

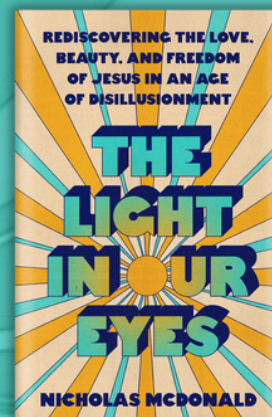
6 Keys to Reaching the Dechurched

The Light in Our Eyes
6-Week Study for Small Groups



WATERBROOK

BY NICHOLAS MCDONALD



Week 1: Reaching the Dechurched Requires an Attitude Shift

Over 40 million Americans have walked away from church over the past decade. 40 Million. That's more people than those who came to faith in the First Great Awakening, Second Great Awakening and Billy Graham crusades combined¹. That means, odds are, you know someone who's walked away from the church, and maybe even said they're done with faith altogether.

Yet, at this same hour, there seems to be a striking new interest in faith and spirituality. College ministries around the country have reported a renewed hunger in faith and spiritual issues. We've witnessed the amazing conversion of several prominent voices in our culture, celebrities and thinkers alike. Personally, over the last decade, I have seen many people walk away from the faith, and I've prayed over them with tears. But at the same time, strangely, I've seen far more people come to faith as well, finding renewal and hope, many for the first time in their lives.

What's going on?

In her foreword for my book, *The Light in Our Eyes*, Karen Swallow Prior compares this moment to that of a few centuries ago. Quoting Historical Theologian Alister McGrath, she writes:

'The late Middle Ages saw the church going through a period of real doctrinal confusion. People were not sure what they believed. They weren't sure why they believed it, either'...It was truly a time of crisis for the church. Yet that crisis, mercifully, led to much needed change through both the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation that followed...What American evangelicalism is going through now can, just as it has in the past, lead to renewal, refinement, and even reformation. I believe this deeply—not just despite but even because of the disillusionment within and toward the church we see today.'

So good, KSP! And I think that's exactly right. I believe we are living in a similar period - a great rearranging is happening in the American church. And I think, largely, that is a good thing. I'm not saying it's easy. What I am saying is this: it's important we see the hand of God in this. As one speaker at the most recent Lausanne Conference - a gathering of evangelicals all around the globe - said of her own continent: "Europe is not post-Christian. It is pre-revival²."

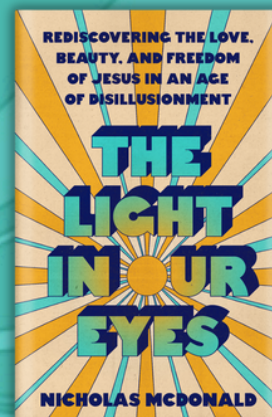
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I love that perspective. Love it!

Many already are beginning to talk about America as a post-Christian world, or a “negative” world that is hostile to faith. That is surely true in some respects. But here is what I can tell you from my own perspective, as someone who walked away from the church for several years and went through a “deconstruction” process myself: my negative attitude toward the American church was partially about a hostility to Jesus, and to God’s word, yes. But it was also, in large part, a rejection of a kind of cultural Christianity that I still reject today. I needed to reject that version of faith in order to discover the love, beauty and freedom of Jesus for myself.

A few weeks ago, a good friend of mine asked, “How should I think about the relationship between deconstruction and sanctification?” (Sanctification is just a fancy word for becoming like Jesus). I had to think about that question for a while. Finally, I wrote him back, and I said, “Well, I think deconstruction can be a little bit like being a teenager. Every teenager goes through a healthy, normal stage of development when they psychologically want to ‘differentiate’ from their parents. I think a lot of what we call ‘deconstruction’ is folks trying to get through this healthy stage of spiritual growth - differentiating themselves from the faith they’ve been handed, in order, ideally, to return to it in a healthier way.”

And what this means is this: I don’t think the 40 million people who’ve left the church are hopeless cases. I think this can make sense of why we are seeing so much dechurching and revival happening simultaneously: we’re witnessing millions of people enter into an awkward stage of spirituality, where they are unsure about the American faith package they’ve been handed, and they’ve not yet decided where they’re going to land. They’re differentiating. Which means they are crossing a bridge: they can grow through this process, or they can fall off.

So I actually don’t believe we are witnessing 40 million people suddenly becoming hostile to Christianity. I truly don’t. In fact, 51% of dechurched people say they would be open to coming back to church with a personal invitation and the right kind of community³. I think what we are witnessing, right now, are 40 million people whose faith is an extremely fragile place - much like a teenager. And, as you know, the way a parent deals with a teenager’s differentiation in that awkward stage makes all the difference. If a parent reacts with hostility, or an attempt to control, that differentiation stage is going to go poorly. Perhaps, even, the relationship will die.

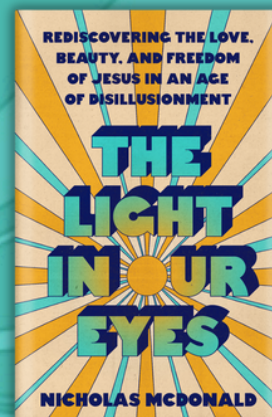
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Now, sadly, I fear this negative, hostile reaction has largely been the attitude toward the dechurched that I've read and heard from the evangelical world: lots of anxiety. Lots of name calling. Very few of us are doing the work we're called to in Galatians 6: "If anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." (Galatians 6:1-2, ESV). Or, more simply, which of us are seeking to obey this admonition from Jude: "Be merciful to those who doubt" (Jude 22)?

Mercy. Gentleness. Restoration.

These are not words I would associate with the evangelical response to the Great Dechurching. So I want to bring these words back into the conversation. That's why I wrote *The Light in Our Eyes*. I believe this conversation needs more mercy. More gentleness. More understanding of where the dechurched are really at. Because it's not all one big lump experience.

