

**CONVERSATIONS
WITH
JEHOVAH'S
WITNESSES**

R O N R H O D E S



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To my beloved wife, Kerri

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Introduction:

Why Another Book on Jehovah's Witnesses?



Thank you for your interest in this book!

You may be aware that I have already written some books on the Jehovah's Witnesses. The first book I wrote on the subject was *Reasoning from the Scriptures with the Jehovah's Witnesses*, weighing in at a whopping 464 pages. I later wrote a shorter treatment titled *The 10 Most Important Things You Can Say to a Jehovah's Witness*. This slimmed-down book is just 128 pages. For those who want the bottom line, I wrote a 16-page quick reference guide entitled *Jehovah's Witnesses: What You Need to Know*.

I'm grinning a bit as I write. The truth is, Ecclesiastes 12:12 just popped into my mind. This verse says, "Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh." So why on earth am I writing yet another book on the Jehovah's Witnesses? Please believe me when I tell you that my goal is not to exhaust your body! To the contrary, my goal is to actually make things easier for you as you continue to be a faithful missionary on your own doorstep when Jehovah's Witnesses visit you.

If you have read one or more of my earlier books on the subject, you will quickly see that this book is not intended to replace the earlier books, but to complement them. Here is the way I look at it.

- *Reasoning from the Scriptures with the Jehovah's Witnesses* is a thorough treatment of what Jehovah's Witnesses believe. It demonstrates precisely why their doctrines are wrong when measured against the Bible. I examine all the

primary verses they cite to support their positions. I also include hundreds of questions you can ask to make your points and to start good conversations.

- *The 10 Most Important Things You Can Say to a Jehovah's Witness* provides a concise overview of their beliefs. It focuses on ten primary points you can make during dialogue.
- The quick-reference guide, *Jehovah's Witnesses: What You Need to Know*, contains a brief 16-page listing of their primary doctrinal problems and the appropriate biblical responses.
- The present book demonstrates how to actually engage Jehovah's Witnesses in effective dialogue. It will show you the right way to do it.

The sample conversations in this book contain the verses that are most likely to surface in dialogue with a Jehovah's Witness. Of course, these conversations do not include every possible verse—that would be impossible in a conversation-style, medium-sized book like this. In the interest of covering the most ground while being sensitive to brevity, I have included conversations on representative verses, thereby demonstrating the basics of how to effectively dialogue with Jehovah's Witnesses.

If you desire to go deeper in a particular area, or if you desire full information on all the verses that could come up during dialogue, my comprehensive book *Reasoning from the Scriptures with the Jehovah's Witnesses* will be a big help to you. For your convenience, I have provided page numbers for supplemental reading at the end of each chapter in part 2.

Tactical Conversations

This book is intended to teach you how to engage in tactical conversations with Jehovah's Witnesses that will yield maximum evangelistic punch. *Merriam-Webster's 11th Collegiate Dictionary* offers this as one of the definitions of "tactical": "of or relating to small-scale actions serving a larger purpose." The tactical conversations demonstrated in this book have the larger purpose of helping Jehovah's Witnesses perceive

the error of Watchtower theology and become believers in the true God, the true Jesus, and the true gospel.

When I was a teenager, many of my friends and I took a driving class at my high school. The teacher began by explaining the basics of how to operate cars—how to use the gas pedal, the brakes, the turn signals, the windshield wipers, the emergency flashers, and the like. All of this took place in a classroom setting.

Imagine if the teacher then gave me some car keys, put me in a car, gave me two thumbs up, and said, “Go have a nice drive.” I might well have had an accident. This is why driving instructors provide on-the-job training in addition to classroom instruction. My teacher took me out on the road every day for three weeks, personally demonstrating everything I needed to know in order to drive safely. By the end of that time, I was ready to drive on my own.

Learning to cook an omelet is much the same. A person can learn a lot about making omelets by reading a cookbook. But it's far better if an experienced cook demonstrates the exact procedure—showing the novice cook what he or she needs to know about the pan temperature, the right order for introducing each ingredient, how to flip the omelet in the pan, and the like. Personal training makes all the difference!

