

EXCERPT



The Spiritually Vibrant Home *The Power of Messy Prayers, Loud Tables, and Open Doors*

March 3, 2020 | \$17, 192 pages, casebound | 978-0-8308-4590-3

What Research Says About Spiritually Vibrant Homes

In 2018 Lutheran Hour Ministries and the Barna Group undertook a three-year collaborative research project. The first area of research was “spiritual conversations in the digital age,” which paved the way for everyday Christians to rethink how they engage in spiritual conversations. The second area of research has to do with “households of faith”—specifically turning the lens of research toward how the Christian faith “is being nurtured and lived out in private—with the people who come and go from under Christians’ roofs.”

The goal of the new research project was to get a view inside the Christian household, and that was accomplished through a series of qualitative in-person interviews followed by quantitative surveys of 2,347 practicing Christians. Both the interviews and the surveys were guided by a simple curiosity: “What does faith look like on a day-to-day basis, in practicing Christians’ most familiar relationships, personal environments, or unobserved hours?” In other words, how does this redemptive laboratory of the household actually work?

In order to study whole households and not just families (getting as close as possible to what the Bible refers to as a household), questions weren’t merely focused on someone’s family but rather the people who are a regular part of someone’s life—including those who “feel like family.” As the researchers put it, a cornerstone of the concept for this study is that household dynamics are not only defined by occupants and family members, but also by the people we invite (or don’t invite) into our homes and routines. This study refers to these familiar faces as extended household members. Many practicing Christian respondents regularly host visitors at least several times a month. These guests—usually relatives (69 percent), but also close friends, neighbors, significant others, exes, caregivers, and more—have a degree of influence on residents.

While all research has limitations, getting to observe statistically significant patterns and differences leads to significant insights about the group being surveyed. In this case, the surveyed group wasn’t just the general population. It wasn’t even a group of self-identified Christians. The group surveyed was a group of exemplars—practicing Christians whose faith is very important to them. In fact, in order to be included in the survey, respondents had to “strongly agree” that their faith was very important to them.

So this research isn’t just pulling back the curtain on a random group of households—rather we are given the gift of being able to peer into the habits and practices and feelings of strong, practicing Christians.

There was a great deal of diversity in the households surveyed. This is noteworthy. While the Cleavers of *Leave It to Beaver* may have been seen as a prototypical family at one point in our history, they are certainly not anymore. Today there is a great diversity of household types. The nuclear family may be a staple on television or in the movies, but it is wrong to assume that most people live in such a household. Reality is much more varied and diverse.

Today’s households are quite diverse and the reality is “the average person will progress through various types of households during their lifetime.” So, the research pulled back the curtain on a wide variety of household types. And

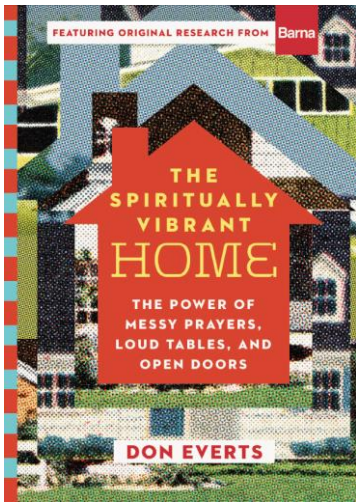


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those households were found in a wide variety of neighborhoods. These households were in urban, suburban, rural, and small-town settings. Those who participated in the surveys also represent a wide variety of ages—from teens up to elders (those born in 1945 or earlier).

It is important to note that researchers set specific quotas for a variety of these demographic factors so their statistical analysis could give us a statistically representative look at what is happening inside the households of all active Christians across the United States whose faith is very important to them.

It's one thing to know that there are Christian households out there that have a strong and active faith, but it's quite another to have extensive interviews and surveys that allow us to spend time looking inside their homes. The research findings teach us quite a bit about people's marriages, life habits, faith practices, conversations, parenting, hospitality, and more. Through the findings we get to see people at play, at work, at meals, and just hanging out.

And while there were a variety of fascinating and useful lessons learned while spending time in these strong Christian homes, one large finding rises above all the others in significance. In short: these exemplar Christian households regularly participate in applying spiritual disciplines, engaging in spiritual conversations, and extending hospitality.

The presence of these three distinct, observable household habits corresponds to what the researchers call greater "spiritual vibrancy." The absence of any or all of these three habits is a risk factor and corresponds with less robust Christian discipleship. In practical terms, if you spend time in a spiritually vibrant Christian household, you will see people applying spiritual disciplines, engaging in spiritual conversations, and extending hospitality. Or, put differently, you will see messy prayer, loud tables, and open doors.

What, exactly, is messy prayer? "Applying spiritual disciplines" refers specifically to the household habits of praying together daily and reading the Bible together weekly. And what are loud tables? "Engaging in spiritual conversations" refers specifically to the household habit of talking with each other about God and faith weekly. "Extending hospitality" is the habit of regularly welcoming non-family guests into the home—in other words, having open doors.