But how do we change our attitude toward the dechurched? There are a few things I'm going to say about this over the next several weeks. But let me start here: We don't have a magic switch we can press to reset our attitudes. Except that, we sort of do. And that's prayer.

If we want to reach the dechurched, we need to begin to pray for them by name. Do you regularly pray for your dechurched friends and neighbors? Because ultimately, the Great Dechurching and rearranging can, certainly, become a Reformation moment, much like the moment Alister McGrath describes. But that, ultimately, is a work of God. So, as obvious as it seems, the first step to reaching your dechurched neighbor or family member is to write down their name. Begin to pray for them, by name, every day.

I believe in Jesus' power to use your prayers for revival and renewal in your friends. But here's what else I believe about prayer: I also believe in Jesus' power to use our prayers to clear away the cobwebs of our own cynicism about our world and our neighbors. Prayer is a posture of hope. And that is the stake I'd like to put in the ground, right now. Let's have this conversation filled with prayer. Let's commit to a tone of hope, expecting that Jesus is on his throne and He wants to revive our loved ones. Because if we can, I think the great dechurching isn't just the end of something. It's the beginning of something new.

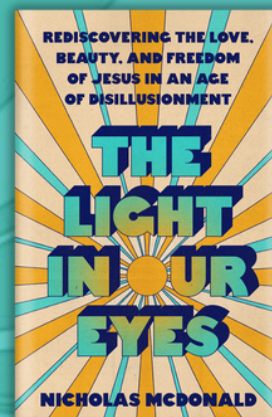
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1

Davis, Jim; Graham, Michael; Burge, Ryan P.. The Great Dechurching: Who's Leaving, Why Are They Going, and What Will It Take to Bring Them Back? (p. 5). (Function). Kindle Edition.

2

Trevin Wax, "Reconstructing Faith" podcast, "Seven Big Challenges Facing the Church Worldwide"
<https://www.namb.net/podcasts/reconstructing-faith/seven-big-challenges-facing-the-church-worldwide/>

3

Davis, Jim; Graham, Michael; Burge, Ryan P.. The Great Dechurching: Who's Leaving, Why Are They Going, and What Will It Take to Bring Them Back? (p. 28). (Function). Kindle Edition.

For Discussion

Icebreaker: Tell about a time when you quit something. Was that a good thing or a bad thing, on the whole? How about the experience itself?

- Re-read Galatians 6:1-2. What stands out to you about the way Paul tells us to serve people with doubts? What might that look like? What does that NOT look like?
- When you think of your friends or family members who've left the church, or are thinking about leaving the church...who comes to mind? Commit together to pray for them.
- When you think of the word "deconstruction", what comes to mind?
- What do you think of the idea that deconstruction could lead to spiritual growth and maturity, if it's done in the right space? What would it take for that to be true for someone?
- How do you feel about that term 'Evangelical'? What do you think of, when you think about that term? Do you consider yourself and Evangelical? Why or why not?
- Are you surprised by the fact that 51% of dechurched people say they're open to returning to church? If so, why? If not, why not? What does this statistic mean for us?
- Take some time to pray for your dechurched friends, neighbors and family members.

Reading:

Read *The Light in Our Eyes* Foreword, Chapters 1-3

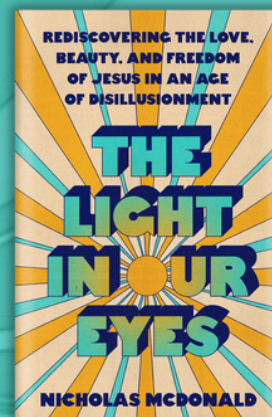
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Week 2: How to Begin a Conversation with Your Dechurched Friend

One of the overwhelming things we ask ourselves when thinking about our dechurched friends and neighbors is simply, “Where do we start?” For some, the answer is apologetics. We need to start, the thinking goes, by answering the defeater beliefs of our dechurched friends. So, step one: read up on our arguments. Prepare our minds. Now, just to be clear: this is good! It’s good to have clear and compelling answers in your back pocket for the dechurched.

But is this where we start?

I’d argue...not so much. Beginning the conversation with your dechurched friend as an *argument* is going to make both of you defensive. I’m not throwing away apologetics altogether. I just don’t believe apologetics is *step one*.

So what is step one?

Step one is: have a conversation that helps you determine what *kind* of dechurched friend you’re talking to.

One of the mistakes I think we’ve made in the Evangelical world regarding the dechurching movement is this: we’ve lumped everyone into a single category. The popular word we use for this is ‘deconstructing’. But over the years, I actually think the *truly* deconstructing are only a minority of those who’ve dechurched...*even if they themselves use the word ‘deconstructing’*. As I’ve spoken with the dechurched, I’ve quickly come to find there are the dechurched...and then there are the dechurched. Determining what kind of dechurched friend you have will set the entire trajectory of your conversation, so it’s absolutely key that we do this first.

In one of his comedy specials, Nate Bargatze tells the story of the worst comedy show he’s ever performed. It was a large business conference in Tampa, and Bargatze told all of his greatest jokes. No laughs. Nothing. At the end of the night, he concludes, “Sorry, I used to be able to do comedy. I guess I lost it.” To which the CEO responds,

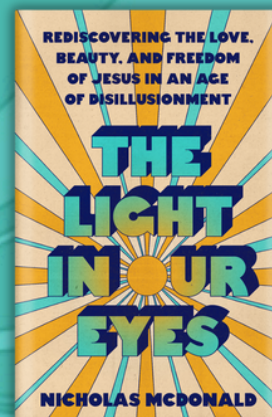
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“No, it’s not your fault. I realized halfway through your set that most of my employees don’t speak english.”