Not all driving instructors teach the same way, and neither do all chefs. That does not mean one is wrong and the other is right. It simply means that their tactics are different. Both may have merit, and both might yield positive results. Similarly, my method of conversing with Jehovah's Witnesses is not the only method that can yield results. God has blessed the Christian church with many fine apologists, and we can learn much from them. I've listed many of their books in the bibliography. I offer my approach with the hope and prayer that many Jehovah's Witnesses will be delivered from the domain of darkness and find entrance into the kingdom of light (Colossians 1:13).

The Difference Between Teaching and Training

There is a big difference between teaching and training. Christian author Kathi Hudson recounts a story told by her father that I think perfectly illustrates this difference.

Since World War II, I've been a trained commercial pilot with an instrument rating. Because of my good training and extensive experience, I could sit a young, 21-year-old man in a classroom and teach him: FAA and Naval Regulations; navigation; aircraft ordinance; mechanical indoctrination; and radio procedures. He could pass all the examinations just fine. He would have had good conscientious teaching.

However, if I were to put him in a new jet fighter plane, put him on the helmet and say, "Have a nice flight, son," what would happen? It is likely he would crash and burn before he ever got off the runway. Why? He had good teaching but NO TRAINING.

Training always involves teaching, but teaching seldom includes training. Teaching with actual flight training would have saved the young pilot's life and the \$15 million fighter plane. Training would ensure him of a good future in flying... To train this young man, I would take him on flights where I piloted, so I could model proper procedure.¹

My goal in this book is to both teach and train you to engage in effective conversations with Jehovah's Witnesses. I will provide some on-the-job training by giving examples of conversations with Jehovah's Witnesses. As you eavesdrop on these conversations, you will learn the ins and outs of effective tactical conversations.

Please note that the conversations I include in this book are not real, but they are realistic. They are not actual transcripts of witnessing sessions I have had with Jehovah's Witnesses. (Such would make for choppy reading at best.) But the conversations are realistic in that I deal with many of the actual issues that will most likely come up on your doorstep. I thoroughly demonstrate how to respond to such issues.

Please also note that in each conversation I not only deal with the particular issue they bring up, but I also take every opportunity to show that the Watchtower Society, which claims to be the mouthpiece of Jehovah, is not a trustworthy source of truth. The more successful

you are in chipping away at the doctrines of the Watchtower Society in a kind but truthful manner, the more the Jehovah's Witness will be open to hearing what you have to say. This two-pronged approach—exposing errors in the teaching of the Watchtower Society and communicating biblical truth—is extremely effective.

Biblically Based Tactics

I intend to take a biblical approach in this book. I will cite lots of Scripture—not only in the sample conversations, which demonstrate how to refute the false views of the Jehovah's Witnesses, but also when I describe the methods I use to communicate truth to them. Scripture must always be central. I encourage you to be like the Berean Christians of old, who tested the apostle Paul's teachings against Scripture: "They received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so" (Acts 17:11).

Paul himself wrote, "Test everything; hold fast to what is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21). Bible expositor Thomas Constable says Paul's readers "could do this by comparing what the speaker said with the standard of previously given divine revelation (cf. Deut. 13:1-5; 18:20; 1 John 4:1-3)."² Our goal, then, is to test all things against Scripture, which is our sole barometer of truth. By doing this, we can better engage Jehovah's Witnesses in helpful conversations.

You Witness but God Converts

It is important that I remind you of a foundational truth. You and I are called to be witnesses to the truth of the Bible (Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 1:8). We do not have the power in ourselves to convert anyone. That is God's job. You and I witness; only our supernatural and miraculous God has the power to convert (see John 6:39-40,44).

