



Dear group leaders,

Thank you so much for your interest in leading a group discussion of *Convinced*!

Below you will find the questions and commentary from the Discussion Questions page as well as some “possible answers” from the film. However, this document is not meant to be used as an “answer sheet” so much as a guide for leading people to reflect on various aspects of the movie. It is intended to help group leaders recall different parts of *Convinced* so that they might facilitate conversations and encourage deeper study and discussion, not test people on their knowledge of the film. I hope you will find it helpful.

Also, I have included a list of books by some of the stars of *Convinced*, as well as others that were mentioned in the movie or recommended by the production team. You can find links to those and other resources related to the film, including more interview footage, at [convincedmovie.com](http://convincedmovie.com).

Thanks again! Please contact me if you have any questions or comments, or just to let me know how you are using the film in your parish!

God bless you,

Don Johnson



# Discussion Group Leader Resource

## Introductory Questions

Did you have a favorite anecdote or story from the film? Why that one?

Did you resonate with any of the characters in particular? What aspect of their experience struck home to you?

## Stage 1 Questions

*This is a story about metanoia – a total transformation of one’s view of the world and approach to life. Christian Smith called it a paradigm revolution and the film tells the story of that revolution as it passes through 4 stages.*

*In Stage 1, there is a failing of one’s current worldview. At some point in each person’s story, their non-Christian worldview proved inadequate to a) explain certain aspects of reality and b) provide a path to peace and happiness.*

Can you think of some examples of this in the film?

Have you had this experience in your own life or heard of it in others?

## Possible Answers

- Jennifer Fulwiler was not satisfied by money and a luxurious lifestyle. Also, according to atheism, her new baby was just a meaningless blob of matter, which did not square with her experience.
- Holly Ordway tried Eastern Religion but that didn’t satisfy, then tried atheism, but said she was “faking it” – she couldn’t actually create meaning for herself
- Devin Rose could not deal with his anxiety disorder as an atheist.

- Richard Cole tried alcohol, poetry, Eastern religions, making money, and much more, but none of it provided fulfillment.
- Mark Shea was haunted his entire life by a longing that he couldn't put a finger on.
- Leah Libresco's atheism couldn't explain the fact that morality is objective; that there is such a thing as right and wrong.
- Jeff Cavins sought answers in Eastern Religion as well as a party lifestyle, but nothing satisfied (including his nominal Catholicism.)
- Kevin Vost was a successful professor and body builder but found his life empty.

## Stage 2 Questions

*In Stage 2, as the search for answers intensifies, misconceptions about Christianity are broken down and, indeed, it becomes attractive.*

What did the converts in the film believe about Christianity that turned out to be false?

What aspects of Christianity surprised and attracted them?

How did they come to realize this?

Have you had similar experiences in your own life?

## Possible Answers

The skeptics originally believed:

- That Christianity was a silly, superstitious belief system that only ignorant, gullible people would consider.
  - Jennifer, Holly, Devin, Leah, Mark, Richard, and Kevin all thought that Christianity was an anti-intellectual religion. They looked at Christians as people who believed in a bunch of things about the universe that simply didn't exist – like believing in a fairy tale.
- Christianity is boring and dry and not applicable to their lives.
  - Leah, Kevin, Jeff, and Brandon Vogt had all experienced Christianity as something that just didn't matter all that much.

They came to change their minds through a combination of various factors:

- They met smart, likable Christians who lived joyful lives
  - Jennifer, Mark, Devin, Richard, Leah, Brandon, and Francis Beckwith met Christians who were very intelligent and for whom Jesus made a huge difference.
- They read the Bible and books by smart Christians and realized that the Christian worldview made sense and was supported by historical evidence
  - Jennifer, Holly, Leah, Devin, Mark all studied and found that Christianity:

- Explained certain aspects of their own experiences, such as longing (Mark) and the existence of objective morality (Leah)
- Was based on historical claims that were supported by strong evidence. (Holly, Jennifer, and Mark studied the resurrection.)
- Was intellectually deep and had better answers to the big questions of life than atheism (Leah and Kevin)
- They experienced the work of God in their lives.
  - Devin’s prayers were answered, Francis had the experience with the radio, Abby Johnson experienced God’s word of rebuke and then forgiveness
- They met Jesus personally and found Christianity to be much more wonderful than they imagined.
  - Leah finds that the work of Christ is wild and beautiful.
  - Brandon finds Jesus to be much more revolutionary than he thought after reading the Bible.
  - Devin studies the Bible and experiences God rushing in; it is the happiest time in his life.
  - Francis and Jeff meet Jesus personally after only knowing about him for much of their lives and are blown away by his love and grace.

### Stage 3 Questions

*Stages 3 and 4 are somewhat of a repeat of Stages 1 and 2. People come to realize that their Protestant Christian worldview isn’t quite as strong and coherent as they thought it was, and then in Stage 4, misconceptions about Catholicism are broken down and, indeed, it becomes attractive.*

What aspects of Protestant Christianity became an issue in Stage 3?