Well, yeah, that’ll do it! Listen: trying to speak to your dechurched friend without understanding *why* they’ve dechurched is a little like that. You can speak to them in your language all you like...but if you don’t understand *their* language, it’s all for naught. Treating every dechurched person as though they’ve deconstructed their faith will, in a strange way, propel them *more* toward deconstruction. “If everyone is saying I’m abandoning my faith for the things I’m experiencing...well, maybe I *am*.” I’ve sadly seen this happen countless times...but it doesn’t need to be this way. I believe there are *millions* of people who’ve stepped away from church but don’t need to be pushed toward deconstruction. One simple conversation that sets the trajectory for your work with your friend can change all that.

So, in order to help you have this first conversation, I’d like to give you four broad categories to think through. Which of these categories does your dechurched friend belong to? You’ll have to nuance these categories of course, because no one fits perfectly. But I’ve found that giving these four categories to my dechurched friends not only helps me understand where to take the conversation next...often, my dechurched friends find these categories incredibly helpful for articulating where *they* are in their faith journey, maybe for the first time. This, too, creates a positive atmosphere for the rest of our conversations.

1. The Doubting.

This is the person who is motivated to hear our apologetics answers. They don’t feel angry at the church, or personally burned. They are highly motivated to believe. However, there are cracks in the pavement. They have lingering doubts. Fears about faith, and themselves, they’ve never expressed. Maybe they’ve been shunned, or treated like an apostate, for being intellectually curious about faith.

These folks *do* often want gracious, apologetics answers to their lingering doubts and concerns. Great!

Our task, then is to surprise them with a gracious, thoughtful answer to their doubts. Sometimes, after I spend some time with these folks, I ask, “So are you really *deconstructing*, or are you just experiencing the normal intellectual growing pains of following Jesus? Are you simply feeling doubt - and maybe even curiosity - about your Christian faith?”

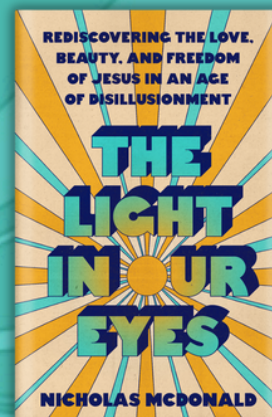
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Often, people in this category feel relieved. They're not apostate after all...they simply need to know their questions are valid, and they've been thought through - oftentimes - by centuries of Christians who came before.

2. The Disillusioned.

When I present this category to people, I often receive the biggest “Aha!” moment. The disillusioned do likely have all sorts of doubts about faith. However, these are compounded by a growing feeling of disillusionment with what they've seen in the American church.

I personally believe - and statistics bear this out - the Disillusioned are a huge swath of those who've dechurched. Two decades ago when I left the church, this is where I was. I'd received good, thoughtful answers to my questions. That wasn't the issue. The issue was the mismatch I saw between Jesus' teaching, church history, and the American church culture I was participating in. I wasn't disturbed that we American Christians were sinners, or even that prominent leaders often fell. I was disturbed by the fact that American Evangelicals did not even seem to have the same *mission* as Jesus, the early church, or even our protestant forefathers and mothers.

So do you know what I tell these folks who are disillusioned?

“Great! Your faith is trying to grow deeper.” For my faith to grow two decades ago, I had to grow past the vision of faith I'd been handed. I need to grow deeper into the global, historic church's understanding of the gospel and our global mission to experience, embody and extend God's kingdom to others.

This is why in my book, *The Light in Our Eyes*, I spend several chapters doing just this: I help us American Christians situate ourselves in history. How did we adopt our current vision of the Christian life? Then I contrast this with our historic protestant forefathers around the globe. This is what I needed as a disillusioned Christian: I needed someone to reintroduce me to Jesus' bigger, better and more beautiful vision for the church.

3. The Deconstructing.

The truly deconstructing are those who are not simply doubting, or disillusioned, but have made a leap - consciously or unconsciously - into a secular framing of Christianity. To oversimplify things a bit, the truly deconstructing Christian has relocated all of the authority of the Christian faith in the self. This is

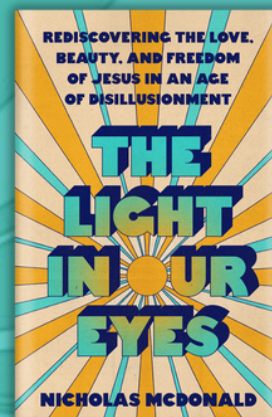
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why, often times, deconstructers will describe their deconstruction as redecorating a room. Someone else decorated this room. Now it's my turn.

Years ago, as a truly deconstructing Christian, I would have said something like, "I love the teachings of Jesus. I don't like Paul. I don't like the Old Testament. I don't like the church."

Now, let me say: it takes some very skillful conversations to work with this person, but there is hope. They may be deconstructing, but they have not deconstructed. There's still something to work with, here: the life and teachings of Jesus.

That's why, in my conversations with the truly deconstructing - and in my book - I spend all of our time with the Jesus of the four gospels. Where did he think authority came from? What was *his* vision of the kingdom for us? Does it really square with the idea that Christianity is...my own personal room? Jesus, after all, doesn't describe the Christian faith like a room. He describes it like a house that can be built on sand, or his word (Matthew 7:24-27). He describes it like a large village - a community - that we all belong to (Matthew 19:29). And he describes it as a place where we should be continually repenting for our cultural and sinful biases. After all, the first word of Jesus' kingdom announcement is: "*Repent*, for the kingdom of God is at hand!" (Matthew 3:2).

4. The Departed.

The Departed are those who no longer see Christian faith as valid.

They are not hopeless cases.

For one, the departed may never have understood the gospel in the first place. They may never have seen the beauty of Jesus' dreams for them, or the world around us. That's why my task is often to reconnect their deepest longings with the true gospel of Jesus.

So often, I hear those who've departed from faith tell me they've done so in the name of love, beauty or freedom. But I don't shun them for wanting these things. That's because what this person needs is to see that their deepest dreams for love, beauty and freedom can *never* be achieved through secular categories. Only Jesus and His kingdom can bring us the love, beauty and freedom our hearts long for.

