



FINDING GOD AGAIN

Finding Hope and Healing After Deconstruction

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Darkness. . .

Is this what You felt?

What You saw?

Was this what it was like on that tree?

All of my pain, heartbreak, fear, anger, pride

Like You, I cried out

ELI ELI LAMA SABACHTHANI?!

MY GOD MY GOD WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?!

Why have you *left* me?

Why am I *so incredibly alone*?

I lashed out

Because that's what trauma does

When you are scared, you

fight

flight

freeze

fawn

faint

And I hurt so many

People close to me

Peopole I love

Like Saul, I persecuted Your people

I wanted retribution under the guise of moral superiority

May justice roll on like a river!

When I needed *peace* that surpassess all understanding

And so you knocked me off of my high horse

And onto a humble donkey

And you said,

Let there be Light.

Forward

If you are reading this, that means you or someone you know has experienced what people are calling “**deconstruction**.” Before I start, if you are someone who was gifted or recommended this book, please know what amount of deep courage and radical love it took for the person to recommend this to you. A common thing I tell clients as we start therapy is this: this journey is not easy, nor will it be “fun,” but it will be worth it, I promise you that. All you need to do is lean in and trust the process. Things tend to get a little worse before they get better, but they do tend to normally get better.

There will be more on that later. Now back to the topic at hand. Deconstruction a big word, let me tell you. It seems that no one really knows what that word really means. A friend of mine once called it, “**excavation**.” It is a digging up of what is there and observing the usage.

I like to use the analogy of buying a new house. Sometimes, while we may have a firm foundation, we realize that due to the many storms of life, water has damaged our roof, or termites have entered our walls, or perhaps we just need to redecorate.

Deconstruction is like that. It’s observing what’s there and what may have negatively influenced what’s there. It’s a natural stage of our spiritual development, according to psychotherapist James Fowler. He calls this his fourth stage of development, which is a time of individuation and reflection (Lownsdale, 1997).

On the other hand, St. John of the Cross may call this the Dark Night of the Soul. This is a time when God seemingly separates Himself from us. It is in this space that I learned, like St. John of the Cross, that, “in the dark night of the soul, bright flows the river of God.”

This is my journey following that river.

Following this will be some pictures during this time that I took. Others will be poems. Sprinkled throughout will be some passages that may or may not relate. While they may hold personal meaning, ultimately, the meaning is up to you.

I hope you enjoy this journey of me finding God again. I hope it serves you or your loved one well.

-DCR

References

Lownsdale, S. (1997). Faith development across the life span: Fowler's integrative work. *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 25(1), 49–63.

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Introduction

Imagine for a moment that you decide to go camping in Yosemite with some of your closest friends. You've been looking forward to this trip all year. These people have become your family over the years. This was the perfect time to escape the constant noise and distractions.

Everything has felt so difficult for so long, you think to yourself. It seems like everyday there is a new tragedy. Everyday there is a new issue coming to light in our country. Not to mention the ever increasing stress of finances due to inflation.

Your vision shifts quickly until you are surrounded by trees. A few hours have passed. You and your friends have made it to your campsite. The tents are pitched, the fire is started, and one of your friends has just finished making some campfire soup. They hand a bowl to everyone and you sit in your comfortable camping chair, laughing, singing, and enjoying the company.

Another hour passes, and the conversation suddenly stops. It's much quieter now. "Shhhh! Just listen!" Your best friend suggests. Crickets. Literal crickets. The crackling of the fire. You stare into the flames and your eyes follow the smoke as it rises almost as if a mysterious force is telling you to look up.

Wow, you think in amazement. You have *never* seen anything like this before. You quickly recognize the Little Dipper, Big Dipper, and Orion's Belt. One of your friends points to a bright star mentioning that it's the North Star. Another friend points out another constellation. Their voices slowly tune out and you are stuck there, just looking in wonder.

When you eventually come to, all of your friends have gone to bed already. But something in you is asking you to stay awake. In fact, you feel something within you pulling. It's a small feeling at first,

but it eventually grows until you cannot do anything but follow it. You decide to trust it.