Many Christians throughout church history have noted the miraculous element involved in a fallen sinner converting to Christ. Baptist preacher Adrian Rogers said that "the greatest miracle is the transformation that God works when he regenerates a soul."³ The German reformer Martin Luther commented, "Conversion is the greatest of

all miracles.”⁴ Henry Morris said that “the miracle of regeneration is a grade A miracle in every sense of the word.”⁵

Here is why I bring this up. You and I as God’s witnesses can be used as God’s instruments to communicate God’s transforming truth so that it eventually may lead to God’s supernatural conversion of a lost soul (such as a Jehovah’s Witness). Knowing that it is God’s job to do the converting takes the weight off of you and me in our witnessing encounters. Following our faithful witness, we leave the results with God. If the Jehovah’s Witness with whom we are speaking does not convert, we can rest in the comfort of knowing that we have been faithful witnesses and that the results are in God’s sovereign hands.

Perhaps a gardening metaphor might help. Some of us plant seeds when we share the gospel. We may be the first to share the true gospel with a particular Jehovah’s Witness. Others of us water the seed that has already been planted in the heart of the Jehovah’s Witness. We do this by continuing to share the truth of God’s Word with him. Others of us, fewer in number, experience the joy of seeing the flower blossom—that is, we are privileged to see him become a true believer in Christ by the power of God.

So don’t become discouraged if you don’t see an immediate conversion after your dialogue with the Jehovah’s Witness. Just focus on being faithful in planting and watering the seed. It is then in God’s sovereign hands. As the Christian singer Keith Green once said, “Do your best, pray that it’s blessed, and the Lord will take care of the rest.”

Charting Our Course

This book is divided into two parts. Part 1 contains seven chapters that deal with the basics of tactical conversing. Here I lay a foundation for you. What you learn in these seven chapters will prove useful in witnessing to Jehovah’s Witnesses and anyone else who is not a Christian.

Part 2 builds on part 1 by providing specific insights on conversing with Jehovah’s Witnesses on important doctrinal issues, such as God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the Trinity, the gospel that saves, and the afterlife. In each chapter, I contrast what Jehovah’s Witnesses believe on a particular issue with what the Bible teaches. I point you to specific issues to

watch for, and I summarize “Important Points to Introduce.” Then I get to the heart of the chapter—“Eavesdropping on a Conversation.” I bring up Scripture references that are likely to surface in the conversation. Following sample conversations, I provide some very brief “Conversation Highlights,” in which I remind you of key components of my conversation. By using this simple methodology, my goal is to equip you to become a confident missionary on your own doorstep.

There is one more thing. You will notice that at the beginning of each chapter in part 2, I remind you to pray what I call the open-the-heart prayer. No such prayer is actually referenced in the Bible. However, I based my idea on Acts 16:14. According to this verse, a businesswoman named Lydia was listening to the apostle Paul speak, and “the Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.” Every time a Jehovah’s Witness rings your doorbell and you begin a conversation, silently pray that the Lord would open his or her heart to pay attention to what you have to say. Remember—only God has the power to convert.

Father, I pray that by the power of the Holy Spirit, You will enlighten the understanding of my readers so that they can fully grasp how to most effectively communicate the good news of the gospel to Jehovah’s Witnesses. Please remove any fears they may have about witnessing encounters. Grant them Your peace as they share the good news. May our combined efforts lead to many Jehovah’s Witnesses becoming believers in the true Messiah, Jesus Christ. Amen.

PART 1

The Basics of Tactical Conversing

Why Effective Conversation Matters



Advice columnist Abigail Van Buren once commented, “In my view, the height of arrogance is to attempt to show people the ‘errors’ in the religion of their choice.”¹ Her thinking implies a commandment—“Thou shalt not infringe upon my religious truth.” Of course, if we heeded Van Buren’s advice, apologetic conversations with Jehovah’s Witnesses (and others) would never take place, and countless souls would enter eternity without having heard the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Tragically, some Christians avoid dialoguing with Jehovah’s Witnesses for other reasons. Some are fearful of engaging in such dialogue. Others are too busy with their own plans for the day. Still other Christians rationalize that Jehovah’s Witnesses follow the “devil’s religion” and should be treated accordingly. Some Christians even slam the door in the face of Jehovah’s Witnesses.

