



# **EXvangelical What's That?**

By

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# Chapter One

Have you heard the term “exvangelical?” It’s a new buzzword among many people who say they used to be evangelical Christians. If they are no longer evangelical Christians, what are they?

Our purpose in this new Faith and Self Defense series is to shine a light on a growing problem in families and churches. The first step in solving a problem is admitting we have one .. and we do.

## Definitions

Let’s define some important terms we’ll be using in this series:

**Christian:** personal disciple, faith follower, of Jesus Christ .. believes Jesus Christ is the Eternal Son of God who died according to the Scriptures, was buried, was raised from the dead according to the Scriptures and was seen by hundreds of

people before He ascended back to Heaven to the right hand of God the Father.

**Evangelical:** Christian dedicated to preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ .. the same Gospel Jesus Christ and His apostles preached two-thousand years ago .. not some new gospel that makes people feel good about themselves rather than the Gospel of repenting of sin and confessing with their mouth the Lord Jesus and believing in their heart that God has raised Him from the dead. “For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation” (Romans 10:9-10).

**Exvangelical:** “A person who has left the Evangelical Christian movement. This includes people who have left to more progressive Christian denominations as well as those who have left Christianity all together.” (The Urban Dictionary)

**Religious (Faith) Deconstruction:** the taking apart of an idea, practice, tradition, belief, or system into smaller components in order to examine their foundation, truthfulness, usefulness, and impact.

**Religious (Faith) Deconversion:** The loss of faith in a given religion and return to a previously held religion or non-religion (typically atheism, agnosticism, or humanism).

In this series, we will look at both types of exvangelicals: those who have left to more 'progressive Christian' churches and denominations and those who have left Christianity all together.

## Who's Responsible?

The term *exvangelical* does not introduce anything new into Christianity, even though it's a relatively new term. We've written about "[Progressive Christians](#)," "[Ecumenicalism and Emerging Churches](#)" and [Deconversion](#) (creating atheists) for many years. We've seen how easily church attendees can be led away from the truth of Scripture to believe false teachings in churches and denominations. Jesus and His apostles warned that this would happen.

*Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. Matthew 7:15*

*Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up,*

*speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Acts 20:28-30*

*But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. 2 Peter 2:1*

*Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. 1 John 4:1*

We could blame **false preachers and teachers** in the churches and denominations for the problem, but who let them into churches in the first place? I think we can lay the blame at the feet of “drifting shepherds” (pastors and other church leaders). Some may say they were unaware of what they allowed to happen, but I believe many are complicit in what’s happened to churches and denominations. If a preacher/pastor/teacher is in the Word and prayer, how would they not see false teachers in

their congregation or denomination? That's why the Apostle Paul wrote:

*Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. 2 Timothy 2:15*

I recommend you read the entire context of Paul's comments to get the full effect of what he was saying about the need for church leaders to instruct Christians in what to believe and how to behave. **Paul's letter to Titus** is another good one to read to see what constitutes a Bible-based church and how Christians should live their lives.

## Spiritual Drift

We have lots of examples from which to choose from in the sad world of *shepherd's drift*, but one you may be familiar with is Rob Bell. Bell was the founding pastor of Mars Hill Church, a mega-church in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He was extremely popular and had a wide following. Time Magazine called him "a



singular rock star in the church world.” Bell shocked the evangelical Christian world when he wrote *Love Wins: A Book About Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived*. Bell questioned how God saves and punishes people. Many who read his book questioned if Bell really believed in universal reconciliation and was therefore a heretic. That led to an uproar in the evangelical Christian community.

I wasn't shocked, however, because it was obvious Bell had started his *spiritual drift* years earlier. He wrote *Love Wins* in 2011. He wrote *Velvet Elvis: Repainting the Christian Faith* six years earlier in 2005. What he wrote sounded similar to what I was reading from leaders in the Emerging Church/Emergent Church movements. That's a concern when pastors we trust begin to sound like pastors we don't.

In the book, *The Deconstructed Church: Understanding Emerging Christianity* (Oxford University Press, 2014), the publishers wrote:

*The Emerging Church Movement (ECM) is a creative, entrepreneurial religious movement that strives to achieve social legitimacy and spiritual vitality by actively disassociating from its roots in conservative, evangelical Christianity and “deconstructing” contemporary expressions of Christianity. Emerging Christians see themselves as overturning outdated interpretations of the Bible, transforming hierarchical religious institutions, and re-orienting Christianity to step outside the walls of church buildings toward working among and serving others in the “real world.”*

In light of that background, is there any way we could have seen what was coming with Rob Bell? I think the clues were there. Not outright heretical statements, but opening theological doors and windows a bit to let something new inside.

*Times change. God doesn't, but times do. We learn and grow, and the world around us shifts, and the Christian faith is alive only when it is listening, morphing, innovating, letting go of whatever has gotten in the way of Jesus and embracing whatever will help us be more and more the people God*

*wants us to be ... this book is for those who need a fresh take on Jesus and what it means to live the kind of life he teaches us to live. I'm part of a community, a movement of people who have been living, exploring, discussing, sharing, and experiencing new understandings of Christian faith.*

*Velvet Elvis*

Those explorations and experiences led Bell to write a book six years later that many Christians viewed as heretical. It's not far from trying to be cool to being wrong. Bell went on to be wrong on a lot of other foundational Christian beliefs, but you could see him drifting long before it became obvious. Bell resigned from Mars Hill Church, moved to California, wrote other books, worked and toured with Oprah Winfrey, and appeared in comedy clubs.

The New Yorker Magazine interviewed Bell about his book in 2012. The article was titled, "The Hell-Raiser: A megachurch pastor's search for a more forgiving faith." Bell told the The New Yorker reporter why he wrote *Love Wins*.

*Bell says that the book, his fifth, was inspired by a congregant who insisted that Mahatma Gandhi, because he wasn't a Christian, must be suffering in Hell. In the opening pages, Bell recalls his incredulous response: "Really? Gandhi's in hell? He is? We have confirmation of this? **The New Yorker Magazine***

That's an interesting reason to write a book questioning God's punishing unrepentant sinners since the Bible clearly teaches that is exactly what God does. We do have confirmation in God's Word that He punishes unrepentant sinners. The question might be better posed as whether we know for sure that Gandhi did not repent of his sins and receive the gift of eternal life when he confessed Christ as Lord and Savior sometime before he died. None of us can judge what a person who has heard the Gospel might do with that Truth in the moments before death. Only God knows for sure. However, for Bell to position himself as denying God's eternal judgment of unrepentant sinners is the problem. Just that comment alone, even without reading Bell's book, should cause Christians to be

concerned about his leadership in a church. After reading the book, your worst fears about Bell may be confirmed.

While Bell still believes himself to be a Christian, his spiritual drift caused many to question what kind of Christian he is or if he ever was a true Christian. *Drift* can take people in a variety of bad directions. Some move on to a more progressive type of religion through *deconstruction*. Some move out of religion all together through *deconversion*.

Let me add that by using the word *drift* I don't mean leaving Christianity as if you could walk away from an eternal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. What's *eternal* about salvation if it's something you can make *temporary* by leaving it? Jesus didn't say He came to give temporal life. He said:

*My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than*

*all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand. John 10:27-29*

*Spiritual drift* is where someone with a history of believing in the foundational truths of Christianity begins to talk or teach differently about those same truths. Rob Bell is just one example of preachers, teachers and other church leaders who have drifted spiritually and caused great harm to churches and their attendees. Unfortunately, there are thousands more just like Bell, many of them well known with substantial influence. Many of them have left ministry, while others are still leading churches and denominations in new directions.

If you are wondering how to identify false preachers and teachers in your church or denomination, you may find this series helpful — [A Layman's Guide To False Preachers and Teachers](#). We will do our best in this series not to duplicate what you can find in other articles on Faith and Self Defense, so please look through our past articles and [free eBooks](#) for topics that may help you. You may also find articles of interest at our companion [GraceLife Blog](#).

## Research

If you would like to look at some research on the topic of Christian leaders deconstructing or deconverting, you may find these sites helpful:

[LifeWay Research](#) — Church Goers Express Hope/Sadness Over Leaders Who Leave The Faith

[LifeWay Research](#) — Reconstructing Faith in a Deconstructing Culture

[Barna](#) — Only 10% of Christian Twentysomethings Have Resilient Faith





# Chapter Two

Question: Why are so many young people in churches becoming exvangelicals? Could it be because of idol worship?

## Idol Worship?

You've probably heard someone say, "Oh, he's my idol." What people living in a Western culture usually mean is they are a fan of a particular celebrity. However, celebrities being the equivalent of wood and stone idols in many countries in the world may not be that different.

Merriam-Webster Dictionary includes two definitions for idol worship — "the worship of a physical object as a god, immoderate attachment or devotion to something." Celebrity worship would be the second definition, even though some people do worship people as if they were god-like.

One success/motivational writer wrote this about celebrities and idol worship:

*Once upon a time, people worshipped and idolized gods. They built temples and statues for the gods, and worshipped them. They were their idols, to whom they prayed. A long time has passed since then, but the need to worship and idolize has not passed, only the idols and the gods have changed. Now, people call them celebrities. Why Do We Idolize and Admire Celebrities*

People love celebrities. They love to follow them on social media, watch their movies and TV shows, listen to their music, read their books, meet them at conferences, buy stuff at their online store, etc. Some scholars believe Nimrod started physical idol worship thousands of years ago based on the power and popularity of kings and queens. That's a type of idol worship that takes celebrity to the extreme.