You walk for what seems like an hour. Eventually, you find a road. *Interesting. We didn't see this road when we were driving up.* You walk for a bit and the road forks off. On one side, you see a well-worn path. There is a sign that reads, "The Road of Pleasing God." You look on the other, this one seems to be less used. Even with just the light of the moon, stars, and your flashlight, you can tell that this road may take a bit of time to go through it. The sign reads, "The Road of Trusting God."

At first you decide to go down the Road of Pleasing God. That sounds correct, after all. But something in you doesn't feel right. That inner voice is telling you to go the other way. As you go down the first road, you get flashes of memories. Some where you are reading your Bible and doing daily devotions in the morning. Another where you are serving at a soup kitchen. And more of you serving at church in various contexts. The first time you see those memories, you remember how happy you felt. How many friends you had. The support of so many people. But then you relive the memories and see how much you had to mask around *everyone*. You were never able to be authentic. In fact, you didn't even really believe in God.

You quickly decide to go down the other road. Afterall, you've been down the Road of Pleasing God before. Maybe it's time to do something different.

This road is *dark*. It takes you what feels like all night to get through it. You have to walk through some brush, climb some boulders, heck, you almost fell off the side of the mountain during a tight pass. You look ahead and you see a warm light. *Must be some people. I'll be safe there.* You persevere and you move forward.

Eventually, the path before you becomes nonexistent. You look behind you, and the path you thought you were on has disappeared. The warm light you saw before is gone. All you have is your flashlight and the stars. Fear sets in. You feel your heartbeat increase, your breath becomes more shallow. You even start to perspire a bit.

Be still and know that I am God.

You have quoted that verse many times when you were anxious before. However, something feels different about this one. It feels more *instinctual*. It doesn't feel like that came from you, but from some *One* else. You decide to listen.

You can hear the running of some water nearby. You head in that direction, and you see a beautiful river. The starlight twinkling in the water as it runs. It provides more light for you than your flashlight does, so you decide to turn it off.

As a kid, you remember learning about how early civilizations used to be built next to water sources. Surely, if you continue to follow this river, you will eventually be led to some people. That feeling from earlier tugs at your gut. You decide to follow it, yet again. It feels comforting.

What feels like hours pass. Eventually you see that warm light again. It's just ahead. The light quickly turns into a nice woodsy lodge. You walk up and see a large wooden door. On the door frame you read:

The Room of Grace

In the Dark Night of the Soul, Bright Flows the River of God.

You walk in the door, and you see all of your friends and loved ones inside. *Oh thank God*, you think to yourself, *I'm home*.

Loosely adapted from The Cure by Bill Thrall, Bruce McNicol, and John Lynch

I.
Beginnings

In the beginning, was You,
and You were with God,
and You were one with God.

What if you sent yourself to this exact time to learn something?
What if you stood with God
As a beautiful soul
And you asked to be born
to this family
in this place
with this situation
with all of the pain
the grief
the joy
the laughter

Are you sure, my Child?

In the beginning, was God
And God was with you.
And God was one with you.

In the Garden

“Can I do something a little bit different?” I asked my professor, subconsciously thinking that I could choose an activity that I enjoyed like drinking coffee with a friend or a youth kid but putting a spiritual emphasis on it. At the time, I didn’t even consciously realize what I was doing.

“Daniel. What if you considered the disciplines of silence and solitude?”

“I don’t want to do that.”

“Then that’s how you know it’s what God wants you to do. Your discipline will be solitude.”

When I was a senior in my undergraduate program at a Christian University, I took a spiritual discipline class. In this class, each of us chose a discipline during the first week. We were to become an expert on that discipline and teach the class. Begrudgingly, I practiced solitude all semester, not knowing that I was practicing a discipline that would serve me well for my future, but is also a key discipline that Jesus practiced Himself.