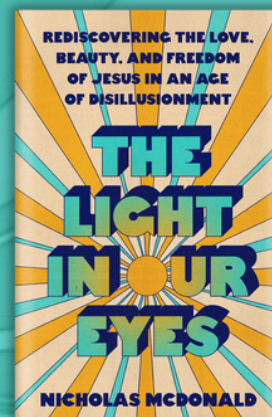
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This is why, in the last third of my book, *The Light in Our Eyes*, I try to show how the secular vision for these things is a dead-end. But Jesus doesn't call us to deny these good desires in us.

Rather, he calls us to see that He is the deepest fulfillment of them.

Conclusion

If you feel overwhelmed by all this, I understand!

That's why I wrote my book, *The Light in Our Eyes*. It's meant to walk you (and your dechurched friend) through each of these conversations in a way that's taken me years to figure out for myself. I truly hope and pray it helps many find hope and restoration in the true gospel of Jesus...through you.

For Discussion:

Icebreaker: Have you ever had an experience of being disillusioned by something outside the Christian faith? The "veil came down", so to speak? What was that like?

- In Mark 9:14-32, he tells the story of Jesus healing a demon-possessed boy. Read the interaction between Jesus and the father in verses 23-24. What is the father's relationship to faith in Jesus, in this moment? What does this statement mean?
- In your own words, take turns defining each of the four terms above: the doubting, the disillusioned, the deconstructing and the departed. How can defining our terms "lower the temperature" in our conversation about deconstruction and dechurching? Why might that be important?
- Have you ever found yourself in one of these spaces? Are you in one of these spaces now? Talk about what that was like for you.
- Many people use the term "deconstructing" to refer to all four of these experiences. Why might it be important to offer clearer language to our friends struggling with faith?
- As you think about your dechurched friends and neighbors, where would you guess they are on the spectrum? Would you be willing to have a conversation with them to ask more directly where they find themselves in these categories?
- What would be your posture toward someone who is doubting? What might that conversation look like?
- What about with someone who is feeling disillusioned?

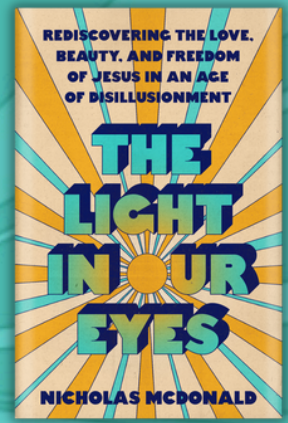
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- What about someone who is truly deconstructing?
- What would a conversation with someone who has departed from faith look like?
- Take some time to pray for your dechurched friends by name.

Reading:

- Read *The Light in Our Eyes*, Chapters 4-6

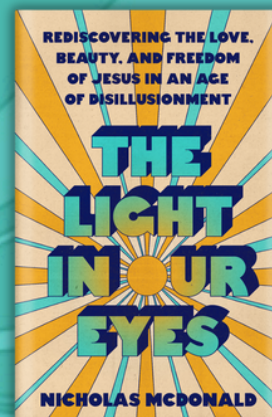
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Week 3: The Magic Sentence I Wish Every Christian Would Say to Their Dechurched Friend

I know there are lots of debate right now about whether Christians should show “empathy” to people, and I get these. I really do. I’ve been in situations where empathy is a code for: “Don’t tell me what I need to hear. Only what I want to hear.”

On the other hand, I’ve been in situations where someone is trying to share about processing their disillusionment with the church: their pain. Their trauma. Their questions. Rather than meeting that person where they are, I’ve heard (and seen) story after story of we evangelicals saying: “Well, you’re wrong. Here’s a book about why you’re wrong.”

...which is not exactly what someone wounded or disillusioned by the church needs to hear.

And look, I get it. I spent a couple of years being that second guy on a college campus. When students came to me with questions, I answered them. Not a problem, right?

Wrong.

Because my students’ weren’t looking for answers...not at first. They were looking for something else. Each time I spoke with them, I could tell I was missing the mark. It was only after trying (and flopping) with this “Answers-Forward” approach that I finally uncovered a sentence that changed everything.

But first, let me tell you about marriage counseling.

Many years ago, Brenna and I went to some marriage counseling (it’s okay. We have the perfect marriage figured out now.) I will be honest with you. The counselor irritated me. We would bring up an argument, and then...she would ask me how I *felt* about it. See, these were the kinds of people I was warned about at Worldview Camp: relativists. She didn’t believe in *truth*. She believed in *feelings*.

So I’d show up to these counseling sessions as shall-we-say not exactly primed for personal transformation.

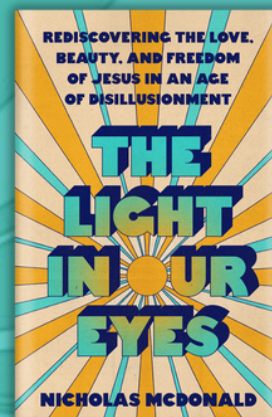
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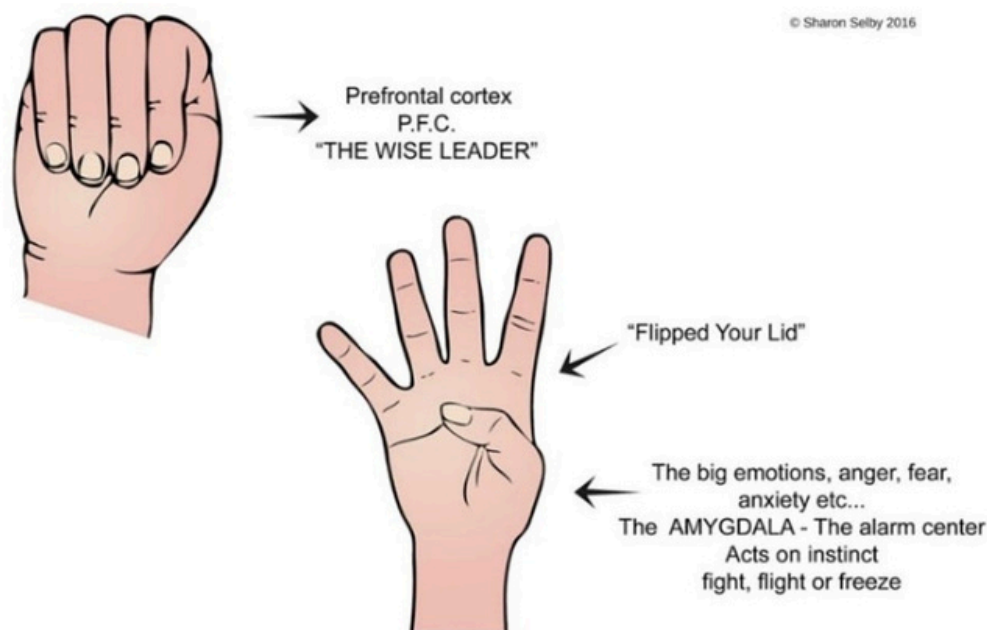
Over time, however, something funny happened. Our counselor started to drop some truth bombs about our relationship...which made my claim that she was some loosey-goosy limp-wristed espresso-drinking postmodernist with half a brain feel just a bit ...flimsy itself.

