

The Deconstruction of one's faith; When young adults fall away, 1 of 3

Hi all,

The phrase 'de-constructing their faith' is used to describe adults in their 20's-40's, but especially in their 30's, who have 'fallen away from the Lord', though raised in a Christian church and family. They now reject their faith claiming to be either atheist, agnostic, or 'I just don't believe that anymore'.

They are deconstructing what they used to believe. Just like renovating a home, the first step is to tear out anything that is old, dangerous, out of date, or unwanted. But just like a derelict home, they are left with it de-constructed and abandoned. They are in a rut, knowing more what they don't believe than what they do.

For parents who were in a 'good' church when raising these children, it is agonizing

It is hard for some not to take it personally, wondering where they went wrong. If not taken personally, it is at least emotionally distressing because the parents were saved out of many of the things now embraced by these adult children. But they have a free will and are responsible for their own lives as adults.

Additionally, many parents of these now adult children have also de-churched themselves, having been hurt or had other experiences that turned them off to the auditorium church system. We find many joining house churches, not out of that hurt, but seeking the genuine, with real relationships - doing church as the apostles and people of the New Testament celebrated the gathering of the saints - finding genuine friendships and relationships in Christ, walking through life together.

Many haven't rejected Jesus in their heart of hearts, though they may sometimes claim otherwise, but rather the package and structure through which they learned of Him. They discovered auditorium church taught them more *about* Him than actually *knowing* Him. They had a church experience not a God experience on Sundays.

We took the kids to church every Sunday, what happened?

Very often when they were young their parents came (or came back) to the Lord, and brought their young family to a good 'Bible believing' church. They were hoping their children too would 'accept the Lord' - and they assumed that was happening via the nursery and Children's Church, and later Youth Group. Some of these children went on to Bible schools, intern programs, missions trips; all designed to reinforce the faith their parents hoped their children had.

But somehow the faith of their parents didn't fully become their own. Every child has to go through that process of making the faith of their parents, their own. But kids are expert at seeing double standards and hypocrisy, and because they are in school they know what a structure that values appearance and performance looks like. You can teach a kid history, but you can't get them to love history. You can teach them math, but you can't get them to love math. You can teach a child about Jesus, but you can't get them to know Him. Kids know how to perform within a structure.

The thing that was foundational was this: They trusted their parents to be right. Many did walk with the Lord or at least had experiences with the Lord. They trusted in what they were told, in the structure, in the system. But then they grew up and out of that system. Mom and dad's voice wasn't the only one anymore; who to believe?

They grow up...

Once these children get outside the confines of that church, they discover in college or work that good people from many different religions are alive and well on planet earth. They start

to see truths in other religions and philosophies, which is eye-opening for them, because in their Christian education no one taught them about other religions and belief systems.

Unfortunately, in Christian schools and more than that, in the homes, there is little if any education about different religions and philosophies. The home is the perfect place to talk with pre-teens and teenagers about other religions and the other voices 'out there', before they get 'out there'. But for most, they move very suddenly from a sheltered Christian home and Christian school and Bible believing church into the world. And they don't have the knowledge to filter and reason through their faith, nor any depth to their own walk with Him.

That said, it isn't just about knowledge.

These teens must know, actually know the Father and Lord, and from there they will be secure learning of other religions and philosophies. They need to develop at home their own time with the Lord - in worship, study, thinking and writing on the things the Lord causes to 'stand out' and catch their attention. Deuteronomy 11:19 tells parents to remember to talk of the Lord with (not to) their children: "...when you sit in your house, when you are walking along together, when you get ready for bed at night and when you arise in the morning."

The auditorium church separates families as soon as they go through the door, and without a personal walk with the Lord, many of these children will, once removed from the structure, fall away.

It isn't unlike someone in the military or a professional athlete, that while in their program are submitted to an external structure demanding physical exercise, but once out of that program with that external structure removed, they stop exercising and get fat and lazy - all because they never developed their own internal discipline while they were in that structure. It never became part of them in their heart.

That is the same with many of these now adult children - church provided a structure, but because they didn't have their own discipline and walk with the Lord, once the structure was removed, so goes their faith. Once that is done, other voices enter in, they start deconstructing their faith plank by plank, examining what they liked or didn't like...