When you read the Gospel narratives, pay attention to what Jesus does before or after speaking to a large crowd. For example, during the story of Jesus feeding the 5,000 (which was actually closer to 15-20,000 people as Scripture and cultural context state that only the *men* were counted, and we know that women and children may have likely been present as well), Jesus leaves to go to a solitary place (Matt. 14:13, Mk 6:46, Jn. 6:15). There are many key moments of Jesus’ life such as this, when he retreats to a mountain or a place to be alone to pray to God and spend time in solitude.

But there are two that I find personally beautiful. First, in the wilderness before He starts His ministry, then at the end of His ministry before he is crucified. In the wilderness, Jesus confronts Satan who tempts Jesus in three ways.

The first being control over the physical with alchemizing stones into food.

The second being control over the angels, and as a result, God, to save His life.

The third being control over people and the kingdoms of the world – dominion.

In the first story, Jesus is alone in the wilderness.

I will talk more about this story in a later chapter.

At the end of His ministry, Jesus takes some solitude with his closest friends, and yet, feels alone.

“While you practice and research solitude, consider this question, ‘Is it possible to be in solitude while you are surrounded by other people?’”

My professor answered that question during my presentation, but to this day, I cannot remember what he said. However, this story of Jesus at the end of his ministry in the Garden of Gethsemane has given me my own answer.

In short, the answer is *yes*. But perhaps not in the way you might think.

Those of us who are familiar with this story, may remember how Jesus takes with him Peter, James, and John to a place called Gethsamane, which in Hebrew, translates literally to “oil press,” which suggests that the garden was a grove of olive trees.

In the ancient world, olives were pressed down until they became an oil, which many of us still use today in much of our food. However, there was a specific usage for individuals in the ancient Jewish world, which again, we still utilize today: anointing. In order to use olive oil for this purpose, you would have to consecrate, or pray over and set the olive oil apart, making it useful to anoint others. For those familiar with the Psalms, which would have been every Jewish male, olive oil has often symbolized gladness and joy. Psalm 45:7 states, “Therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions,” (NRSVUE). In general, there were a lot of uses for olive oil, which provides a lot of meaning for this garden that is translated as “olive press”.

What became a place of grief and stress for Jesus has an underlying air of anointing and holiness. It is in this place where Jesus states, “My soul is deeply grieved, even to death, remain here, and stay awake with me.” Then in typical grief fashion, he threw himself to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me, yet not what I want, but what you want.” (Mt. 26:38-9, NRSVUE).

First, from a clinical perspective, it sounds like Jesus was battling with some really dark and understandable anxiety and depression. In the Luke account of this story, it states that Jesus sweated blood, which only happens when

someone undergoes some incredible stress under a clinical phenomenon called hematohidrosis (Jerajani et al., 2009).

That sounds intense.

Hematohidrosis has two causes. One religious, one nonreligious. The nonreligious causes come from systemic disease, vicarious menstruation, which means bleeding from somewhere other than the uterine cavity when someone with a uterus is menstruating, excessive exertion, psychogenic, and other unknown factors (Jerajani et al., 2009).

The religious cause, Jerejani continues, is a stigma, which formerly meant, “a spot, a sign, a wound, or a mark branded on a slave.” Following Christ’s crucifixion, the wounds on palms, soles, and the crown that Christ suffered on the cross were reproduced, but were believed to be supernaturally imposed by God (2009).

Again. That sounds intense.

Now, while the religious cause is fascinating in and of itself, the nonreligious cause is what we see happening in the Garden of Gethsemane, specifically, the psychogenic cause of hematohidrosis. In simple terms, extreme psychological and emotional stress can cause someone to *bleed blood*. The writer of Matthew quotes Jesus as saying his soul, “is deeply grieved, even to death.” Jesus was seriously depressed.

When people are experiencing depression, often all they need is someone to sit by them. They need someone to be near them. They need someone to be *with them*. I find it beautiful that one of the names for Jesus is, “Emmanuel,” or *God with us*.