And here was just the thing about her, the really annoying thing: *she was way more effective* at dropping truth bombs than I was. When she said something, I was ready to listen to it. I trusted her. Something about our conversations made me ready for her - sometimes difficult - words to me.

Why?

Here's what I learned, over time. It's not that our counselor thought truth was unimportant. It's just that, being a counselor, she knew how the human brain worked.

Here's a helpful little illustration:



Adapted from Dr. Daniel J. Siegel's Hand Model of the Brain found in *Mindsight: The New Science of Personal Transformation* (Bantam Books, 2010)

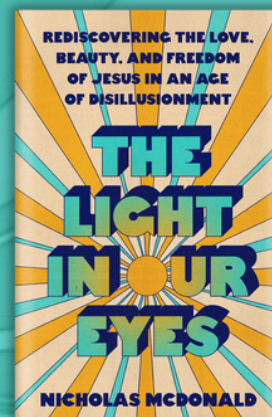
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This is a picture of our brain in two different states (not like Michigan and Indiana but like states of mind. If your brain is in two different States this will probably not be as helpful to you). In the first state, you're calm. You can think. You can reason. If someone is saying something to you, you're able to process it.

In the second state, you feel threatened. You have big emotions. And in this state of mind, you *are literally unable to think logically*.

It wasn't that our counselor didn't believe in truth. But she did know when - and how - to tell the truth most effectively, in a simple, two step process:

1. first, feel this person's experience. Really feel it, so that they feel safe and fully understood. They feel that you feel it. That's how much you feel it.
2. second, give perspective.

So what does all this have to do with reaching our disillusioned, dechurched or deconstructing friends? Well just think about Billy the Deconstructing Barista. If Billy is willing to have a conversation with you about his church experience, he's probably feeling pretty nervous.

- Maybe he's never been allowed to ask questions, or express doubts.
- Maybe he's never told anyone what happened at that church - yes, the church everyone loves.
- Maybe he's afraid you'll think he's not a Christian and maybe he never was one at all.

These are *big fears*, people.

So I cannot tell you how life-giving it is when Billy the Barista, fearing your judgment, anger, or even worse...a book recommendation attacking their deconstruction process (sheesh), experiences this instead:

1. You listen with empathy (or compassion, if you want). You try to get inside the shoes of Billy the Barista, until you can say the magic sentence that unlocks everything else: **"I understand why you'd feel that way, Billy the Barista. I really do."**

1.b Make sure you really mean this. Billy can tell if you're just using this as a segue to something else. And take a long pause. Or end the conversation.

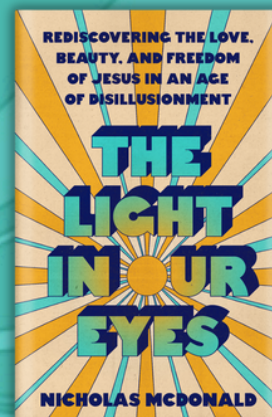
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Or sit with them and try to summarize things and ask, “Do I have this right?” Feel what they feel.

1.c DO NOT skip to step two with a, “but here’s what I think.” Okay. Understood?

1d. I’m serious. This probably takes about a year of time. As my pastor friend Sam Haist says, when working with deconstructing folks he spends most of their first sessions saying, “Man, that’s so hard,” or, “I actually agree with you on that.”

2. After taking time to think about this person’s experience, this person feels safe. *Now* they are open to your perspective. Presumably that’s part of why they’re talking to *you*. So be gentle. But don’t be timid. The vast majority of people who are questioning faith do *want* some form of guidance. So, now is the time to give it.

This is why in my book, *The Light in Our Eyes*, I spend the *entire first half* of the book sharing my own deconstruction story. The pain. The awkwardness. The hatred and anger I felt toward the church. The confusion. And yeah, I’ll be honest: my evangelical friends who’ve read the book have been a bit twitchy about this first half.

But it. is. crucial. It’s crucial. There’s no moving to step two without step one.

But I *do* move to step two. In the second half of the book, I share my story of finding renewal in the ancient, global, historic gospel of Jesus. And I tell the stories of many others who’ve experienced that as well. I tell those stories to help people imagine a future where their doubts and frustrations don’t lead to dechurching. Instead, they lead to restoration.

Renewal.

A sense of being re-storied by Jesus.

But you can only get to that point with your struggling friend after you can say this one, magic little sentence that changes everything: **“I understand why you’d feel that way. I really do.”**

Watch as Billy the Barista’s shoulders relax.