There are examples of adult children in scripture who 'deconstructed' their faith

The prodigal son clearly went through a time of deconstructing his faith, but do we recognize the rich young ruler was in the midst of doing the same thing? Paul's close companion Demas, in the end forsook him, for Paul said 'he loves this present world'.

Next week we will look at some of these people and be able to relate to the process going on inside of them. Remember this however, God the Father is a Spirit, and He works first and foremost out of view, deep in a person's heart, in their deepest thoughts. Paul said in Galatians 4:19 that he was 'travailing in birth again, until Christ be formed in you'.

It is a process, and don't be discouraged by the outward appearance of an adult child who is deconstructing their faith - trust Christ is in fact in them, dealing with deep things that can take years, even decades to work out...but He is faithful to continue that work.

More next week, until then, blessings,
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Deconstructing one's faith; 2 of 3: Prodigals, rich rulers

Hi all,

I've been sharing about a process commonly called (in the US) 'deconstructing one's faith', used to describe adults in their 20's-early 40's who were raised in church, and now reject church and for many, the Lord.

The Rich Young Ruler

The Rich Young Ruler is found in Matthew 19:16-22 examining his faith and his relationship with his parents.

He came to Jesus asking: "Good master, what thing must I do to have eternal life?" And Jesus responded: "Why are you calling me good? There is no one good but God." Right at the start Jesus seeks to settle the issue. Who do you think I am? Am I Lord, liar, or lunatic? By calling me good, since there is none good but God, are you calling me God? The young man was silent. So Jesus approached the question from another angle.

In this one exchange we find the dilemma of those deconstructing their faith: Those who reject what they grew up with, but don't yet know what to do. In their heart of hearts they only know they still want eternal life, even if they won't admit it openly, down in their heart they are afraid of dying and want their destination secure.

In anger and hurt they may lash out at their parents, their church, or openly state they reject their 'religion', but in their hearts there is fear, confusion, and again, knowing more what they don't want than what they do want.

Having tried the constraints of 'religion', they enter a world of dysfunction. Sometimes that dysfunction is evident by the broken relationships and instability in life. Sometimes dysfunction is hidden behind pursuing all the gold and glitter the world offers, leaving them empty inside - they know this, but aren't at peace, and they aren't at a place yet where they can humble themselves and return to their childhood faith.

Consider the young man

This young man was rich and we are told later in the conversation, had many possessions. Not just money, but possessions too. Yet for all he had, he knew he did not have eternal life. He told Jesus he did all that was required of him in his religion, and his parent's religion no doubt - yet he knew he didn't have eternal life.

He was searching for something to do. "What must I do?", he asked. He had kept all the commandments since he was a child, but was empty. He knew that religion did not hold eternal life, did not fill his heart with purpose.

The adult who has left his faith is wrestling with the claims of Jesus. Many times they don't reject Him, but rather the church package through which Jesus was presented. If they could only know the Lord without the packaged show of the auditorium church and its culture. This young man had a form of religion, but he was smart. He knew it was appearance oriented, performance based, and it left him empty though he kept all the commands since he was a child. He was deconstructing his faith. He was trying to figure it out. What must I do?

That is what they are wrestling with; the claims of Jesus

The role of parents in the lives of their children include the fact that every 'first' their child experiences in life (to a certain age) will come through their parents. The stove is hot - that first time learning that fact came through their parents. Eat your vegetables they are good for you - that 'first' came through their parents. Brush your teeth to keep them healthy - that 'first' came through the parents.

As I child ages a parent wants their child (or should want their child) to learn of the topic of sex from them, not their school, and not their friends, and not from a porn site. A parent wants their child to learn about money and budgeting and working hard and saving from them, not leaving that education to be taught by the world's advertisers and friends. Parents want their children to understand the proper context of the issues of life - from eating properly to sex and money and relationships. Parents put everything into proper context and understanding. Including God.

A parent presents their child with 'this is God' and 'I want to teach you about Jesus, who loves us and died for us' - and that is fine until that child becomes an age where other people have other ideas about God. Even if that child had genuine experiences with the Lord, making Him 'their own' doesn't automatically happen.

Many of us know friends or relatives who perhaps as a child or teen experienced the Lord

But they aren't walking with Him now. Sometimes we wonder how we were so changed by the same experience and they weren't? It's because one can have an experience with God, but they let it be just that - a moment in time. Just having an experience with the Holy Spirit doesn't mean that person gives their heart and life to God.

