cover all the details. But if you get those four down, you're pointed in the right direction.



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Questions, Part 1

I asked some of my regular readers for questions they wanted me to answer in this webinar, and here they are:

- What was your first experience evangelizing?
- How do you know when to speak and when to shut up?
- How do you keep from centering on yourself instead of Jesus?
- How would you bring the good news to someone who is disgusted with the criminal actions of Catholics, especially clergy?



What was your first experience evangelizing?

I can tell you a couple stories. As you'll read in the book, I grew up in one of those Catholic families that parish staff love to hate. We were the people who show up for First Communion and then disappear never to be seen again.

Well, eventually my family did start attending Mass regularly when I was in high school, and our pastor got us caught up on sacraments, and I wrapped up high school super-enthusiastic about "being Catholic." As you'll read in my conversion story in the book, I was one of those people who is very active in parish life and leadership – I was a student-leader for my youth group – though as we talk about in the book, in truth I was not yet a *disciple*. Still, I loved my Catholic identity, and I wanted other people to experience the pleasure of being involved in church.

And I can remember that summer after graduation, working at the local steakhouse, meeting a guy my age who was new to town – real cute, we hit it off, hung around together a fair bit. And I remember – keep in mind I'm all of seventeen and at that point I had *no filter whatsoever* – you think I'm bad now, but you have no idea what I used to be like – I remember that the very first time I met him and his mom, and they had an Irish last name, and I said, "Oh, are you Catholic!" Very excited.

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And his mom says, "*No.*" And I mean even I was able to tell that okay, these are people who have negative feelings about the Catholic faith. But did that cause me to shut up and listen more and talk less?

No it did not. So that was not a real successful long term relationship with my friend and his mom, and I think they were pretty glad to see me go off to college.

So that's one story, and here's a second one:

So I got to college and my faith, which was mostly just *membership* in the Church? That wore off real fast once I was around people who challenged my faith.

I spent about eight years more or less out of the Church, but I wasn't happy without God, and began seeking Him. Through a long series of events, I had a profound conversion experience that was the changing point in my life (I share some of that in the book) and there I was: Bam! Converted.

My husband meanwhile was born-again Christian – but Evangelical Protestant. Still, the two of us were on fire for Jesus Christ, and we wanted everyone to experience the joy that had descended on our lives.

And thus, my poor brother.

My brother and his wife are awesome people. You cannot find better. But neither of them were raised with much of a Christian faith, and our conversion was at best *puzzling*, and honestly it became very *irritating* to them, because we could not shut up.

Never mind that it had taken my husband and I *years* to convert – somehow we got it in our heads that if we could just make the right argument, say the right thing, suggest the right prayer – that somehow my brother and sister-in-law could be converted on-demand.

Well, that's not how God works. God works in His time. He draws souls at His pace, according to His plan, and our being completely insufferable was not a big help to the Lord.

So: Don't do that. Don't be a pest. Thus the book is three hundred pages of how not to be a pest, but instead to allow God to use you in ways that are genuinely helpful to others. And although I have personally tested most of the "what not to do," rest assured that on the "what *is* good evangelization" side of the equation, I am sharing with you the knowledge and experience of many evangelists, past and present, who are truly a *help* in drawing other people closer to God.

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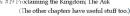
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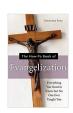
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When to Speak and When to Hush? Great question! This is most of the book. Chapters of note

- •#6 Listening
- #7 & #8 The Five Thresholds; Moralistic Therapeutic Deism
- •#9 Corporal Works of Mercy
- •#12, #13, & #14 Apologetics; Workplace; Street Evangelization
- •#15 & #16 Hospitality; Parish Events
- •#17 Retreats: #24 Catechesis
- •#18 & #19 Proclaiming the Kingdom; The Ask

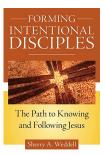






That challenge of knowing what to say and when to say it is one of the major skills of being an evangelist. And so my friends requested I answer that question today, but we don't have that many hours. So let me just tell you what sections of the book deal with one or more aspects of the problem of "How do I proclaim the Faith in a way that is helpful to others?"

Chapter 6 Listening: Listening is the foundational skill, and the book gives you some tools for learning to listen more effectively.



Forming Intentional Disciples: The Path to Knowing and Following Jesus by Sherry Weddell, Our Sunday Visitor 2012, available at: https://www.orderosv.com/product/forming-intentional-disciples-the-path-to-knowing-and-following-jesus

Chapter 7, The Five Thresholds of Conversion, which is based on Sherry Weddell's seminal work *Forming Intentional Disciples* [show book] and Chapter 8, Moralistic Therapeutic Deism – these two chapters together help you learn more about how to recognize where someone may be on their spiritual walk, and thus what kinds of words and actions are most helpful.

Chapter 9, Corporal Works of Mercy, puts into perspective that balance between words and actions, and how to use them both.

Chapter 12, Apologetics, Chapter 13 on Evangelizing in the Workplace, and chapter 14, Street Evangelization, are basically 100% focused on the what to say and how and when to say it.

Chapters 15 and 16, Hospitality and Parish Events, help you think about your approach to parish and personal evangelization from the newcomer's or outsider's point of view – and there is a lot of material in both those chapters.

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Chapters 17 and 24, Retreats and Catechesis, complement each other. "Retreats" discusses how different ways of proclaiming the faith are more helpful depending on where someone is on their spiritual walk, and "Catechesis" teaches how to proclaim the faith in a meaningful way.

Chapters 18 & 19 Proclaiming the Kingdom and "The Ask" get down to the nitty gritty, and they are almost 100% answering this question of when and how to use your words to share the Gospel and invite people to make a decision to follow Jesus Christ.