Unfortunately, the Christian Community has not been immune to celebrity worship. Even though the focus of our worship should be God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit), celebrity worship crept into the lives of Christians and churches long ago. People started following, in a committed sense, “celebrated” people. That is still true today and is a big part of the problem with *exvangelicalism*.

Think about all the “stars” in Christianity during the last several decades. As we mentioned in the first part of our series, a heretical pastor and author was lauded by Time Magazine as being “a singular rock star in the church world.” The secular press loves it when Christians gush over their celebrities. Maybe it makes Christianity seem more mainstream and less dangerous to the media. What we know about that particular “rock star” church celebrity is that his words and actions led many people away from believing what the Bible teaches about God’s judgment on unrepentant sinners. This kind of *celebrity worship* can easily lead to *exvangelicalism*. Some people “deconstruct.” Some people “deconvert.”

## Religious Deconstruction

Let's first look at religious deconstruction, also known as theological deconstruction. Deconstruction is often the first phase of a church member's move from evangelical Christianity to eventual unbelief (atheism, agnosticism, humanism).

Interestingly, this process of religious or *faith deconstruction* often starts within the church. Popular pastors, church leaders, academicians, conference speakers, authors, movie actors, song writers, and musicians begin to drift away from the truth of God's Word. Their drift should be noticed long before it ever gets out of hand, but it hasn't been in thousands of cases. A Christian who is in the Word, reading, studying and believing the Bible to be true, and communicating with God through prayer regularly should be able to spot the drift long before other Christians notice. God has given us all the information we need to recognize spiritual drift (and heresy), plus we have the Holy Spirit of God living inside of us to guide us into all truth. That should give Christians time to protect themselves, their family and church. However, all too often people don't listen to

warnings coming from knowledgeable and discerning Christian brothers and sisters.

We have many recent examples of religious “celebrities” deconstructing from evangelical Christianity. Their experience, and their sharing about it publicly, has led to many church members deconstructing as well. Many people have serious questions about their Christian faith, questions that often go unanswered in churches unprepared to answer those serious questions. Christians with questions and doubts who see “Christian celebrities” announce they’ve deconstructed because they finally got some answers (so they think) to their questions, often follow the celebrities into the deconstruction process.

I’ve read many deconstruction stories and most have a similar thread. People have questions, even doubts, but fellow church and family members don’t want to answer the questions or hear about the doubts.

This is a big problem and one of the primary reasons Christian Apologetics exists. Christians should welcome questions and sharing of doubts from fellow believers. Asking and answering questions is how we learn about God and how we grow in Christ. Christian Apologetics is about having answers to tough questions and a defense for doubt.

Church members who won't answer questions often don't have answers to the questions. Instead of admitting they don't know and suggesting they and the questioner search for an answer together, church members often shut down conversation. The same is true about doubts. If we're honest, we all have doubts at times. Instead of making someone feel bad about expressing their doubts, we should thank them for their honesty and let them know we also deal with doubts. Christian Apologetics is about facing our questions and doubts and finding the evidence that answers questions and removes doubts.

Parents are the first line of faith defense. Listen to your children's questions. Welcome their doubts. If Christian mothers and fathers answer their children's questions and help remove doubt, 'celebrity Christians' will probably have less effect on young people when they (the celebrities) *deconstruct*. Grandparents and other family members can also be part of that early line of spiritual defense.

Teachers and other leaders at church are the next line of faith defense. People who teach and lead in churches should be in those positions because they are able to teach and lead in a godly way. If they can't or won't do that, then they need to step aside and let people who are able do the teaching and leading step in. They can always return to teaching and leading when they gain more knowledge and ability. The spiritual health of children, teens and young Christians is at stake, so it's important we get this right.

## EXvangelical Examples

Here are some recent examples of celebrities who have “deconstructed.” Some say they’re *exvangelicals*. Some say they no longer believe in God. We’ll address “deconversion” in a future part of our series, but we’ll include those celebrities as well in this list since many of them went through a deconstructing process before they deconverted. Keep in mind that each one of these celebrities were followed and loved by thousands of young Christians. Celebrity deconstruction has a big impact on their adoring fans. Celebrities influence their fans and that carries consequences.

- Jon Steingard, former frontman of Hawk Nelson — no longer believes in God
- George Perdikis, early member of Newsboys Band — says he’s lost faith in God
- Kevin Max, singer songwriter, former member of dc Talk — says he’s an exvangelical who is “deconstructing and progressing”



- Joshua Harris, author and evangelical pastor — no longer a Christian
- Marty Sampson, Hillsong song writer and worship leader — losing his faith and deconstructing
- Katy Perry, singer — says she believes in a higher power, but it's not God anymore
- Paul Maxwell, author, former writer for Desiring God, former professor of philosophy at Moody Bible Institute — says he's no longer a Christian
- Rhett and Link, YouTube personalities, former missionaries and Crusade for Christ (CRU) staff members — both deconstructed/deconverted
- Michael and Lisa Gungor, former Christian alternative rock musicians— deconstructed, deconverted, reconstructed
- JGivens, former Christian rapper — deconstructed
- Landon Jacobs, lead singer and guitarist of Sir Sly — deconstructed, deconverted
- David Bazan, singer, songwriter, formed Pedro the Lion — deconstructed, deconverted

Here are social media quotes from several of the celebrities about what happened to them.

*I have undergone a massive shift in regard to my faith in Jesus,” wrote Harris. “The popular phrase for this is ‘deconstruction,’ the biblical phrase is ‘falling away.’ By all the measurements that I have for defining a Christian, I am not a Christian. Joshua Harris*

*I’m genuinely losing my faith, and it doesn’t bother me,” Sampson wrote in an Instagram post that has since been removed. “Like, what bothers me now is nothing. I am so happy now, so at peace with the world. It’s crazy. Marty Sampson*

*I always felt uncomfortable with the strict rules imposed by Christianity. All I wanted to do was create and play rock and roll... and yet most of the attention I received was focused on how well I maintained the impossible standards of religion. I wanted my life to be measured by my music, not by my ability to resist temptation ... The Christian music scene is*

*populated by many people who act as though they have a direct hotline to a God who supplies them with the answers to the Universe. There seems to be more ego and narcissism amongst Christian musicians than their secular counterparts.*

*George Perdakis*

*Hello, my name is Kevin Max & I'm an #exvangelical (on Twitter).* *Kevin Max*

*Maybe I'm not 'Christian' but I still believe God loves me because He can't lie (on Twitter).* *JGivens*

*When I lost my faith at 22, I figured it was the end of any kind of spiritual life for me. I now believe spirituality to simply be a process of becoming comfortable with unknowing. I wrote the lyrics to "Material Boy" about feeling free to explore spirituality outside of the bounds of my childhood faith.*

*Landon Jacobs*

*Growing up, Christianity didn't feel oppressive for the most part, because it was filtered through my parents. They were and are so sincere, and I saw in them a really pure expression of unconditional love and service. Once I stepped away, I could see the oppression of it. David Bazan*

Unfortunately, the list of 'Christian' celebrities who deconstruct and deconvert will continue to grow in the coming months and years. As those celebrities go, so will thousands of young people who idolize them.

It's more important than ever for you to understand the deconstruction process because some of those future *exvangelicals* may come from your family or church. We need to learn everything we can now to be ready to help them before it's too late.

## The Deconstruction Process

Understanding process is an important part of solving problems. We can identify a problem, but how do we solve it? One way is to unravel the process to get back to the root(s) of the problem. It's a type of reengineering from an investigative perspective.

How does the “deconstruction” process work? Where does it start and how does it proceed? Why do some exvangelicals continue to have some belief in God while others don't?

Keith Giles is a former pastor, the co-host of the Heretic Happy Hour Podcast and author of *Jesus Untangled*. He believes there are “6 pillars of religious deconstruction.”

1. The Bible
2. Eternal Torment [Hell]
3. Penal Substitutionary Atonement [PSA]
4. Suffering In The World
5. The End Times Hype
6. The Church

Based on conversations I've had through the years with people who have experienced a religious (faith) deconstruction, these have all been mentioned as where questions and doubts started. For me it was hypocrisy among church leaders. For others it's evil and suffering in the world. Others are bothered by the idea of God "sending" people to hell. Some say it's the way Christians view science, age of the earth, evolution, sexual ethics, sexual abuse by church leaders, politics, abortion, women's rights, LGBTQ+ issues, etc.

Every person who has deconstructed or is now in the process of deconstructing had a starting place. One of the things I want to address in this series is how to help those people be restored. Everyone is an individual, so we need to understand their process, their journey, from an individual perspective. If they truly believed in God, we can help them understand what they misunderstood about God that led them away from Him. If their faith was hollow and empty, we can introduce them to the true God of the Bible. Either way, though, we need to treat each

person as a unique, unrepeatable miracle of God. Every person is precious in God's sight.





## Chapter Three

As we've pointed out in previous parts of this series, people deconstructing or deconverting is nothing new. We find examples of it in the New Testament and early centuries of the Church.