And that's the plight of the rich young ruler. He had kept all the commandments. He was a 'good boy' by all measurements of what a good Jewish boy was in the first century. He was probably a teen here, late teens perhaps, yet still searching. Here he comes face to face with God in the flesh and then walks away.

God or the world?

"Sell your possessions and follow Me" to him, meant putting all his wealth and the pride that goes with it, on the sacrificial altar of his heart, and walk away. Many men grow up thinking becoming a Christian will make them weak. They think faith is for women because they've never reconciled being a man of faith with being able to work hard and get ahead in life for themselves and their family. To many men, their faith is expressed by working hard and providing for their family which is well and good, but doesn't contradict being a man of faith.

This rich young ruler was confused as well. Was Jesus God? He hadn't answered His question. He is good, but would the young man go so far as to say Jesus is God? And if He is God, I want God, but not to the point He will change my life. He would weaken me as a man, as a person wanting to be successful in life. I like the world. How can I be a person of faith and still be successful? The young man couldn't reconcile those questions.

Verse 22 says the young man "went away sad, for he had many possessions."

The word 'sad' does not properly convey this man's emotions. It is from the root Greek word 'lupe' which means 'to be in deep emotional pain, distress, and grieving'. It is used to describe the pain in childbirth.

It is used again in II Corinthians 7:9 to describe someone who is repentant to the degree they are in agony over their sin. It is used in Ephesians 4:30 when Paul tells us not to grieve the Holy Spirit - don't cause Him deep emotional distress by our actions. It is used in John 17:30 of Peter who was grieved, deeply emotionally hurt that the Lord had asked him 3x if he loved Him.

The rich young ruler was devastated over the question of Jesus and what he would have to do to have eternal life - he loved the world and his status and his possessions. The thought of returning to the core of his faith, of leaving the show and appearance of religious acceptance for the genuine, caused him deep emotional pain - like childbirth in his soul.

This pain describes what many are going through who were raised in faith, have experienced the world, and know down in their hearts 'mom and dad are right', but are too proud and too much in love with the world to humble themselves and return to their faith. They are not happy people. They mask their pain, they mask the wrestling going on in their hearts. They may be angry and need to be left alone to wrestle within themselves - they need the time to process and will at some point future, return to ask questions or reconcile.

But there is hope...

While today, the Lord may not require everyone with possessions to sell them all, He does require us to 'sell out' to Him in our hearts. The question becomes; "Do we add Jesus to our busy life, or do we give our busy life to Jesus?" Sometimes it starts as adding Him to one's life, and over time becomes giving that life to Him.

Church tradition says this Rich Young Ruler was the man we know as Barnabas, ministry companion of Paul. In Acts 4:34-37 it says Joseph, who was such a good man and 'bridge builder' in relationships,

the apostles instead called him 'Barnabas'. Barnabas means 'one who calls people together to closer intimacy and comfort'. We see in Acts he sold all his possessions and gave the money for distribution by the apostles so that the needs of others were meant. In Aramaic his name means 'son of a prophet'.

He was the first one to approach the former Saul of Tarsus to discover if his new faith was genuine in Acts 9, and then introduced (Paul) to the apostles. They sent him to Antioch in Acts 11 as their representative to check on new Greek believers there.

We cannot prove Barnabas was the young man of Matthew 19 by chapter and verse, but still, we see young men like him 'selling out' for the Lord. Men like Matthew himself who was a teen or pre-teen when he met Jesus. The apostle John is estimated to have been about 17 when he became one of Jesus' disciples.

The Lord works over time, deep in the hearts of people...and next week we'll look at another who wrestled with the faith of his family, and had that moment when scripture says he 'came to himself'. May it be so with all our wayward children! Until next week, blessings,

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Deconstructing one's faith; How to pray, 3 of 3

Hi all,

Last week we looked at the Rich Young Ruler and his internal wrestling with the faith of his parents, culture, and personal values. Today the Prodigal Son who also 'deconstructed his faith', and how to pray for those doing the same.

In Luke 15:11-32 Jesus includes the story of the Prodigal Son as part of a larger teaching found in the first 10 verses in this chapter, about 100 sheep and one gets lost and separated from the flock, and about a woman who has 10 coins and loses 1 and searches her whole house to find the 1. So that sets the context - the prodigal son is the lost coin, the lost sheep.