And of course the other chapters have relevant material, but those are the big ones for answering the question of when and how to speak about your faith.



Keeping Jesus Front and Center

- · Pray for humility.
- · Repent, repent, repent.
- Deploy prayer and penance that puts you in your place.
- · Normal Catholics have an edge.
- ullet The Little Way is the only way.





The next question was: How do I make sure I am centering my life as an evangelist on Jesus Christ and not on myself?

First of all, God does answer prayers, so if you'll explicitly and *sincerely* pray for humility any time you can bring yourself to pray that prayer, God will answer. It may hurt a little, but He'll come through.

Second: Repentance. That process of recognizing your own sinfulness and your own weakness is so crucial to staying focused on Jesus. If we don't honestly know ourselves to be sinners? We lose sight of our need for the Savior. So examine your conscience and seek good pastoral advice for holding yourself accountable for cooperating with God's grace.

Third situation: There are people out there, and you might be one of them, who are *good* at being Catholic. I do not have this problem. But it happens. If you find it is *easy* to be a pretty impressive package of piety? You are too comfortable. The only way to grow in humility and dependence on God is to follow Him out of your comfort zone.

So if you find that you look real good as a Catholic next to those of us who are absolute, total hot-mess wrecks? *To whom much is given, much is expected.* Stop holding yourself back. Your self-satisfaction is because you aren't yet allowing God to help you grow. You need to become intentional about letting God *fully* use the gifts He has given you.

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So, cold hard truth, those of us who are average or hot-mess Catholics? We have an edge in the humility business. If you are very talented and self-disciplined and well-behaved, humility is going to be harder for you.

My recommendation is that you take a look at the *Little Way* of St. Therese of Lisieux, and do what it takes to allow God to lead you to the point where you are stuck with no choice but to be on the Little Way. She's a Doctor of the Church for a reason, and if pride is your problem, the Little Way is the cure. But some of you will have to make some serious spiritual pilgrimages to find the Little Way, because you are naturally endowed with great ability and so it is a much longer journey to get to the place of complete dependence on God.



Our final question in today's talk addresses what I think is the greatest challenge to evangelization in the Church today. The question was: "How would you bring the good news to someone who is disgusted with the criminal actions of Catholics, especially clergy?"

I will tell you right now this is an open wound for many *inside* the Church, and I am seeing many, many good, sincere, faithful Catholics struggle with staying Catholic because of the extensive moral rot that permeates the leadership of the Church, both among clergy and laypeople.

There is not a magic cure for this.

I can't give you a phrase that will heal these wounds, because you cannot talk away the real suffering and the real scandal inflicted by criminal or abusive behavior.

What can you do?

You can listen. When someone is struggling, they need to be heard. They need to know that other people can *see* the abuse and can *respect* their experience of suffering. So not dismissing the feelings of someone who is hurting is our number one step on the path towards healing.

Secondly, Fast and Pray. To paraphrase the Lord: There are certain demons that can only be expelled with prayer and fasting, and this is one of them.

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Fast and pray for your friend, for his or her healing and for God to provide some shelter from the horrible behavior that happens in the Church, so that your friend can grow closer to God and not be overcome by the disgusting behavior of some people who label themselves Christian.

Fast and pray for the Church, because what is going on right now in the Church is an odious offense against God, and honestly I think the only reason He hasn't dealt more severely with us is that He promised not to let the Gates of Hell prevail. So fast and pray. Now is a time for as much prayer and fasting as you can manage.

Finally, do your best not to be part of the problem. And here I am not assigning collective guilt or asking you to control situations that *are not* in your control. But to the extent that a situation is within your power to either control or to influence, don't tolerate any kind of abusive or criminal or gravely immoral behavior. Certainly do not cooperate with cover-up attempts.

And this is costly. You *will* be persecuted when you take a stand. You *will* lose so-called friends who don't like you getting their way. You *will* lose the privileges that come with getting along with those people in power who just want to do what they want and nobody question it.

But you'll be happier. You have to live with yourself. So stand up for what is right.

And if you do that, then you have some ground to be more helpful to your friend who is struggling. And if you do stand against the evil that has permeated parts of the Church, then you will find you can better relate to your friend.

And that leads to the final help I can offer today, and that is that you need to be faithful and steadfast in loving your friend. Be patient. Be longsuffering. Be kind. The wounds are real, and for many people they will not be fully healed in this life. But hold fast to the promise of Sacred Scripture: *Love never fails*.

When you are at your wits' end, hold onto that. Love never fails.

Love. Never. Fails.

That's what evangelization is. Your mission is to love. Focus on that, and you'll get farther than you'd think.

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Thank You For Coming!

Transcript of this talk (straight from my notes) will be posted at JenniferFitz.com.

Additional Q&A?
Facebook.com/groups/JenFitz





I'd like to thank everybody for coming today, and Our Sunday Visitor for hosting this event. I hope you enjoy the book. If you would like to share a transcript of this talk, I will post my notes from today on my personal website, JenniferFitz.com, so take a look there, they should be up later today.

For additional questions and answers beyond what we have time to answer today in this webcast, please feel free to post questions any time at my very small, quiet discussion group, which can be found at:

Facebook.com/groups/JenFitz

And I will do what I can to answer questions, usually in the form of a blog post, since if you have a question, chances are other people have that question as well.

[Time permitting, take open Q&A – transcript note: Any open Q&A from today's webcast will be posted separately on the blog jenniferfitz.com, in a fleshed-out and clarified version.]

It's been a pleasure, and I hope you have found something helpful in what I have said today. Have a good one, and God bless your work and your relationship with Him.

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