Demas was a close associate of the Apostle Paul's (Colossians 4:14; Philemon 1:24). Even though Demas traveled with Paul and participated in ministry with the apostle, Paul wrote that "Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica" (2 Timothy 4:10). The Greek word for "forsaken" means "utterly abandon, leave in the lurch, deserted." Demas utterly abandoned Paul at a time when the apostle could have used his help. Demas "loved this present world." Paul was in prison and nearing execution for his faithful ministry. It was apparently too much for Demas. He chose the "present world" rather than the eternal world where Paul was headed. There may be more to it than that, but it's what we know. The "present world" could mean that Demas didn't want to be martyred. It could mean that Demas no longer wanted to

sacrifice his time and energy in ministry. He may have wanted to live his life differently. Demas may have had doubts about what he was doing, especially in light of Paul's impending death.

It's obvious from Paul's mention of Demas in Colossians and Philemon that he started well. Demas was counted with such people as Luke, Mark, Epaphras and Aristarchus. You don't get into that group without having proven yourself trustworthy. Paul called Demas and the others "my fellow laborers." That's a powerful endorsement from the apostle and may be why Paul thought it necessary to mention Demas' abandoning him at the end. Because Paul had spoken so highly of Demas in previous letters and conversations, he may have wanted church leaders and members to know that Demas was no longer to be trusted as a spiritual leader. Paul's mention of Demas was not a passing thought. It was intended as a warning.

Did Demas “deconstruct?” Did he lose his faith or just his courage? We don’t have answers to those questions because Paul doesn’t say any more about Demas than that. What we do know is that Paul thought it important to mention Demas in the last letter he (Paul) would write before his martyrdom. Demas is a name that has served as a warning to Christians through the history of the Church.

Jesus and His apostles included many warnings about false prophets, preachers and teachers. Jesus said — “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves” (Matthew 7:15). Paul said — “For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock” (Acts 20:29).

They also warned about church members “falling away” (apostasy, defection, revolt, depart, a leaving) — “Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons” (1 Timothy 4:1) — and following after bad church leaders — “speaking perverse things, to draw away the

disciples after themselves” (Acts 20:30). Paul wrote — “Let no one deceive you by any means; for *that Day will not come* unless the falling away comes first” (2 Thessalonians 2:3).

Notice some key words and phrases from just those warning verses:

- Beware of false prophets
- come to you in sheep's clothing
- inwardly are ravenous wolves
- savage wolves
- come in among you
- not sparing the flock
- depart from the faith
- giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons
- speaking perverse things
- draw away the disciples after themselves
- let know one deceive you
- falling away comes first

Some of the pastors and other church leaders who have deconstructed or deconverted are doing exactly what Jesus and the apostles warned about in their lessons and letters. Some are false prophets. Some look like sheep, but are really ravenous, savage wolves who come in among Christians and don't spare the flock. Some who depart the faith give heed to deceiving spirits and teach or write or sing the doctrines of demons. Some speak perverse things and draw away disciples to follow them. Some are deceiving church members and causing them to fall away (apostasy).

That's a big problem with celebrities in churches and denominations. Because of their celebrity they are able to speak perverse things (to distort, misinterpret, corrupt, pervert), draw people to follow them instead of Christ Jesus, and deceive and cause people to fall away from believing God.

## Deconstructing Deconstruction?

I think it might be helpful to hear from a Christian “celebrity” who doesn’t like what he sees happening in the church “celebrity culture” today. John Cooper, lead singer and bassist of the Christian band *Skillet*, has a different view of celebrity and deconstruction.

*Cooper said these worship leader deconstruction posts are very confusing to people, and his goal was to help people understand what was happening. Describing these moments as “gut punch after gut punch,” Cooper said it is church leaders’ responsibility to help Millennials who are going through these faith crises understand good theology and where to look for answers. **Faith Strong Today***

Cooper has a lot to say on the subject, but what he wrote on a [Facebook post](#) in 2019 might be helpful in understanding modern “deconstruction” by celebrities. It’s worth [a longer read](#).

*Ok I’m saying it. Because it’s too important not to. What is happening in Christianity? More and more of our outspoken leaders or influencers who were once “faces” of the faith are falling away. And at the same time they are being very vocal and bold about it. Shockingly they still want to influence others (for what purpose?) as they announce that they are leaving the faith. I’ll state my conclusion, then I’ll state some rebuttals to statements I’ve read by some of them. Firstly, I never judge people outside of my faith. Even if they hate religion or Christianity. That is not my place and I have many friends who disagree with my religion and that is 100% fine with me. However, when it comes to people within my faith, there must be a measure of loyalty and friendship and accountability to each other and the Word of God.*

*My conclusion for the church (all of us Christians): We must STOP making worship leaders and thought leaders or influencers or cool people or “relevant” people the most influential people in Christendom. (And yes that includes people like me!) I’ve been saying for 20 years (and seemed probably quite judgmental to some of my peers) that we are in a dangerous place when the church is looking to 20-year-old worship singers as our source of truth. We now have a church culture that learns who God is from singing modern praise songs rather than from the teachings of the Word. I’m not being rude to my worship leader friends (many who would agree with me) in saying that singers and musicians are good at communicating emotion and feeling. We create a moment and a vehicle for God to speak. However, singers are not always the best people to write solid bible truth and doctrine. Sometimes we are too young, too ignorant of scripture, too unaware, or too unconcerned about the purity of scripture and the holiness of the God we are singing to. Have you ever considered the disrespect of singing songs to God that are untrue of His character?*



*I have a few specific thoughts and rebuttals to statements made by recently disavowed church influencers...first of all, I am stunned that the seemingly most important thing for these leaders who have lost their faith is to make such a bold new stance. Basically saying, "I've been living and preaching boldly something for 20 years and led generations of people with my teachings and now I no longer believe it..therefore I'm going to boldly and loudly tell people it was all wrong while I boldly and loudly lead people in to my next truth." I'm perplexed why they aren't embarrassed? Humbled? Ashamed, fearful, confused? Why be so eager to continue leading people when you clearly don't know where you are headed?*

*My second thought is, why do people act like "being real" covers a multitude of sins? As if someone is courageous simply for sharing virally every thought or dark place. That's not courageous. It's cavalier. Have they considered the ramifications? As if they are the harbingers of truth, saying "I used to think one way and practice it and preach it, but now I've learned all the new truth and will start practicing and*

*preaching it.” So the influencers become the voice for truth in whatever stage of life and whatever evolution takes place in their thinking.*

*Thirdly, there is a common thread running through these leaders/influencers that basically says that “no one else is talking about the REAL stuff.” This is just flatly false. I just read today in a renown worship leader’s statement, “How could a God of love send people to hell? No one talks about it.” As if he is the first person to ask this? Brother, you are not that unique. The church has wrestled with this for 1500 years. Literally. Everybody talks about it. Children talk about it in Sunday school. There’s like a billion books written on the topic. Just because you don’t get the answer you want doesn’t mean that we are unwilling to wrestle with it. We wrestle with scripture until we are transformed by the renewing of our minds.*

*And lastly, and most shocking imo, as these influencers disavow their faith, they always end their statements with their “new insight/new truth” that is basically a regurgitation of Jesus’s words?! It’s truly bizarre and ironic. They’ll say “I’m disavowing my faith but remember, love people, be generous, forgive others”. Ummm, why? That is actually not human nature. No child is ever born and says “I just want to love others before loving myself. I want to turn the other cheek. I want to give my money away to others in need”. Those are bible principles taught by a prophet/Priest/King of kings who wants us to live by a higher standard which is not an earthly standard, but rather the ‘Kingdom of God’ standard. Therefore if Jesus is not the truth and if the Word of God is not absolute, then by preaching Jesus’s teachings you are endorsing the words of a madman. A lunatic who said “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the father except through me.” He also said that he was alive before Abraham, and to see him was to see God because he was one with God. So why then would a disavowed Christian leader promote that “generosity is good”? How would you know “what is good” without Jesus’s teachings? And will your*

*ideas of what is “good” be different from year to year based on your experience, culture trends, popular opinion etc and furthermore will you continue year by year to lead others into your idea of goodness even though it is not absolute? I’m amazed that so many Christians want the benefits of the kingdom of God, but with the caveat that they themselves will be the King.*

*It is time for the church to rediscover the preeminence of the Word. And to value the teaching of the Word. We need to value truth over feeling. Truth over emotion. And what we are seeing now is the result of the church raising up influencers who did not supremely value truth who have led a generation who also do not believe in the supremacy of truth. And now those disavowed leaders are proudly still leading and influencing boldly AWAY from the truth.*

*Is it any wonder that some of our disavowed Christian leaders are letting go of the absolute truth of the Bible and subsequently their lives are falling apart? Further and further they are sinking in the sea all the while shouting “now I’ve found the truth! Follow me!!” Brothers and sisters in the faith all around the world, pastors, teachers, worship leaders, influencers...I implore you, please please in your search for relevancy for the gospel, let us NOT find creative ways to shape God’s word into the image of our culture by stifling inconvenient truths. But rather let us hold on even tighter to the anchor of the living Word of God. For He changes NOT. “The grass withers and the flowers fade away, but the word of our God stands forever” (Isaiah 40:8).*

More recently Cooper published a book titled *Awake & Alive To Truth: Finding Truth In The Chaos Of A Relativistic World*. He pointed out **in an interview** that deconstructionism and cynicism are two tenets of postmodernism.