While each of these three "vibrant variables" was found to be fruitful and helpful within a Christian household, the researchers saw something special when all three were present. As the researchers observed, good things happen because of each of these household habits individually, but when all three occur then all of those good things are multiplied. Where you have messy prayer, loud tables, and open doors, then you have spiritually vibrant homes.

—Adapted from chapter 3, "Vibrancy: Pulling Back the Curtain on Spiritually Vibrant Homes"

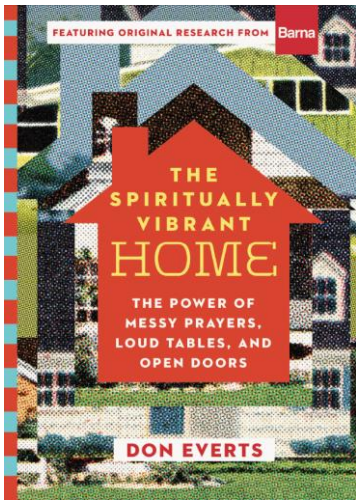


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Q & A



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What does it take to have a spiritually vibrant household? Looking at everyday households of faith, original research from the Barna Group and Lutheran Hour Ministries shows that some of the healthiest, most vibrant homes extend beyond the nuclear family. Don Everts shows how these households practice spirituality, hospitality, and community that make them delightful places for living and thriving.

Making the Connection Between Faith and Home Life

What brought about the idea to focus a book on home?

Don Everts: My heart has been circling around the topic of home for some time—since a simple description of a home in a novel I was reading to my children brought surprise tears to my eyes. Why am I so emotional about home? I've lived in practically every kind of household type: nuclear family, roommates, as a couple, multigenerational, a family plus roommates. . . . I've lived in a variety of differently-shaped homes. Why is home always so emotional and important and connected to my faith life? This became a driving curiosity for me. That latent journey of my own got moved to the front burner when I got to work with Barna and Lutheran Hour Ministries on their latest research project: studying "households of faith."

Now my own curiosity about home life was met with fascinating findings from Barna. The result has pushed me back into what the Bible has to say about homes and households (some surprising stuff there!), has given me great hope (which says a lot for an angry Gen Xer!), and has changed how my current multigenerational home is pursuing our faith together.

What is at the heart of *The Spiritually Vibrant Home*?

Don: Our faith and our home life are connected, whether we realize it or not. God designed us to live life as part of a spiritually vibrant household—no matter what age or stage of life we are in. Armed with biblical insights that are confirmed and illuminated in the latest research, anyone can pursue greater spiritual vibrancy in their own home. The research is surprising, and the findings apply to everyone.

What are the two to five main things you want readers to take away from your book?

Don:

- Recognize the spiritual significance of the seemingly mundane domestic details of your life.
- Unpack how the Bible views homes—as extended households where the faith is nurtured.
- Understand the three household habits that spiritually vibrant households pursue: applying spiritual disciplines (messy prayers), engaging in spiritual conversations (loud tables), and extending hospitality (open doors).
- Be equipped and empowered to pursue those habits within your own household.



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Don Everts

Don Everts is reluctant to call himself an evangelist, but for decades he has found himself talking about Jesus with all sorts of skeptical and curious people. He is a writer for Lutheran Hour Ministries and has served as a pastor and a campus minister. He has also been a speaker and trainer for Alpha and InterVarsity Christian Fellowship.

Don and his wife, Wendy, live in a wonderfully messy multigenerational household in the St. Louis area with their three children and Don's mother, plus a dog that thinks he's a cat, and a cat that spends time in the neighborhood sewers.

Don's many books include:

- *The Reluctant Witness: Discovering the Delight of Spiritual Conversations*
- *I Once Was Lost: What Postmodern Skeptics Taught Us About Their Path to Jesus* (with Doug Schaupp)
- *Breaking the Huddle: How Your Community Can Grow Its Witness* (with Doug Schaupp and Val Gordon)
- *Jesus with Dirty Feet: A Down-to-Earth Look at Christianity for the Curious Skeptical*
- *Getting Your Feet Dirty: A Down-to-Earth Look at Following Jesus*
- *The Smell of Sin: and the Fresh Air of Grace*
- *Meeting God in the Flesh: 8 Discussions for the Curious and Skeptical*
- *Go and Do: Becoming a Missional Christian*
- *All the Ideas Living in My Head: One Guy's Musings About Truth*
- *The Dirty Beggar Living in My Head: One Guy's Musings About Evil and Hell*
- *The Fingerless Lady Living in My Head: One Guy's Musings About Tolerance*
- *The Old Man Living in My Head: One Guy's Musings About the Bible*

Follow Don on Twitter: @DonEverts.



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