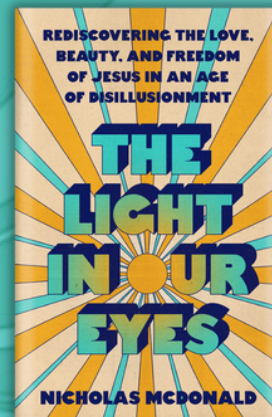
6 Keys to Reaching the Dechurched

The Light in Our Eyes 6-Week Study for Small Groups



WATERBROOK

BY NICHOLAS MCDONALD



His defensiveness subsides.

His heart opens.

That's the magic sentence I want you to say to your disillusioned friend.

Even if it takes you a year or two of listening to get there.

For Discussion:

Icebreaker: Have you ever been in a situation where your “lid was flipped?” What happened...both externally and internally?

- In John 11, Jesus raises his friend Lazarus from the dead. But before he does, he spends some time interceding with Lazarus' sisters in verses 32-37. Talk about Jesus' reaction. If he knew he would raise Lazarus from the dead, why does he react this way?
- Some of us tend to feel more comfortable in the “empathy” space in our response to pain. Others feel more comfortable in the “perspective” space. What is your go-to posture?
- Why is it important that we offer both empathy and perspective? What happens when we offer empathy but never offer perspective? What happens if we offer perspective without first showing empathy?
- According to the article, what should be the goal of your first several conversations with your dechurched friend? How can you get to that place?
- Is there such a thing as “false empathy?” What does that look like? How do we make sure that our empathy comes from the heart?
- What are some ways you can relate to your doubting, disillusioned, deconstructing or departed friends' faith journey? Is there anything to which you could say, right now, “I understand why you feel that way”? What?
- Are there other spaces in life where you may need to exercise more empathy? How about contributing more perspective?
- Take some time to pray for your dechurched friends.

Reading:

- Read *The Light in Our Eyes*, Chapters 7-10

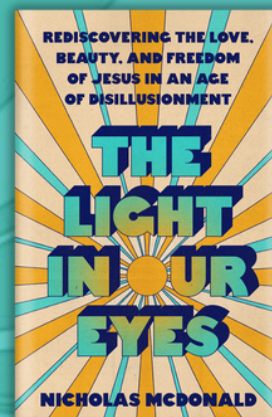
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WATERBROOK

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Week 4: Reaching the Dechurched Through Hospitality

Sometimes we think of people who've dechurched in terms of their ideas: they had ideas about Christianity. Now they have ideas that are secular. True enough. But something we often forget about people who've dechurched, or are deconstructing, is that we humans are as influenced by *communities* as we are by ideas.

In fact, you could say: sometimes our ideas *follow* our communities.

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How many people have dechurched or deconstructed primarily because they've simply found a warmer, more hospitable and less judgmental community outside of the church? My hunch, based on plenty of interactions with dechurched folks, is that this is actually a far bigger driver of deconstruction than the ideas behind deconstruction itself...even if that community is simply an online hoard of voices who can relate to and affirm their gripes with the church. That - at least for a time - is scratching at that real human itch we all have to be really *understood*.

Now, it's not that the ideas of the dechurched stay the same. It's that the community often comes *first*, and the ideas *follow*...more like a slow erosion than a systematic and thoughtful rebuilding of a house. Sometimes that's how our ideas work: by osmosis. Not all the time. But I've seen it.

So what does that mean for those of us who love people outside the church?

It means that while it's good to be prepared to defend the Christian faith against loud online deconstructing voices, the truth is, our arguments will rarely find a home in the heart of someone who hasn't experienced a compelling Christian community. This isn't meant as an argument against arguments! What I'm trying to say is: we need to focus *at least* as much effort on creating *compelling communities* for the disillusioned as we do on creating compelling arguments for faith, and against heresy.

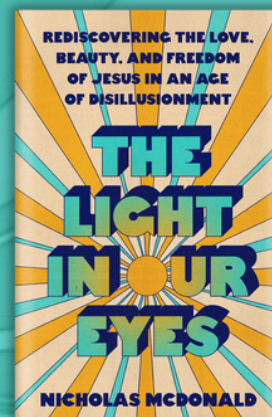
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This, after all, is what Jesus did for us, isn't it? He "tabernacled among us" (John 1:14). That's not simply because Jesus had some great ideas, and adding humanity to his divine nature was the best vehicle for those ideas. It's actually more profound and mysterious than that. Jesus walked among us because he was the ideas he was talking about. He was truth, embodied.

In the same way, I'd argue that whatever ideas we'd like our dechurched neighbor to believe *can't* completely be communicated in abstraction. Part of the truth of these ideas is found in the way they are embodied in Christ's community: the church.

That's all a fancy way to say: we need to be people who practice hospitality toward our disillusioned and dechurched friends. We need to fully live into a compelling, Christ-shaped community that offers far *more* warmth and grace than the world. That's something, sadly, I can confidently say most folks who've left the church have never experienced.

So, what does that look like? I don't have a systematic plan for your life, but here are some ideas I've found useful over the years:

1. Consider spending time in their space. Last week, a friend and fellow minister was telling me about working in the U.K. with lots of expats. Most of them, he said, were ex-vangelical and feeling some level of disillusionment with the American church.

"The pivot point for them," he shared, "was when I would go into their spaces. I can think of one man in particular who I asked to help me with a project, and that meant spending some time in his space. That was when things changed for him. He became open to conversations about Jesus, and the church, after that."

In many ways, this is a harder and braver way to show hospitality. It requires us to leave spaces where we're in charge, and enter into spaces where others are in charge. But this was the way Jesus' exercised all of his hospitality toward others. "The Son of man", after all, "has nowhere to lay his head" (Matthew 8:20). What a humble guy! Jesus - Lord of the universe - constantly put himself in spaces where others were in charge.

It's no wonder people felt compelled by him (and offended!).