*I do think it's a pretty big warning to all of us to build your life on top of the Words of Jesus Christ,' he said. 'We need to continue to build our lives upon that, or we will get destroyed ... and I do think that that has happened to a lot of our pastors.'*

*He also cautioned that the same thing might happen to someone who is not steadfast in God's Word, noting that the "woke" society claims to be 'more Christian than Christ.' 'That's what we have to watch out for,' he warned.*

*Cooper claims that emotionalism is part of the 'woke ideology' that has infiltrated the Church, and that many people today worship Jesus because it 'feels good,' rather than make Him the Lord of their lives. 'What Jesus requires is actually Lordship, and with Lordship comes an understanding that I am not my own God,' he said. 'This isn't about what makes me emotionally feel good. This is about the Lordship of Christ, He is God, and I am not.' John Cooper*



## Chapter Four

**Exvangelical** is a relatively new term used for former evangelical Christians who have left the Evangelical Christian movement. “This includes people who have left to more progressive Christian denominations as well as those who have left Christianity all together” (Urban Dictionary).

Another term that is older, but similar in some ways, is *post-evangelical*. The term was coined by author Dave Tomlinson and is the title of his 1995 book, *The Post-Evangelical*. Many in the Emerging and Emergent Church movements have referenced the book and the term.

Our series is focused on the newer term, exvangelical, and how it is impacting the 21st century church.

We move now to *religious deconversion*.



## Religious Deconversion

A short definition of *religious deconversion* is “loss of one’s faith in a religion” (APA Dictionary of Psychology). Christians would see deconversion as loss of faith in Christ. If someone had truly converted to Christ, then deconversion would mean no longer believing in Christ.

Religious deconversion differs from deconstruction in that the former “believer” no longer believes in the Christian God. They are often atheists, agnostics, humanists, etc. These people often go through a process of deconstructing before deconverting. Here’s one example. I chose it because the deconstruction phase lasted for several years before full deconversion and he is now having a big impact on leading others to deconvert.

## Example

Former Christian radio host Seth Andrews wrote about his battle with doubts and eventual deconversion and becoming the host of a popular atheist community (*The Thinking Atheist*). His 2012 book is titled *Deconverted: a journey from religion to reason*. Evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins wrote the foreword to the 2013 second edition of the book.

Andrews called his journey from Christianity to atheism “a long, strange, painful, exhilarating, liberating, amazing journey.” (Introduction, p I) His deconstruction process included seeing Christianity as being ridiculous, atrocious, insane, wild mythology, psychological abuse, bad science, corruption and blatant lies. This, he said, after being a Christian for 30 years.

*As a Christian for thirty years, I had long been an accessory to these crimes against education, science, and reason. For decades I had accepted without challenge the religious teachings of my family and culture. I was the genuine article. I was a true believer. Introduction, p III*

Seth was host of a morning radio show on a Christian station in Tulsa from 1990-2000. He said that the tragic accidental death of Christian songwriter Rich Mullins in 1997 caused him to struggle with “the God of Matthew 10, the one who considered us worth ‘more than many sparrows.’” Seth wondered why God “would design or abide the taking of Mullins’ earthly life in such a pointless, gruesome manner.” ([Friendly Atheist](#))

Most people I’m familiar with who have deconverted had what I call a “trigger” event. Something triggered their doubt. I know what mine was and how it opened the door to many doubts, questions and eventually becoming an atheist. When talking with people who are in the process of or have deconverted, I like to talk with them about their “trigger” event. What started the doubts? Talking about and the event or events that started doubt are often helpful in resolving the earliest doubts. The doubts that followed will also need to be discussed, but the “trigger” is important.

Seth said another event that rattled his “religious cage” was 9/11. He said his faith went into “a kind of muted, dormant phase ... doubt was always there, but I focused on other things.”

*It was a cop-out, really. I was speaking the words of Christianity, but I didn't attend church or pray because it seemed ridiculous. Friendly Atheist*

Seth said he watched a YouTube video of [Christopher Hitchens](#) and found himself emboldened to ask questions of his own. He said he read the Bible objectively and unfiltered for the first time in his life. Seth said the way Christian apologists responded to his questions actually “propelled” him toward and ultimately to apostasy.

After reading what he said about how the apologists responded to him, I understand why his questions were not answered. Similar responses turned me off as an atheist radio talk show host and were not the answers that eventually led me to Christ. We apologists can learn some important insights to how to help

people in the deconstruction phase of their religious lives by listening to them carefully and giving them thoughtful answers based on evidence. Pat answers without substance won't help. Seth also pointed to a 2010 radio interview he did with Dan Barker, a former evangelist and President of the Freedom From Religion Foundation, as another turning point in his life.

*When Dan said, 'If I wasn't a Christian, nobody is,' I could totally relate. And now I'm free. I've made it a life mission to expose the flaws in the very teachings I once held so dear.*  
*Introduction, p III*

I understand what Seth said. I had a similar zeal to fight back against the ignorance and stupidity (so I thought at the time) of Christianity. However, I realized later that I had never been a real Christian and never searched out the evidence for theism and Christianity.

Seth's story should be a warning to all Christian parents, teachers and apologists. His story is repeated every day. People of all ages, some of them sitting next to you at church, in your youth group, on your worship team, preaching from the pulpit, are struggling with doubt and silently going through deconstruction. Once it becomes obvious or they share their struggle publicly, it's often too late.

When I hear or read people's deconversion stories, they are often similar to my experience as a child of the 1950s and 60s and Seth's experience as a child of the 70s and 80s. I became an atheist at a much earlier age than Seth, but the stories are much the same. He was in his early 40s and I was a teenager.

It's important that we understand each person as an individual. Deconversion stories may be similar, but each is unique and we should treat each person as unique.

## Young People Deconverting

Many teenagers who were raised in evangelical churches deconstruct in high school and deconvert during college. That was my story. Most, however, never come back to church attendance or belief in God. I was blessed that God brought Christians with good answers into my life during my early 20s. I think that because I was never saved, even though I played one at church, I was more open to conversations with thoughtful Christians. Being an investigative journalist also helped. I looked at the evidence Christians gave me from the perspective of an investigator.

I've been involved in working with young people in church settings for 50 years and have witnessed the process of young people deconstructing and deconverting. So many of them were just like me — raised in evangelical churches from childhood only to leave the church in mid to later teenage years. Someone has said that youth ministry is like herding cats. You get some into the room through one door, only to see others leaving through other doors. And if you think that the young people

leaving the church were only the ones on the fringes of faith, look again. Many were leaders in their youth groups. Some went on to college and became heavily involved in campus ministries, only to develop doubts and walk away.

We've written for many years about the problem of young people dropping out of church attendance or leaving the faith. Here are a couple you may want to read for some background.

[Hope For America's Youth](#)

[Hope For America's Youth – Answers](#)



## Generational Deconversion

I'm an early Baby Boomer, born in the late 1940s. Most of my friends in the first church I attended after I was saved were the same age. We loved Bible study and solid sermons about the truths of God's Word. Our assistant pastor was a professor of Greek at a local Christian college and taught Sunday night Bible studies from the Greek. That was a great introduction to God's Word.

My first encounter with youth ministry in the 70s was with late Baby Boomers, sometimes called Generation Jones. They were born between 1955 and 1965 and several years younger than me. We were all concerned about social issues (Vietnam War, race relations, etc) and searched for answers together from God's Word, believing what God said to be the best source of truth on all matters related to faith and practice. We expressed our doubts and searched for answers to tough questions. I remember staying up late into the night with our youth and singles groups talking about everything important to them. We found answers to our questions and doubts in God's Word

rightly divided. Our focus was on “making disciples,” something many churches don’t do and haven’t done for decades. You can read more about that here – [The Church’s Biggest Problem\(s\)](#).

Every generation differs in some ways from their parents’ generation. Gen X, born between 1964 and 1980, were the children of Baby Boomers. Gen X was followed by the Xennials micro-generation, born between late 70s and early 80s. Millennials were born between 1981 and 1996. Gen Z were born between 1997 and 2010, children of Gen Xers. You can read about them here – [Meet Generation Z](#).

What we’ve learned from research (e.g. Barna, LifeWay, Gallup) is that the percentage of people who say they still believe in God and the Bible has become smaller with each generation. Church membership is one metric of how people view religion and their belief in God.

Gallup began polling church membership in the United States in 1937. Young people living then were known as part of the *Silent Generation* – people born from 1928 to 1945. (My parents were born in what's called the *Greatest Generation* – people born between 1901 and 1927.) The percentage of people who attended church in the U.S. was 73% and stayed near 70% for several decades. The slide downward began at the turn of the 21st century and has continued a steady decline. The last Gallup poll information from 2020 showed that membership in a church, synagogue or mosque was at only 47%. Based on trends from the last 20 years, membership in houses of worship will continue to plummet.

Gallup's researchers found that the decline in membership was primarily because more Americans express no religious preference.

*Over the past two decades, the percentage of Americans who do not identify with any religion has grown from 8% in 1998-2000 to 13% in 2008-2010 and 21% over the past three years. GALLUP*

According to Gallup, membership in church is generationally driven. 66% of “traditionalists,” adults born before 1946, attend church. Baby Boomers come in at 58%, Gen X at 50% and 36% for Millennials. Data about Gen Z is not available yet because only a small number of them have reached adulthood. The younger generations are also becoming a larger part of the entire adult population as older adults die.