The problem with the last of these responses is that it ends up reinforcing, in the minds of Jehovah’s Witnesses, their claim to be the true people of God. Just as God’s people were mistreated and persecuted in Old and New Testament times, so the Jehovah’s Witnesses claim to be the persecuted people of God today. They believe they are modern martyrs in a long line of victims throughout history. Christian apologist Wilbur Lingle reports, “I have been to their Kingdom Halls and heard them sing a song about going from door to door and how people will slam the door in their faces—but they will be ‘true to Jehovah because they are receiving persecution for his sake.’”²

My best advice is to always be willing to converse with Jehovah’s Witnesses whenever they show up on your doorstep, and to do it with

kindness and respect (see 1 Peter 3:15-16). Never forget that God will use you as His instrument to reach the lost. This book will help you to be prepared.

A Kingdom Assignment

Throughout biblical history and to this day, God has chosen to reach people through other people. For example, God chose the Jews to be a light for the nations and appointed them to share the good news of God with all other people around the world (see Isaiah 42:6). The Jews were to be God's representatives to the Gentiles. The Jews failed at this task and didn't even recognize Jesus as the divine Messiah. Nevertheless, this was their divine calling.

Among the Jews themselves, the priests were called to represent God to the people and to represent the people to God (Exodus 30:10). God employed the priests as intermediaries to maintain His relationship with the Jewish people.

All the while, the Old Testament prophets were on the scene, often beginning their revelations from God with "Thus says the LORD" (as in Exodus 4:22, for example). They communicated God's revelation to the people as God spoke through them. Then, in New Testament times, God communicated His revelations to people through the apostles (see Acts 4:33).

Today, God calls Christian churches and individual Christians to be His representatives in sharing the good news of the gospel with other people throughout the world (Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 1:8). Just as He did in times past, God today works *through* people in making Himself known *to* people. This has always been His *modus operandi*.

The relevance of this fact for witnessing to Jehovah's Witnesses is obvious. You and I as Christians are God's representatives, empowered to communicate the truth of Scripture to those we encounter, including Jehovah's Witnesses. Never forget that God reaches people through His own people. For this reason, when Jehovah's Witnesses show up on our doorstep, we can know that God is giving us a kingdom assignment. Do we dare say no?

Goal-Driven Conversations

When conversing with Jehovah's Witnesses, we engage in goal-driven conversation. Our goal is to help them become truly informed about Watchtower theology. We want to provide information that leads them to the true God, the true Jesus, and the true gospel that saves. As one Christian apologist put it, "The ultimate goal of a Christian conversing with a Jehovah's Witness should be to lead him to personal faith in our wonderful Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."³

There is a strong precedent in Scripture for using the spoken word to persuade men and women to accept God's truth. The apostle Paul instructed young Timothy about this.

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching (2 Timothy 4:1-2).

Church leaders are required to "hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that [they] may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it" (Titus 1:9). Paul himself loved to reason from the Scriptures with people.

Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ." And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women (Acts 17:2-4).

Of course, apostles and church leaders were not the only ones to engage in goal-driven conversations with people. We have seen that you and I, too, are called to be engaged in the evangelistic process.

Always Be Ready with an Answer

First Peter 3:15-16 is foundational to our tactical strategy in witnessing to Jehovah's Witnesses. "Set apart the Messiah as Lord in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you. However, do this with gentleness and respect, keeping your conscience clear" (HCSB). Let's briefly examine the key components of this passage.

Honor the Messiah Jesus as Lord in Your Hearts

Each of us must honor Christ as Lord in our hearts. He is our sovereign Master. When we are in full submission to the lordship of Christ, we think about our conversations with Jehovah's Witnesses in new ways.

- We recognize that Christ is in charge. When witnessing to a Jehovah's Witness, we are fulfilling the Great Commission.
- We recognize that Christ is in charge of the outcome of the conversation. We must not forget that our job is simply to speak about the truth of Scripture and that it is God's job to convert. This takes the burden off of us in witnessing encounters.
- Because Christ is in charge, we need not have any fear about the witnessing encounter (see Psalm 118:6; Hebrews 13:6). As one commentator put it, "To reverence Christ as Lord means to believe that Jesus Christ is in control and that those who come against the believer are not. To have such reverence is to maintain a deep-seated confidence in Jesus Christ as the reigning Lord of the universe."⁴ Put another way, "our fear of the Lord should drive out all fear of men."⁵ So don't sweat it when you converse with Jehovah's Witnesses. The Lord is with you. Share the truth in peace.