The unhappy son

We find a man with two sons, and the younger man asks for his inheritance so he may go out and start his own life. In ancient Israel the eldest son received a double portion of inheritance. (Dt 21:15-17)

The fact the younger brother wants his money now so he can go out and start his own life, tells us he does not want to have his older brother as his boss. He had grown up with his older brother being groomed to take over the family business and property knowing he would receive half whatever his brother got upon the death of their father. He wanted out. Now. And the father gave it to him, perhaps understanding his need to prove himself, but certainly sad at his son leaving the business.

How many young people (the older I get the more I define young people as those under the age of 40, lol) are today re-thinking their upbringing and making the decision that they cannot go on like they were raised. They want out, and that's what this young man did. How many young people have found organized religion stifling, restrictive, and out of touch? How many like this young man say 'I can't do this anymore', and leave?

The results reveal he needed that family structure

In Luke 15:13-16 we are told he went to another land, and there wasted his money on 'riotous living'. This is where he gets the name 'prodigal son'. The word 'prodigal' is Latin for 'wasteful', but more than that, meaning to move one's life in a way which wastes. It refers to a lifestyle of extravagance beyond one's means.

In verses 14-16 we are told there was a famine in the land and he had to find a job. He got the lowest job available, feeding pigs, which were unclean to a proper Jewish lad such as himself. He was the lowest of the low. We are told in v17 in the King James Version, at his lowest point of hunger and need, 'He came to himself'.

The Greek reads like this: "However, to himself having come, he was saying..." He was finally having an honest conversation with himself about his situation. Verse 17 says in that inner struggle talking to himself, he remembers the lowest servants in his father's house had plenty of food whereas he had none. He was starving. The pigs were eating, but not him. No provision, no true friends. All alone. He had to reach that low point that he might 'come to himself'. That he might have that honest assessment of his life, faith, and family relationships.

He needed that

He was finally having the conversation with himself that he should have had before he ever thought of leaving his home. If he would have had faith in the Lord within the confines of his older brother being his boss and 2x as rich in his inheritance than he, the Lord would have developed character within him and blessed him in future plans. But he didn't consider what he had and the value of the stability of his life. He didn't value his family, his faith, nor the values of his upbringing. All that was coming back to him now as he saw that even the pigs had something to eat where he had nothing.

Still thinking within himself he develops a plan. This is important. He determined he would return to his father, humble himself, and just ask for a job somewhere on the estate. Those deconstructing their faith will at some point begin to reconstruct their faith, just like this young man. They will think through a plan to return.

That which was a point of anger and injustice before - that the faith of his family meant his brother got 2x as much as him and that he would be his boss, was processed within his heart. He had to go through great difficulty and hardship before he was at peace with the situation, but he did process it. He had to do it by himself, away from his faith, his father, his brother, and how he saw his future with them in his life.

We know how it ended

He returned, his father saw him in the distance as he was approaching and ran to him, had a great party, and the elder son was offended. But our point is that the young man returned.

We must allow those we love who are currently deconstructing their faith to continue their processing. They are not alone. The Seed they have in them is incorruptible. God is a Spirit and it is in the unseen realm of their spirit that He wrestles with them. This can take years.

Galatians 4:19 says that Paul was 'travailing in birth again until Christ is formed in you'. Paul is in intercession for them like being in childbirth, but the issue is 'Christ being formed in (them)'.

Paul's prayers for the Ephesians in 3:15-20 and 1:17-20 were for their inner being, where no one but the Father see. That the Father would by His Spirit, make them strong and give them revelation of the unfathomable love of Christ, and that He would give them the Spirit of Wisdom and Revelation in Him so they may know the depth of His invitation to them in Christ. That's powerful. That's how we need to pray for the 'de-constructors'.

Right now they may be demolishing their faith, their upbringing, and even lashing out at the injustices of their early life. But the Father is still there, dealing with them by grace and mercy, showing them things, helping them get rid of the error and hurt they experienced, and rebuilding their faith one plank at a time towards a future return and reconciliation. And in that day as in our example above, there will be great rejoicing.

He is faithful. Pray according to the prayers above and as prompted for your loved one, and watch the Father work....

New subject next week, blessings,
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