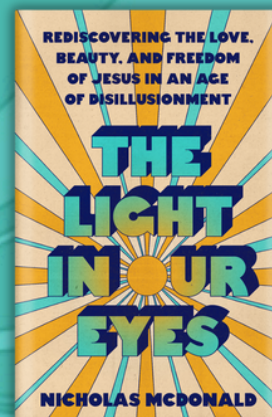
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2. Find your “front porch”. Two years ago, Tim Keller wrote a compelling article based on some of Dutch theologian Abraham Kuyper’s observations regarding ministry in a post-Christian context. Kuyper begins by describing the purpose of the Jewish temple “forecourt”: a place where those not committed to the Jewish faith could spend time, have good conversations, and explore the shape of faith without being believers themselves.

In that article, Keller argues that Christians need to build more “forecourts” in society: places where people can feel the Christian faith and see it’s shape, before they commit to it. To put it in modern language, he argues, churches need to be about the business of building more “front porches:” “Congregations must build their own church porches where they can serve lemonade to outsiders who are not yet ready to come all the way into the ‘house,’ but where they can be prepared to do so.”

I fully agree with this, and I’m thankful to be around lots of people doing that work: building “front porch” institutions, and building “front porch” rhythms into the life of the church (like a q&a with dinner).

But for those of us who aren’t in ministry, or building institutions, how do we create “front porch” spaces for our dechurched friends?

Here’s the easiest, most natural way I’ve found to do this: *form or join a common-interest group*. That could be:

- A group of people who love weird indie movies (I’m in one of these).
- A running or biking group.
- A group committed to the dignity of creating sock puppets.

It almost doesn’t matter what it is. It doesn’t even have to be a formal “club” or organization (though it can be, which often gives far more opportunities to build bridges that wouldn’t otherwise exist).

If you don’t have time for a group, just figure out what you and your dechurched friend both enjoy...and get a group of people together to do it! Even if it only happens once a season, that’s still a huge step: Whether it’s golfing, working out, creative writing or simply working in your favorite coffee shop, you can create a makeshift “front porch” where deeper conversations about life are natural and non-threatening.

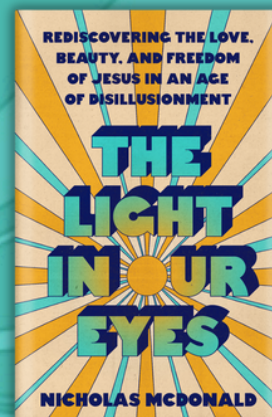
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3. **Host a party.** In my book, *The Light in Our Eyes*, I tell the story of my friend Luke the Dirt Scientist. Luke was “out” on church his freshman year of college. But after about a year of spending time with RUF (the ministry I was part of), Luke decided to become a Christian.

How did Luke receive this profound understanding of Jesus’ love toward him?

That’s what I asked him one day of his Senior Year in the cafeteria with the stir-fry (the best cafeteria). I asked him what, exactly, had recaptured his interest in Christianity and compelled him to seek out Jesus for answers. I was thinking of a couple of really great sermons I’d done, and I was thinking about how I’d led some very excellent Bible studies with him.

And do you know what he said?

He said: “It was probably the night we made pizzas at your house. It was like just five of us and it was super awkward but I just loved it.”

“Um, no,” I said. “I asked you what really helped you become a *Christian*. You know like a sermon I preached or something. Or something I said or something. Or something profound I wrote to you or something.”

“No, that was it. The pizzas. Obviously hearing about Jesus was key. But when we made pizzas at your house, I thought, ‘I’m in. This weird little community is what I’m looking for.’”

What I wanted to say was, “SERIOUSLY!? The stupid pizza night? That was lame!”

But what I said was: “That is very beautiful, Luke.”

For Luke, the merciful love of Jesus embodied - just five of us, making pizzas at our house one night - demonstrated the power of the gospel to him.

And I’ll be honest, here’s what I was thinking that whole night: “This is not a good event. This is not going well. People are talking about math and one kid is only talking to my dog.” But Jesus still used this to reach Luke’s heart. Maybe the weirdness of it was part of it. I don’t know. But here’s the moral of the story: it doesn’t even have to be a *good* party.

It just needs to be a group of Christians finding joy in life together, as best as they can.

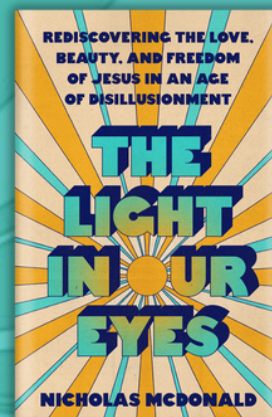
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The point of all this isn't to overwhelm you, and I know some of you are feeling that right now. These are ideas, not commands.

Could one of these work for your life, now?

Who do you have in mind?

What would it look like for you?

If we're to effectively bring people into the Christian community, we need to be honest with ourselves: do we have a community worth bringing people into? Are we creating those spaces? My hope and prayer is that as we rethink the ways we reach a post-Christian culture, we're also finding a sense of restoration and renewal in the church for ourselves.

Creating hospitable communities isn't just effective.

It's what Jesus dreams about. For us. For them. For the world.

For Discussion:

Icebreaker: What's a memorable party you've been to? What made it memorable?

- Of the three practices listed in chapter 10 – Communion, Confession and Hospitality – which most resonates with you?
- Which of these three practices would you like to grow in? What would that look like over the next six to twelve weeks? Be as specific as possible, and ask your group to help you brainstorm. What is one habit or rhythm that could be the first “stepping stone” toward making this part of your life? It doesn't need to be a radical shift in living. Think small, simple, concrete and consistent.
- **Read Matthew 9:9-12.** The first thing Matthew does after being named a disciple is throw a party at his house...with sinners and tax collectors. Back this situation up, a bit. What are all the things that had to be possible for this party to happen? Go as nitty-gritty as possible.
- This article claims that sometimes, ideas follow communities. Do you agree or disagree? How does this happen, if it happens? Why does this happen?
- Why do you think so many people find the church to be an *inhospitable* place?