Be Ready to Respond

Do you have an eternal hope that is plainly evident to all those you meet? Or are you more like a secret-agent Christian who has never blown his cover?

The truth is, only people who become aware that you have an eternal hope will ask you about it. My exhortation, then, is that we should all be open and free about our hope in Jesus Christ. Especially when Jehovah's Witnesses show up on the doorstep, we ought to speak in such a way that they quickly perceive that we are truly excited about our eternal hope. Don't mask it. Don't camouflage it. Be a shining light—a sparkling diamond—so that they can see that something is different about you (Matthew 5:16). As one Bible scholar put it, “Christian hope is to be so real and distinctive that non-Christians will be puzzled by it and ask for an explanation.”⁶

When someone asks us about our eternal hope, we need to be ready with an answer, as 1 Peter 3:15-16 instructs. Bible expositor Thomas Constable says, “We should have the reason we are living as we do on the tip of our tongues so whenever an opportunity arises we can explain why we behave as we do (cf. Acts 22:1; 25:16).”⁷

Once they ask us, we can make our defense. The word “defense” in this verse comes from the Greek word *apologia*, from which we derive the English term “apologetics.” In New Testament times the term was often used of a formal legal defense in a court of law (see Acts 25:16; 2 Timothy 4:16).⁸ The apostle Paul adapted the term in regard to defending the truth of Christianity (see Philippians 1:16).

Always Use Gentleness and Respect

Peter reminds us to make our defense of the truth with gentleness and respect. These words are rich in meaning. The word “gentleness” carries the idea of meekness and humility. There is not to be even the slightest hint of arrogance (see 1 Peter 3:4). This does not mean that the Christian defender is to seem weak or hesitant, but rather that he or she is to communicate strong truth from the Bible in a gentle and humble way. The Christian should certainly not ram truth

down people's throats, speak patronizingly, act condescendingly, or have a critical countenance. Let's not forget that soft answers are the most effective because they "turn away wrath" (Proverbs 15:1). A gentle answer is much easier to swallow.

The word "respect" has two important nuances. On the one hand, we are to maintain a reverential awe of God (see 1 Peter 1:17; 2:17; 3:2). On the other hand, we are to treat Jehovah's Witnesses with respect (see Colossians 4:6).

I urge you to burn the words "gentleness" and "respect" into your heart. Your theological arguments may be strong, but they will have little effect if they are not communicated with gentleness and respect.

We Are Ambassadors of Christ

Perhaps one of the best pictures of a person who communicates with gentleness and respect is an ambassador. The apostle Paul says "we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us" (2 Corinthians 5:20). Previously, I noted that God primarily reaches people through people. Here we are told that God reaches the unsaved through you and me as ambassadors of Christ.

Christian apologist Don Closson has some great insights on the ambassador model of witnessing.

We need fewer frontal assaults and more embassy meetings. The skills necessary to be a successful ambassador are quite different from those of an infantryman. Persuasion rather than conquest motivate the ambassador, and one's style of communication can be as important as the content being conveyed.⁹

It is not just *what* you say that is important, it is also *how* you say it. Gregory Koukl, another Christian apologist, highlights three primary skill sets of an ambassador of Christ.

First, a Christian ambassador should possess a clear understanding of the message being offered by his sovereign King. Second, he needs to exhibit a personal character that

reinforces the message he's been charged with, not distract from it. Finally, an ambassador needs sufficient wisdom to know how to communicate his message in a manner that draws people into dialogue and then to keep the conversation going.¹⁰

Showing gentleness and respect are two of the key requisites for drawing people into dialogue and keeping the conversation going. Never forget that the way you and I carry out our task as Christ's ambassadors will determine in large measure how open Jehovah's Witnesses will be to the true Christ and the true gospel. "People will think more highly or less highly of Christ and his church based on the effectiveness of his ambassadors' service."¹¹