While some of the “nones” never attended church (many were raised in atheist families), many were raised in church and went through the deconstruction and deconversion process. My own experience talking with “nones” is that the conversations are usually friendlier because they know very little about Christianity. Conversations with those who have deconverted, on the other hand, can be more challenging because they believe they know a lot about Christianity. The opportunity with both “nones” and “deconversions” is to love them and share the evidence that points to the truth of the resurrected Son of God who loves them and died for them.



# Chapter Five

So far in our series about *exvangelicals*, we've looked at:

- Definitions
- Who's Responsible
- Spiritual Drift
- Idol Worship (Celebrities)
- Religious Deconstruction
- Exvangelical Examples
- The Deconstruction Process
- Deconstructing Deconstruction
- Religious Deconversion
- Young People Deconverting
- Generational Deconversion

We continue now with Generation Z.

## Generation Z

Members of Generation Z were born between the end of the 20th century and the early part of the 21st century (1997-2012). They, along with their older millennial brothers and sisters, have been deeply impacted by celebrity 'Christians' deconstructing or deconverting. They are more open to the emotional side of celebrity stories and less inclined to search for the truth.

Many young people view evangelical Christianity in a negative light socially and personally. Some believe the Christian religion is harmful to society. Many raised within an evangelical Christian community are ready to leave it when they reach the age of about 15 or 16. Business models have sprung up during the past decade to help young people who want to deconstruct or deconvert. They offer what many young people say they didn't get from their church experience. Here's one example:

## ***Doubt Your Beliefs? Have Questions About Changing Or Leaving Your Faith?***

### ***You Are Not Alone, And We Are Here To Help***

*Learning how to live after questions, doubts, and changing beliefs is a journey. We at Recovering from Religion are intimately familiar with this path, and we are here to help you to cross that bridge. Our passion is connecting others with support, resources, community, and most of all, hope. We have two forms of support available below: peer support and professional support. [\*Recovering From Religion\*](#)*

The company even has a Fall Excursion billed as — “Discover yourself and the world around you in a new light, free of dogma.” That kind of thing appeals to young people who are going through deconstruction or deconversion. As you look at the video publicizing the excursion, its appeal to Gen Z is obvious.



## What's Wrong With This Picture?

What's wrong with this picture is that God established the Church to give Christians support, resources, community and hope. The concerns I hear from exvangelicals who have either deconstructed or deconverted could have been addressed beautifully through parents, church leaders and members who followed the teachings of Jesus and His apostles. Jesus left clear instructions for Christians just before He ascended to Heaven after His resurrection:

*All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Matthew 28:18-20*

Following the Lord's instructions shouldn't be hard to do:

1. Go and make disciples from every nation (*ethnos* – ethnic culture) in the authority of Christ
2. Baptize disciples in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit
3. Teach disciples to observe (*téreo* – maintain, keep intact, guard, watch over, preserve) all things (*panta* – each and every part) that Jesus commanded (*entellomai* – charged, enjoined, command to reach a purpose) the apostles

If Christians, and that includes church leaders, read and study their Bibles and do what Jesus and His apostles said to do .. and don't do what Jesus and His apostles said not to do, then they have accomplished the purpose Jesus has planned for the Church He is building. That shouldn't be hard to do since most of us have access to Bibles and can read. However, Christians are not accomplishing the goal Jesus established for disciples. If we were, I don't think we'd have so many people growing up in churches only to leave them when they get into high school or college. I also don't think we'd be hearing so many of them

complaining about Christians not caring about them, not listening to them, not answering their questions.

Christianity is about every aspect of life. That includes thoughts, emotions and will. It includes how we relate to God, ourselves and others. Jesus said we should love God “with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one’s neighbor as oneself” (Mark 12:33). In Matthew 22:37-39, Jesus said the same thing a little differently: “with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind ... You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

God calls on His people to use every part of themselves to serve Him and others. Christians should engage their mind and emotions when learning about God and looking for ways to help their neighbors. Unfortunately, many Christians are not doing either and that’s hurting efforts to make disciples of those people who grow up in churches.

Think about that for a minute. A child is born into an evangelical Christian family and grows up in an evangelical Christian church. The child attends all of the church programs and eventually becomes part of the youth group. However, they have doubts and things happen that shake the foundation of what they've been taught as truth. They share their concerns with parents, teachers and leaders, but are met with resistance or no response at all. They begin to deconstruct in high school and deconvert in college. All of those years of parents and churches investing in young lives, only to see them become #exvangelicals.

Something is terribly wrong with that picture, yet churches repeat that process year after year after year .. decade after decade after decade. Why does this continue to happen and what can we do about it? These precious children who we love so much are not finding answers to their questions and doubts and are walking away from their beliefs about God at record numbers.

I left church at the age of 16, became an atheist and didn't return until I was 23 after investigating the evidence for Christianity. Would I have left the church if someone had provided me good answers to my questions and concerns? I might have, but I'll never know for sure because it didn't happen.

We need to love and care for our children and youth in the same way we would want someone to care for us. If we had questions and doubts, wouldn't it be nice if someone cared enough to show an interest and listen? Something bad is going on in churches and has been for decades.

Christians have become so entangled with the world they live in, that they are not spiritually sensitive to their own children and young people. It takes time to enter into the world of young people to earn their trust so they'll share their concerns. When children and young people **ask tough questions**, answer them to the best of your ability. If you are not able to answer their questions, invite them to searcher answers with you. When children and young people express doubts about God or

Christianity, thank them for their openness and listen. If you've had similar doubts, tell them. Share with them how you deal with doubts. Teach them what it means to be a thoughtful follower of Jesus Christ. We do not want Christians to be mindless in their devotion to Christ. He deserves our minds, our hearts, our souls and every ounce of strength we have to give Him.

## Example

We can learn from the lives of others. Here is an example that may help whether you are currently deconstructing, deconverting or trying to help someone who is going through that process.

**Tony Campolo** is a well-known and self-described leader for the progressive Christian movement. He co-authored a book with Emergent Church leader Brian McLaren in 2003 and has been involved with many other Emerging Church leaders and programs.

I heard Tony speak at an evangelical conference for pastors more than 40 years ago and didn't like what I heard. He spoke with a lot of passion and seemed like a nice person, but what he said didn't match some of what I knew to be true from God's Word. Tony became a spiritual advisor to President Bill Clinton more than a decade after I heard him speak. He surprised the evangelical world in 2015 when he came out **in favor of full inclusion of LGBTQ people** in the life of the church. The more you look into the writings of Tony Campolo, the more concerns are raised about what he believes.

**Bart Campolo**, Tony's son, is now a humanist chaplain. He was raised in a progressive Christian family. Bart spoke on the Holy Heretics podcast several years ago and said that his journey away from Christianity began when he was exposed to urban poverty. "It messed with my theology," he explains. "I had a theology that said God could intervene and do stuff." But after a period of unanswered prayer, Bart admits: "I had to change my understanding of God. Sovereignty had to get dialed down a bit. Campolo admitted that changing his view of God's sovereignty was "the beginning of the end" of his faith. Why? "Because once

you start adjusting your theology to match up to the reality you see in front of you, it's an infinite progression. So over the course of the next 30 years...my ability to believe in a supernatural narrative or a God who intervenes and does anything died a death of a thousand unanswered prayers". Campolo continued: "I passed through every stage of heresy. It starts out with sovereignty going, then biblical authority goes, then I'm a universalist, now I'm marrying gay people. Pretty soon I don't actually believe Jesus actually rose from the dead in a bodily way." Premier Christianity Magazine

Bart made an important point: "Because once you start adjusting your theology to match up to the reality you see in front of you, it's an infinite progression." Once church members start playing with the truth of God's Word, where will they stop? If God is not Sovereign, if God cannot be believed or trusted, how far is it to unbelief? Bart went on to say that "progressive Christianity," which is what he grew up knowing, is headed towards full-blown unbelief. He predicts that as many as 40% of "progressive Christians" will become atheists during the next decade .. and he said that four years ago.



## Influencers

Bart Campolo, like his father, is an influencer. Tony Campolo influenced Baby Boomers through Millennials (Gen Y). Bart Campolo has been an influence on Millennials and Gen Z. Influencers are people who “influence” others in specific directions. It might be influencing what someone buys, where they go or what they believe. Influencers use a variety of communication tools including speaking, singing, songwriting, books, social media, podcasts and videos.

Research has shown Gen Z is the most racially, religiously, and sexually diverse generation in American history. **Barna Research** from a few years ago showed that about half of Gen Z is non-white, only 4% claim to have a biblical worldview, the number who claim to be atheists has doubled when compared to older generations, and 33% say gender is how a person “feels inside,” rather than their birth sex. Barna called Gen Z the first post-Christian generation.

Young people in Generation Z are heavily influenced by social networking and YouTube. 97 percent of Gen Z surveyed said they use YouTube (80-95% every day). Celebrities have a high-name recognition and favorability with Gen Z. Gen Z women are familiar with Beyonce (99%), Zendaya (95%), Shane Dawson (86%), Serena Williams (81%) and Jennifer Aniston (80%). Gen Z men are familiar with Justin Bieber (98%), PewDieDie (95%), LeBron James (95%), Steph Curry (86%) and Elon Musk (84%). Zendaya is a favorite of Gen Z women (72%) and PewDieDie is a favorite with Gen Z men (62%).