In my own personal experience, I have worked with emancipated youth as a lived experience mentor for over 4 years of my life. Additionally, I had walked alongside dozens of middle and high school students as a youth pastor and youth mentor. I have even led young adult small groups and walked alongside young adults through harrowing times. Each of these journeys have taught me one important lesson: It does not matter what I say or what I do. It does not matter if I have the perfect prayer or the perfect Bible verse or the perfect bit of wisdom. What does matter is if I am *with them*. Can I come alongside them and show them *love*?

Bob Goff in his beautifully written book, *Love Does* describes a story in his first chapter when he tried to drop out of high school and move into the mountains. Immediately, his youth leader dropped everything to *be with Bob*. This experience failed (as someone who works with teens, not surprised). Bob learned quickly that he was unprepared and did not have the money nor supplies to effectively live in the mountains. He was glad his youth leader went with him as it gave him a way to get home safely. Later, he found out the secret that his leader was *just married and about to leave on his honeymoon*. But, as Goff says, *that's just what love does*.

It goes with.

It joins.

It stays awake when your best friend is grieving.

Jesus cried out, like many of us do, to three of his closest friends. He just wanted them to *be with him*, and yet they had difficulty staying awake.

Like me, it seems like Jesus was hoping to be in spiritual community when God was wanting Him to be alone. It was here that Jesus says one of the deepest and boldest prayers that I believe is often overlooked.

Lord, not my will be done, but yours.

In other words, God, I am not super happy with what I think you want to do, and I know what *I want*, but I am going to be obedient, nonetheless.

As my professor said (yes, same one as before), it is at this time that the Son's will was in opposition to the Father's.

Jesus' will was different than God's.

Of course it was, though, right? I mean, who would *want* to die? Who would *want* to die in one of the most gruesome and archaic ways that humanity has ever created? One that is incredible painful and prolongs the course of death as you slowly suffocate, with your arms and legs broken so you can't hold yourself up. In front of your mom, your best friends, your brother, your followers, and everyone else you came to save.

And yet, Jesus was obedient and submitted.

Now, let's be clear. It is not often that God is going to call someone in the 21st Century to something similar. But *truly following Jesus* does call us to die to ourself. In another verse, Matthew quotes Jesus and states, "Whoever wants to

be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me,” (Mt. 16:24, NIV).

Having grown up in the Catholic and Lutheran churches, this verse has often been used as a way to talk about how bad I am or how my wants and desires are not important.

I don’t think that is what Jesus was talking about at all. I think what Jesus was getting at is something less self-defeating and something that has become more empowering for me over the years. It has also helped me understand Jesus in the Garden in a different light.

While this will be what is discussed throughout this book, the essence is that Jesus was not telling us that our desires and our wants are pointless or worthless. Instead, Jesus was pointing us to a larger reality.

In order to be a disciple of Jesus, we need to *follow him*.

Following a Rabbi was a big deal. You could not do that halfheartedly. You gave up everything. You followed a Rabbi 24/7. You slept near them, ate the same food, learned their mannerisms, and their sayings.

You became like them.

Meaning, *to follow Jesus, you must become like Jesus.*

Now you may have heard that many times growing up and you may be telling yourself, “Yeah but that’s impossible. Jesus was perfect.”

Okay sure. Jesus is and was perfect. But does that mean that we can’t *try*? Does that mean that we can’t at least do the work to try and become like Jesus? To be His hands and feet on this earth?

In John 3:30, John the Baptist states, “He must become greater; I must become less,” (NIV). Now, John is saying this because John baptized Jesus, who was his cousin (No seriously. Go read Luke 1. I always find that fact fun.). Since then, Jesus had started to baptize the crowds, so people have begun going to Him and have left John, who previously had a crowd following him.

John the Baptizer is an amazingly humble character. From the start, he was never concerned with his own glory nor the amount of followers he had (probably would have been a hipster influencer on Instagram no doubt). All he cared about was pointing towards Jesus. The angel Gabriel even stated that he would be like Elijah in Luke 1.

John had learned the lesson of dying to oneself before Jesus even told his disciples. Dying to oneself does not mean to deny your wants and needs, but to essentially have an ego death. It’s to hold your inner child in the arms of your True Self (the one that is found in Christ) and tell your Shadow Self that they no longer need to protect the innermost part of you that was originally damaged.