Have you struggled with any of these same issues or interacted with anyone who has?

### Possible Answers

The inability of the “Bible Alone” ethos to provide any authoritative answers to doctrinal and moral questions was a huge problem for many, including many Protestant pastors.

- Jennifer couldn’t find any consistent interpretations of the text and no way to settle disputes.
- John Bergsma, Matthew Leonard, Jeff Cavins, Jason Stellman, and Taylor Marshall all struggle with this problem while serving in Protestant ministry.
- The commentary by Christian Smith and Patrick Madrid touches in this issue.

### Stage 4 Questions

In Stage 4, what did the converts believe about Catholicism that turned out to be false?

What aspects of Catholicism surprised and attracted them?

How did they come to realize this?

What was the bottom line for these converts? Why was it so important?

Have you had this experience in your own life or heard of it in others?

### **Possible Answers**

The converts originally believed

- That Catholicism was a silly, superstitious belief system that only ignorant, gullible people would consider.
  - Jennifer saw the moral teaching of the Church, particularly in regards to sexuality as antiquated and ridiculous.
  - The status of Mary and the saints was seen by many as a superstitious add-on to true Christianity, including Devin, Mark, Holly, John Bergsma and David Currie.
- That Catholicism was boring.
  - Abby, Kevin, and Francis found joy in the Church that they didn't expect.

They came to change their minds through a combination of various factors:

- They met smart, likable Catholics who lived joyful lives
  - Jennifer found Catholics online that had great answers to her questions.
  - Abby met Catholics in the pro-life movement and then at Church that defied her stereotypes.
  - At Notre Dame, John met a type of Catholic that he "didn't think existed."
- They read the Bible and books by smart Catholics and realized the Catholic worldview made sense and was supported by historical evidence.
  - Holly and Jennifer studied the doctrines of the faith and realized they were "eminently reasonable."
  - Brandon, Francis, David, Scott Hahn, and Taylor Marshall studied the early Church Fathers and realized that they were Catholic.
- They experienced the work of God in their lives and experienced Jesus personally through the Eucharist and the intercession of his Mother.
  - Brandon, Matthew, Mark, Holly, and Jennifer, among all the rest, found Jesus and the joy that comes with an even more intimate relationship with him.
    - They also experienced the familial benefits of a relationship with his Mother.

### **Concluding Questions**

What's the Bottom Line?

Why is this so important?

What do you think Jennifer meant by the idea that her life has started now that she is Catholic?

### **Possible Answers**

Truth. But it's not just that Catholicism has the accurate answers to the questions we are asking, it's that it has the answers to the most important questions: How can we be saved? How can we be close to God? How can we have eternal, abundant life? This is what we were created for, and as Augustine famously said, our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Him.

## **Books Mentioned in the Film or Recommended by the Production Team of Convinced**

*Catechism of the Catholic Church*

*The Case for Christ* by Lee Strobel

*Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis

*The Resurrection of the Son of God* by N.T. Wright

*Handbook of Christian Apologetics* (with Ronald Tacelli) and *Handbook of Catholic Apologetics* by Peter Kreeft

*Summa Theologica* by Thomas Aquinas

*Surprised by Joy* by C.S. Lewis

*Christianity for Modern Pagans* by Peter Kreeft

*How to Talk to a Skeptic* by Donald Johnson

*Evangelical is Not Enough* by Thomas Howard

*Theology of the Body* by Pope St. John Paul II

## **Selected Books by the Stars of Convinced**

*Something Other Than God* by Jennifer Fulwiler

*Not God's Type* by Holly Ordway

*Arriving at Amen* by Leah Libresco

*Why be Catholic* by Patrick Madrid

*My Life on the Rock* by Jeff Cavins

*Unplanned* by Abby Johnson

*Atheism to Catholicism* by Kevin Vost

*By What Authority* by Mark Shea

*Catholic By Choice* by Richard Cole

*Rome Sweet Home* by Scott and Kimberly Hahn

*Prayer Works* by Matthew Leonard

*Return to Rome* by Francis Beckwith

*The Protestant's Dilemma* by Devin Rose  
*Return: How to Draw Your Child Back to the Church* by Brandon Vogt  
*The Crucified Rabbi* by Taylor Marshall  
*Something Greater is Here* by Kenneth Howell  
*The Bible Made Impossible* by Christian Smith  
*Born Fundamentalist, Born Again Catholic* by David Currie  
*Sex au Naturel* by Patrick Coffin  
*Bible Basics for Catholics* by John Bergsma

## Online Resources

Links to the homepage of each person in the film can be found at [convincedmovie.com](http://convincedmovie.com).

Also, these are wonderful organizations that offer an array of great resources:

[Catholic.com](http://Catholic.com)

[Catholics Come Home](#)

[The Coming Home Network](#)

[Calling All Converts](#)