Out of curiosity, are you familiar with PewDieDie? He is a 30-something German with 110-million subscribers to his YouTube channel. PewDieDie used to have the most subscribers, but T-Series, India's multimedia YouTube channel, surpassed him with more than 180-million subscribers. You might want to find how he is influencing your children and young people. Even as he is having fun in his videos, he's sharing a moral position and life advice. Do you know what he's saying to his millions of young followers? If we don't know who is influencing our young

people, how and why, we are missing an opportunity to both understand and communicate with them.

Other Gen Z celebrities who have a big influence with today's young people include Billie Eilish, Rowan Blanchard, Greta Thunberg, Amandla Stenberg, Selah Marley, Yara Shahidi, Emma Chamberlain, Jojo Siwa, and Millie Bobby Brown. Others include Taylor Swift, Dwayne Johnson, Will Smith, KristenBell, Emma Watson. Ariana Grande, Tom Holland, Leonardo DiCaprio, Ryan Reynolds, Robert Downey Jr., Nicki Minaj, Lady Gaga, Megan Thee Stallion, Cristiano Ronaldo and Selena Gomez. There are many more, but this will give you a start at better understanding who influences children and youth today.

Gen Z is influenced by global events and issues like climate change, social responsibility, social justice, racism, gun violence, gender equality, recession, the Covid pandemic, etc. Friends are also a big influence in their lives, along with family. Understanding young people in Generation Z is helpful to talking with them about their questions and doubts about Christianity.

## Connected

Gen Z are also into texting and selfies. They love their smart phones and have never known a time when the Internet didn't exist. They live in an environment that is always connected, especially to their friends.

One research group in Australia (McCrindle) says the five factors that define Gen Z are —

1. Digital
2. Global
3. Social
4. Mobile
5. Visual

At their core, Gen Z want to love and be loved, just like the rest of us. They want their lives to matter, just like the rest of us. Who better than Jesus Christ to love them and give them eternal lives that matter.

If you are a member of Generation Z and are struggling with questions and doubts, **please contact us**. If you are a parent of a child or young person struggling with questions and doubts, **please contact us**. If you are a church leader concerned about children and young people struggling with questions and doubts, **please contact us**. If you are a teacher concerned about children and young people struggling with questions and doubts, **please contact us**. We will do our best to connect you with helpful people and resources.

## Research

Barna has done a lot of research about why young Christians leave churches. Here is their list **from research they did ten years ago**. It demonstrates that what we're seeing today with #exvangelicals has been developing for a long time. I joined Ratio Christi in apologetics ministry on college campuses in 2011 and can verify that what Barna discovered through research was, and still is true, through face-to-face ministry:

1. Churches seem overprotective
2. Teens' and twentysomethings' experience of Christianity is shallow
3. Churches come across as antagonistic to science
4. Young Christians' church experiences related to sexuality are often simplistic, judgmental
5. They wrestle with the exclusive nature of Christianity
6. The church feels unfriendly to those who doubt

Look closely at the six reasons and ask yourself this question: "Is this a picture of my church?" If so, what could you do to make a difference in your church and the lives of children and young people in your church?

## Reading Resources

[Apologetics for the Next Generation](#)

[Meet Generation Z: Understanding And Reaching The New Post-Christian World](#)

[Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation](#)





## Chapter Six

First, let me say that I understand deconstruction and deconversion. I went through it as a teenager. My “trigger event” was a contentious church business meeting where I saw and heard church leaders stand up and say terrible things about other people — some who were in the meeting and some who weren’t. I was 12 years old and had just become old enough to attend church business meetings. What I heard was very hurtful to people I knew. I began to see leading members in our church as mean and hypocritical. That was the beginning of my deconstruction. Four years later I told my parents I wasn’t returning to church. Three years later I was an atheist. My “deconversion” was complete.

I put quote marks around the word deconversion because I had never been converted. I walked the aisle of our church at the age of ten and told the pastor I wanted to join the church. I attended special classes for several weeks and was baptized, but I had not become a Christian. I did what kids were supposed to do by my age, but it wasn’t because I wanted to be

saved from my sins or know Jesus in a personal way. I just went through the religious motions.

It should have been obvious to older people in the church that I wasn't saved, but no one talked with me about my behavior. They scolded me for bad behavior, but no one asked me what I was thinking. No one seemed interested to know if I had any questions or doubts. Maybe they didn't notice. Maybe they didn't care. That's why I say I understand deconstruction and deconversion. Even though my trigger event happened more than 60 years ago, I can still feel the emotions as if it were yesterday. That's how deeply the deconstruction and deconversion process is for many people. It helps to remember what it felt like if you went through it. If you haven't gone through either, which I hope you haven't, realize that the emotional pain can be very deep.

## Helpful Steps

From my experience and the experience of so many people who have deconstructed and/or deconverted, here are some helpful steps you can take to help someone who's struggling right now.

1. **Love People** — that seems so simple, but it's at the heart of both the problem and the solution. If you love people, really love people, you'll watch out for them. You'll want the best for them. You'll want to help hurting people find answers to their spiritual and emotional pain. If you don't love people, really love people, you won't watch out for them. You won't want the best for them. You won't want to help hurting people find answers to their spiritual and emotional pain. Love is the key. Either we love people the way Jesus loves people or we don't. God loved us so much that He sent His Son from Heaven to earth to die for our sins and give us the gift of eternal life. Jesus loved us so much that He volunteered to die for our sins and give us the gift of eternal life. Jesus didn't just talk about love, He

actually loves. Love is not what we say. It's what we do. Love does. Love goes. Love cares. Love gives. Love helps. Love meets the deepest needs of our soul. Like the Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians, love is "the greatest." He also wrote that anything we do without love is wasted. It's just a bunch of empty noise.

2. **Prepare Yourself To Help People** — Be sure you are ready to help people who are going through spiritual deconstruction or deconversion. Unfortunately, church leaders haven't done a good job preparing Christians to help each other spiritually. Church programs often focus on doing things for others, but are not big on making disciples. Making disciples includes learning everything Jesus and His apostles taught. That includes doing good things for others, but it also includes being able to make disciples and teach them to make disciples. Making disciples often includes answering tough questions and helping people through periods of deep doubt. Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 are great chapters to read about how to use spiritual gifts to help people, but don't miss the context. The focus is not on what spiritual gift you have but on holy

living. Before Paul wrote about spiritual gifts in Romans 12, he wrote this: “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” After he wrote about spiritual gifts in Romans 12, Paul wrote this: “*Let* love *be* without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. *Be* kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion.” Before Paul wrote about spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12, he wrote, “Now concerning spiritual *gifts*, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant: You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols, however you were

led. Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.” After Paul wrote about spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12, he wrote, “But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills. For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also *is* Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For in fact the body is not one member but many.” It’s clear that spiritual gifts are not about us. God gives gifts to His children so they build up each other for God’s glory. As Paul wrote in Ephesians 4 about Jesus giving gifts to the Church, “from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.” God has gifted you so you can help others, but that doesn’t mean you are prepared to help other people with your gift.

You need to understand your gift and how to nurture it. Find someone with a similar spiritual gift who is helping people the way you'd like to help people. Ask that person for help in learning how to use the gift for God's glory. Be sure the person you learn from is well-grounded in God's Word and in prayer. If they aren't, learn from someone else who is spiritually mature. Don't be fooled by celebrity. When you're ready to help people, go and make disciples.

3. **See People** — Don't just "see" people. Really SEE people. There's a big difference from seeing people attending church, youth group or small group and SEEING people at church, youth group or small group. Seeing people spiritually means you see how they're doing spiritually. It's nice to check on someone to see how they're feeling or how their sick relative is doing, but I suggest we go deeper than that. We need to see people with spiritual eyes. Also remember that communication is both verbal and non-verbal. Watch people's body language when they're sitting alone, talking with others and talking with you. Do you see anything that might indicate they are hiding or hurting? By that I mean they may be hiding information or emotions to

cover problems or pain. Watching people closely and lovingly is an important part of helping people.

4. **Hear People** — Listen to what people say. Really LISTEN to people. What do they say to other people? What do they say to you? Do you hear anything that might be a clue that there's more going on in their lives than what they're saying publicly?
5. **Care For People** — If you care for another person, you will demonstrate what you're thinking and feeling through your actions. You will want to spend time with them. You will want to develop a deeper relationship with them. You will want them to know you care and will prove it through your behavior and actions.
6. **Build Trust With People** — Building trust means you have to be "trustworthy." Depending on the relationship you have with a person, that may come quickly or take time. People who are in the early stages of deconstructing are often open with people who express interest or concern. However, people who have been deconstructing for a period of time may have had bad experiences with other Christians and may not be ready to be hurt again. If that's



the case, love them and prove to them that you are different. You care about them, will listen to them without judging them, and won't leave them just because they're asking tough questions about Christianity.

7. **Treat People with Respect** — We need to be careful not to think more highly of ourselves than we should and not think lowly of others. The temptation for that exists when we talk with people who are deconstructing or deconverting. The Apostle Paul explains it well in his letter to the Galatians: “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who *are* spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For each one shall bear his own load.” (Galatians 6:1-5) Helping someone who is having questions and doubts about their belief about God and the Bible includes bearing their burdens. Deep questions and doubts are burdens to people. Read through

their deconstruction/deconversion stories or listen to them talk about it and you'll see that this is a real burden for them. You will share in their burden as you listen and search for ways to help them see the truth of God's Word.