We have all been hurt at some point in our life. We all have trauma. Carl Jung came up with this concept of “shadow work” in modern psychotherapy as an effort to try and guide individuals to healing these wounds.

So, this book will be diving into these wounds and ways to heal them.

We're going to take time acknowledging what those look like by observing the temptations of Jesus.

We'll take time diving into the "seven deadly sins" and the Ego, as well as what the gnostic gospel of Mary Magdalene might be able to teach us, although not canonical.

We will observe David in his flight away from Saul, clinging to God.

We will pay close attention to Job and his journey losing everything, but still deciding to truly bless God.

We will read the story of Esther as an effort to take our own liberation into our own hands, trusting God along the way.

We will look at the story of the Prodigal Son and King Solomon as they search for every way to be healthy but finding "nothing new under the sun."

And finally, we will observe Saul being knocked off of his [redacted] onto his [redacted] to guide God's newly chosen people into the next era.

So let's begin, shall we?

Let's head on this journey of finding God again.

Two

Speck
Plank
Depending on your view
They are the same

Sometimes when it feels like there is something in our eye,
We realize that nothing was actually there
I wonder if we often focus too much on imaginary specks
In the eyes of others
Instead of seeing that
Eyes are the portal to the soul

It's easier to judge
Than it is to love
To assume we know what someone else is experiencing
Rather than putting ourselves in their shoes
And realizing that we are really all the same

I think that's what Jesus was trying to tell us
The plank in my own eye is more important
Because my plank
May be creating dust
Which gets into the eyes of others

And if that dust gets in the way
Of one's soul portal
Then it gets in the way of seeing
How Christ is in all
And Christ is all

So I sit there
And I rub my eye
Only to realize
There was nothing there

References

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What did You do to bring this upon Yourself?
What can You do to prevent it from happening again?

Questions with a good intent
But lacking in compassion
In humanity
Questions from a man in a chair
As I lay on a couch staring at a stale ceiling
Wondering where it all went wrong

I lived a life -- a good life
One where I did My best
To follow the Light that was within Me
The one that the darkness could not understand
I came to love and be Love
To bring people into union with one another --
And with God

And yet they hated Me
They did not hear Me
They were threatened by Me
I threatened their system
Their system of indulgences
Ways to buy one's spot in Heaven
Their system of *avarice*
of *hubris*
of *lust*
of *gluttony*
of thoughts and prayers rooted in *inaction*
of *insatiable wrath*
of *vainglory*
of *despair*

I wanted to bring hope and joy
Life and life to its fullest
All they had to do
Was *follow* Me

So what did I do to bring this upon Myself?
I lived into Who I Am

and I would do it again

for the sake of Love



When we experience something difficult -
let's call it trauma
Our brains go to
 a lower place
 an older place
 primordial
 reptilian

A part that releases chemicals
That can get us to safety
While it slowly deteriorates our brain -
 with toxic cortisol

Our brains are hard wired
 for survival
 for safety
 for connection
 for wholeness

Elijah ran from Jezebel wanting to die
Moses ran from Egypt after killing a man in cold blood
David was often on the run and hiding from Saul
Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were sent to burn in a furnace
Paul and Silas were jailed, flogged and beaten
Jesus was persecuted by religious authorities
Hung on a tree meant for Rome's worst criminals
With a crown of thorns on his head
And his clothes divided amongst the soldiers

And yet God met each one.
Elijah was given food, water, and rest,
Moses was given power to free the slaves,
David was given protection and sustenance,
Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were not burned,
Paul and Silas were set free,
Jesus died, and yet rose again to free all of humanity from the power of death

When we experience trauma
Our brains may go to a lower place
 But may our souls reach

A Higher Place.



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Jerajani, H. R., Jaju, B., Phiske, M. M., & Lade, N. (2009). Jesus Christ experienced hematohidrosis while praying in the Garden of Gethsemane before his crucifixion. *Indian Journal of Dermatology*, 54(3), 275–276. <https://doi.org/10.4103/0019-5154.55645>