**8. Ask Deeper Questions** — Based on your love for people, what you see and hear, and developing a deeper relationship with them, you can ask deeper questions that open opportunities for deeper spiritual conversations. That's where you can ask them how they are doing spiritually. As you listen to how they answer, ask more questions. Make sure to give them plenty of opportunity to be heard, really heard, about what's bothering them. Don't take offense if they believe something different than you. Your opportunity to talk will come. Here's a simple acronym that may help you. ALPS = Ask. Listen. Pray. Speak.

**9. Give Good Answers** — The Apostle Paul wrote this to the Colossians in Chapter 4 -- "Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time. Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one." The Apostle Peter wrote this in 1 Peter 3 -- "But sanctify the

Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear." If you are well prepared, asked good questions and listened carefully, you'll be ready to answer them. Be sure your answers are good ones. Many deconverted people say that even well-meaning Christians gave them terrible answers to their questions. That may be somewhat subjective on their part, but it's still worth considering. People going through deconstruction or deconversion are not interested in "pat" answers. They want substance. They want thoughtful answers. They want both love and logic. Remember that Jesus is both the Love and Logic of God expressed in Flesh. "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:14)



# Chapter Seven

We come now to the final part of our special series about *exvangelicals*. Tens of thousands of young people are walking away from Christianity every year. Thousands more know little or nothing about Christianity (known as the Nones). It's our desire to help them all.

In the last chapter we looked at nine steps you can take to help someone who is going through the deconstruction/deconversion process. Here is a reminder of the ninth step:

**Give Good Answers** — The Apostle Paul wrote this to the Colossians in Chapter 4 -- "Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time. Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one." The Apostle Peter wrote this in 1 Peter 3 -- "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear." If you are well prepared, asked good questions and

listened carefully to what they said, you'll be ready to answer them. Be sure your answers are good ones. Many deconverted people say that even well-meaning Christians gave them terrible answers to their questions. That may be somewhat subjective on their part, but it's still worth considering. People going through deconstruction or deconversion are not interested in "pat" answers. They want substance. They want thoughtful answers. They want both love and logic. Remember that Jesus is both the Love and Logic of God expressed in Flesh. "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:14)

Giving good answers to questions and doubts is a feature of Christian Apologetics.

## Christian Apologetics

I recommend that every Christian learn how to defend their primary (essential) beliefs. That defense is called apologetics, from the Greek word *apologia* (a speech in defense). It doesn't mean we do all the talking, but it does mean that when we talk we present a good speech in defense of Christian teaching. It means majoring on the major teachings of Christianity. Jesus and His apostles did a great job in their speeches, lessons and writings to teach us what's essential in being followers of Christ.

What's an **essential** of Christianity? The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is at the top of the essentials list.

The Apostle Paul went so far as to say that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is so important to Christianity that if Jesus did not rise from the dead, our faith is empty and useless and we should be pitied above all other people (1 Corinthians 15:12-19). That's a pretty strong and bold statement.

The Gospel (good news) is pretty simple. Paul put it this way:

*For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time. 1 Corinthians 15:3-8*

1. Jesus died for our sins according to the Scripture (truth claim)
2. Jesus was buried (evidence supporting truth claim)
3. Jesus rose again the third day according to the Scriptures (truth claim)
4. Jesus was seen alive by hundreds of people, most of whom were still alive at the time of Paul's writing (evidence supporting truth claim)



You might wonder why I didn't list belief in God's existence as the #1 essential of Christianity. It is an essential, but keep in mind that Jews and Muslims also believe in the existence of God but are not Christians. Some Jews even believe that Jesus died at the hands of the Romans, but they don't believe Jesus died for their sins or rose from the dead. Muslims believe that Jesus is one of their prophets, but not that He died for their sins or rose from the dead. Belief in God is essential, but it is the atoning death and resurrection of God's Son that sets Christians apart from all other religions. That's why Paul wrote what he wrote about the resurrection.

*Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up—if in fact the dead do not rise. For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not*

*risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. 1 Corinthians 15:12-19*

Three Christian apologists helped me investigate the truth claims of Christianity when I was an atheist. They were loving, kind and patient. I worked my way from evidences for God's existence through the credibility of the Bible to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Though I found many convincing evidences for God and the Bible, it was not until I saw the evidence for Christ's death, burial and resurrection that I believed on the Lord Jesus Christ and was saved. When I confessed with my mouth the Lord Jesus and believed in my heart that God had raised Him from the dead, I was saved — "For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Romans 10:10).

The resurrection of Jesus Christ had another effect on my thinking after I was saved. I realized that what Jesus said was true. That may sound elementary, but it's important to a defense of Christianity. Jesus said that He was "the way, the truth, and the life" and that no one "comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). John the Apostle wrote that "grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17b). Jesus always told the truth. He never lied. He proved that by predicting how and when He would die and who would kill Him and that He would rise from the dead on the third day. Why is that important to a defense of Christianity?

Jesus addressed most of the reasons I had for being an atheist. Jesus addressed most of the reasons I hear from people who have deconstructed or deconverted. When I began to read the Gospels as a new Christian in light of the revelation that everything Jesus said was true, it brought new light to my investigation of the Old Testament. I had spent months trying to disprove the Old Testament only to find strong evidence for it. The fact that the resurrected Lord from

Heaven quoted from many parts of the Old Testament added to my confidence in it.

On the night before Jesus was arrested, He told His disciples that He would ask His Father to send them another Helper after He left them. Jesus called the Helper “the Spirit of truth” (John 14:17). Jesus also told His disciples that “when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own *authority*, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come” (John 16:13). That meant what the apostles said and wrote would be true as well because the Spirit of God would guide them into all truth. The apostles addressed many of the questions and doubts that *exvangelicals* have shared about their reason for deconstructing and deconverting.

The combination of the truth-telling of the resurrected Lord of Heaven and the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the words of the apostles add to our confidence in the evidence we have for the truthfulness of the Old and New Testament writings. As we talk with people who are questioning and doubting, we should

include the resurrection of Jesus in our defense of Christian truth.

## Hey, Jude

Every *exvangelical* you talk with has a unique story. They may be early in the process of deconstruction, completed deconversion or somewhere between. If you've built a trusting relationship (see chapter six of this series), you should be able to talk with them at a deeper level about what they're thinking, feeling and wanting.

The big question is how to best help each individual. Some may be open to hearing what you have to say. Some may be argumentative or even confrontational. Whichever way the conversation goes, continue to love them and pray for them.

Jude's epistle give us some insight how to help exvangelicals. Jude was one of Jesus Christ's half-brothers. Jude didn't believe that Jesus was the Messiah until after seeing Jesus alive after His resurrection. He wrote one letter that's included in

the Bible. He wanted to write fellow believers about “our common salvation,” but found it necessary to exhort them “to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.” The reason for that was false teachers had crept unnoticed into the churches and had turned “the grace of our God into lewdness” and denied “the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.” That’s similar to what’s going on in today’s churches.

Jude warned fellow believers about the false teachers who had become the church celebrities of that time. Jude called them “spots in your love feasts, while they feast with you without fear, serving only themselves.” Jude said they were “clouds without water carried about by the winds.” He called them “late autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, pulled up by the roots.” Jude called these celebrity false believers “raging waves of the sea, foaming up their own shame.” He called them “wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever.” Jude said they were “grumblers, complainers, walking according to their own lusts; and they mouth great swelling *words*, flattering people to gain advantage.” He reminded them that Jesus’

apostles had warned that there “would be mockers” in “the last time who would walk according to their own ungodly lusts.” Jude said that the false leaders were “sensual persons, who cause divisions, not having the Spirit.” Those are the types of people who influence church members today. They are wolves in sheep’s clothing who sneak into churches to ravage the sheep.

The only way to handle false teachers is to expose them, but what about people in the church who are influenced by those false teachers? How do we help those who deconstruct or deconvert? Here’s what Jude recommended:

*“But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. And on some have compassion, making a distinction; but others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh. Jude 1:20-23*

Notice Jude's logic. Christians who want to help people influenced by false teachers should do four things:

1. building yourselves up on your most holy faith
2. praying in the Holy Spirit
3. keep yourselves in the love of God
4. looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life

We need to be in good spiritual shape before trying to help others. If we're weak in the faith, weak in prayer, weak in the love of God, weak in our relationship with Christ, we should focus on our own need before trying to help someone else.

It reminds me a little of what Jesus said in His Sermon on the Mount:

*And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see*



*clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.*

Matthew 7:3-5

We need to be cautious for many reasons. One of them is that we might be fooled while trying to help someone else. I've known people who deconstructed and even deconverted while trying to help others who had walked away from Christianity.

When we're spiritually strong, we're ready to help people. Here's Jude's logic for doing that:

1. on some have compassion, making a distinction
2. on others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh

Some texts divide Jude's logic into three parts:

1. be merciful to those who doubt
2. save others by snatching them from the fire
3. to others show mercy, mixed with fear

Since experts on the original Greek text are divided about whether Jude presented his advice in two or three parts (some point out Jude's use of other triads in his letter as one reason to support three parts in verse 22), we will look for some general insight into what God wants us to do to help exvangelicals.

## Mercy and Compassion

The Greek word in Jude 1:22 is *eleeó* and means “have pity on, show mercy to.” The next word is *diakrinomenous* and means “to distinguish, to discern, to judge between.” However, some texts have the word in the accusative case instead of the nominative case, which would change the definition to “doubting, wavering.” That's part of the disagreement about two parts verses three parts. I can see a case being made for both views, but it's not something we need to spend a lot of time on since the language and textual experts can't come to a final agreement. The point for us is that we need to extend mercy to people who have questions and doubts. We might think of these people as early deconstructionists. These are our friends and family members, co-workers, people we know in the community,

who are beginning to have questions and doubts. Don't look down on them. Don't think yourself better than them because you're not doubting. You probably did at some point in your Christian life, so be patient and merciful. Listen to them and address their questions and doubts with love and thoughtfulness.

We also need to make a distinction from the next group that's further down the road to deconstruction and even deconversion.

### **Save from Fire by Snatching**

Another group in the churches Jude wrote to were in more trouble. They had gone beyond doubting and wavering and had fallen for the lies of the false teachers and celebrities who had secretly slipped in among them. These church members, like many today, had fallen under spell of the false teachers and were in great spiritual danger.

So, what's the "fire" Jude mentioned? The Greek reads *hous de sōzete ek pyros* — "others also save out of the fire." The word *sōzete* means "rescue, make safe." Jude is calling what we do a "rescue mission." That's a good way to look at it. What we rescue people from is *pyros*, the fire. The word *pyros* means any kind of hot fire, but Jude meant the word to be understood in a spiritual sense. Jude used *pyros* in verse 7 when he wrote, "suffering the vengeance of eternal fire." Jude's context was of the fiery destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and cities around them who were "set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire." Jude's use of the same word, *pyros*, several verses later certainly had the same meaning. The rescue mission we're on is to save people from the vengeance of eternal fire.

You may remember in the first chapter of our series that I started with the example of former pastor Rob Bell who shocked the evangelical world with his 2011 book, *Love Wins*. Bell, who Time Magazine called "a singular rock star in the church world," questioned whether God punishes unrepentant sinners by sending them to hell. If God does not send unrepentant sinners

to hell, why did Jude write that Sodom and Gomorrah are examples of people “suffering the vengeance of eternal fire”? Why would Jude write that we need to save people from fire? I’ll go with the plain teaching of the Bible. God has called us to rescue people from the vengeance of eternal fire.

How do we do that? We “snatch” (pull) them out. The Greek word is *harpazontes* and means “to seize by force, catch up, snatch away.” That’s what a rescuer would do with someone who was in danger of being burned. They would grab them, pull them out and carry them to safety. That goes to show us the seriousness of our rescue mission with people who have deconstructed or deconverted. They are literally in mortal danger and need rescuing. Does that mean we kidnap people and put them through deprogramming? Probably not, unless they are in a physically dangerous cult. However, the spiritual end is just as bad. Rescuing people from the vengeance of eternal fire is serious.

Jude also includes a warning for the rescuer — “hating even the garment defiled by the flesh.” Here’s how one commentator explains this:

*Believers are to beware lest their mercy is transposed into acceptance, and they themselves become defiled by the sin of those they are trying to help. Jude may have been thinking of Jewish purity laws where one would become unclean by coming into contact with something that was unclean. In contrast, believers will be presented before God “without blemish” (NRSV) in the last day, with every stain removed. Perhaps mercy is demonstrated especially through prayer in cases like these. The text constructs a nice balance between showing love and mercy and maintaining standards of purity and righteousness. Showing love for the sinner does not exclude an intense hatred for the corruption brought about by sin. Furthermore, believers need to beware of getting too entangled with some who sin, lest the sinner influence them rather than vice versa. Thomas R. Schreiner (2012). New American Commentary Vol 37: 1, 2 Peter, Jude. B&H Publishing Group.*

Ask any firefighter about being in the rescue business and they'll tell you it's personally dangerous. Rescuing people from fires means getting as close to the fire as the person they are rescuing. I covered hundreds of fires during my years as a reporter and can attest to the dangers. I also went through firefighter training to report on the process and saw firsthand how difficult and dangerous rescuing people from fires can be. I've seen firefighters overcome by smoke and injured by falling structures. Some firefighters are seriously hurt. Some lose their lives. Rescuing people in danger puts them in danger.

The same is true for Christians who want to help rescue people from the vengeance of eternal fire. Many have gotten too close to the flames and stumbled and even fallen into unbelief. I've talked with former pastors, evangelists, teachers, church leaders and apologists who are now in need of rescuing.

That third way of looking at the text makes sense in light of that danger: "to others show mercy, mixed with fear." Firefighters will tell you that they have a lot of respect for fire and are especially careful that they don't get burned. We also need to respect the

danger of false teaching and be careful that it doesn't burn us. It's wise to show mercy to others, mixed with fear.

The next verse in Jude is insightful: "Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, And to present *you* faultless." Stumbling is a possibility for any believer, but God is able to keep us from stumbling and to present us faultless. That's good advice for us and for the people we're rescuing, but we might wonder how that works.

## Rescue Equipment

Jude warns Christians who "snatch" others "out of the fire" that they need to be careful of the dangers inherent in such missions. Which goes back to the importance of being prepared. One of the things I learned during my years as a reporter was the importance of firefighting equipment for firefighters. The equipment weighs a lot, so strength training is part of how firefighters train. They also learn how to suit up correctly for their battle against the fires they will fight. They also learn the importance of trusting their equipment.



The same is true for Christians who want to rescue people from spiritual fire. Paul wrote about the equipment we need to put on and trust before going into the battle for souls:

*Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and*

*supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints— and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak. Ephesians 6:10-20*

If fighting fires was easy and not dangerous, firefighters wouldn't have to bother with special equipment that protected them and gave them the tools to literally snatch people out of fires. If the battle against Satan and his spiritual forces was easy, we wouldn't need to put on the armor of God. Even as firefighters will tell you about the dangers of fighting fires, we can confirm the dangers of rescuing *exvangelicals*. You need to take it seriously and prepare well.

Jesus and His apostles made it clear that we are in a battle for souls. Jesus won the war by dying on the Cross and rising from the grave. Our job is to fight the good fight. Paul told Timothy to wage “the good warfare” and “Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life.” (1 Timothy 1:18 and 6:12) At

the end of Paul's life, he wrote — “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” (2 Timothy 4:7) Paul also told us how to fight —

*For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled. 2 Corinthians 10:3-6*

Paul told Titus that church leaders (elders) must “be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.” (Titus 1:7-9) Notice the importance of holy living and holding fast the

faithful word. It is through sound doctrine that we are able to both exhort and convict those who contradict.

Unfortunately, that is what's missing in so many churches today and has been for many years. If we are going to be able to really help *exvangelicals*, those who have deconstructed and deconverted, we must be strong in the Lord and His mighty power. We must dedicate ourselves to the great Gospel our Lord has given us. We must be ready to defend it at all cost. There is no greater calling or need in this life.

*You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier. And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. The hardworking farmer must be*

*first to partake of the crops. Consider what I say, and may the Lord give you understanding in all things. 2 Timothy 2:1-7*

## Training Programs

One of the best training programs I know to prepare people to talk with exvangelicals, Nones and other unbelievers is from [Engage 360](#). Their training program is called [Engage Your World: A Practical Guide To Having Spiritual Conversations In Everyday Life](#). You can download the first chapter of the guide at the link above. Engage 360 has online training and in-church training. I highly recommend their programs. They have a unique way of training and helping every Christian prepare to have spiritual conversations with family, friends, co-workers and other people in their community. Engage 360's training is a great combination of practical evangelism and apologetics.

## Apologetics Resources

[Apologetics Book Reviews](#) — We've been sharing reviews on apologetics books for many years. You can look through some of our past reviews at this site.

[The Popular Encyclopedia of Apologetics](#) — Dr. Ed Hindson is one of the apologists who personally helped me during my journey from atheism to Christianity. His *Popular Encyclopedia of Apologetics* is an excellent resource for any Christian who is helping exvangelicals and others with questions about Christianity.

[The Poached Egg](#) — an excellent resource of some of the best apologetics articles

## Student Resources

[Apologetics Study Bible for Students](#)

[Impact 360 Ministries](#)

[Ratio Christi](#)

[Reality Student Apologetics Conference](#)

[Summit Ministries](#)



## Research Resources

**LifeWay Research** — Church Goers Express Hope/Sadness Over Leaders Who Leave The Faith

**LifeWay Research** — Reconstructing Faith in a Deconstructing Culture

**Barna** — Only 10% of Christian Twentysomethings Have Resilient Faith

## Reading Resources

[5 Things about Deconstruction](#)

[Engaging #Exvangelical: Three Tips for Church Leaders](#)

[‘Progressive’ Christianity: Even Shallower Than the Evangelical Faith I Left](#)

[Apologetics for the Next Generation](#)

[Meet Generation Z: Understanding And Reaching The New Post-Christian World](#)

## Summary

As I wrote in the first part of this series: “Our purpose in this new Faith and Self Defense series is to shine a light on a growing problem in families and churches.”

My hope and prayer is that we have accomplished that purpose. The light shines and we see the massive challenge before us. Please know that our prayers are with you as you engage with your family and friends who are on their way to becoming *exvangelicals*. If we can help you, **please let us know**.

*But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light. Therefore He says: ‘Awake, you who sleep, Arise from the dead, And Christ will give you light. Ephesians 5:13-14*

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