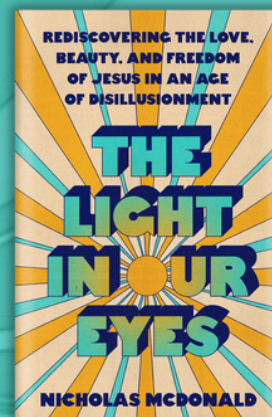
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- Why is it that Jesus “tabernacled among us?” Why didn’t he simply write an essay and let it float down from heaven? Why does Jesus spend time in our space?
- What would need to change for us to be a warm, welcoming community?
- Of the three ideas in this article, which most appeals to you...or even to us, as a group? What could this look like for you, starting this week?
- Taken from another angle, which of these three things would be most appealing to your dechurched friend/friends?
- Take some time to pray for your dechurched friends.

Reading:

- Read *The Light in Our Eyes*, Chapter 11

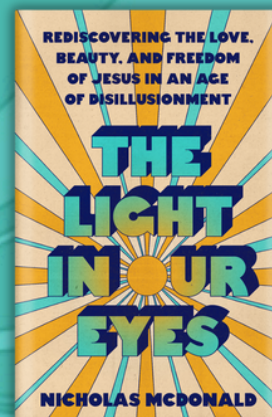
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Week 5: We've Way, Way Overcomplicated Evangelism

I think when most Christians hear the word “evangelism”, we think of a certain type of person. Or, we think of a set of techniques or very intense arguments or philosophical principles we need to memorize or little drawings we need to make to help people feel and believe the gospel. But over the years, I’ve come to believe we’ve made evangelism – or “re-sharing” the gospel with our dechurched friends - far, far too complicated.

But before I say why, let me back up and ask: which gospel are we sharing?

If the gospel we’re trying to share with people is about escaping the world to go to heaven by believing in a certain set of doctrines, then evangelism will always, by necessity, be incredibly complicated. How do we get people motivated to listen to us? How do we describe our complicated system? How could we possibly present this dire proposal to our friends and family?

The gospel of escape is incredibly difficult to share with people. But I don’t think that’s because we’re cowards, or because people are too sinful and wicked to receive it. Rather, it’s because the image of God in people is always going to reject the gospel of escape. We are creatures, made for a created world. Any gospel which demands we care less about this will always violate the image of God inside of our non-Christian neighbors. And so if our gospel presentation has nothing to do with the life we’re actually living, and the created order God made, and the art and culture and circumstances we care deeply about, then our evangelism will necessarily be manipulative, complicated, and offensive to the *imago dei* inside of our neighbors.

However, I don’t believe the gospel is a gospel of escape. The gospel is about Jesus renewing everything.

And if that’s true, re-sharing the gospel with our dechurched friends is incredibly simple. It’s not easy, mind you. But it is simple. The most effective evangelists, in my experience, have three basic qualities:

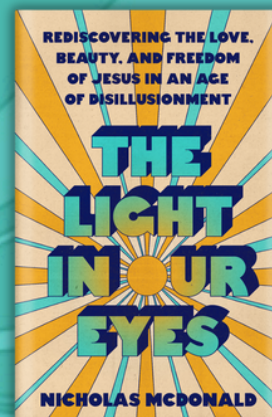
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1. **They believe that everything in life is about Jesus.** When your low-income neighbor finds miraculous provision, that's Jesus. When your friend is compelled by the beauty of music, or a sunset, or a film, that's Jesus calling out. When your coworker feels the darkness of life because their marriage is hard, that's Jesus calling to them. The best evangelists see all of life - every piece of culture, creation and community - as pointing to Jesus.
2. **They have enough intimacy with non-Christians to see where Jesus is at work in their lives.** Because they know their non-Christian friends and neighbors, and they believe Jesus is sovereign over every aspect of life, the evangelist sees one hundred connection points between the passions, circumstances and conversations they have with their non-Christian friend to Jesus.
3. **They have enough courage to name the ways Jesus is at work.** The loving evangelist is able to say boldly to their non-Christian friend, "The darkness you feel is Jesus drawing you to himself. The art, music, films and experiences you're compelled by is Jesus drawing you near. The freedom you're seeking is found in Jesus. The justice you're fighting for is found in Jesus. The love you can't find anywhere else is found in Jesus."

It's really that simple.

And it's really that complex. Yes - this means every time we present Jesus, we'll need to present him uniquely...in the same way Jesus himself demonstrates all through the gospels. When Jesus presents himself to different people through the gospels, he always shows himself to them in unique ways, based on their own desires, their own pain, and their own circumstances. Citing NT scholar D.A. Carson, Tim Keller writes in his book "Center Church" that we see at least 6 different motivations people in the New Testament have for coming to Jesus:

1. Sometimes the appeal is to come to God out of fear of judgment and death (Hebrews 2:14-18)
2. Sometimes the appeal is to come to God out of a desire for release from the burdens of guilt and shame (Galatians 3:10-12)
3. Sometimes the appeal is to come to God out of appreciation for the "attractiveness of truth" (1 Corinthians 1:18)
4. Sometimes the appeal is to come to God to satisfy unfulfilled existential longings (Acts 17)
5. Sometimes the appeal is to come to God for help with a problem (Matt 9:20 - 21, Matt 9:27).
6. Lastly, the appeal is to come to God simply out of a desire to be loved (John 4).

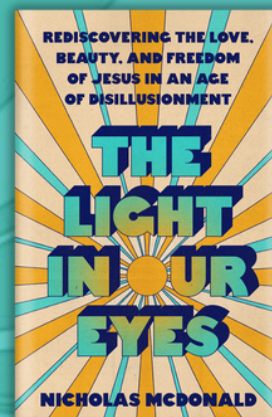
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In conclusion, Carson argues, “We do not have the right to choose only one of these motivations in people and to appeal to it restrictively.”

Now, practically, that may sound overwhelming to you. That’s why in my book, *The Light in Our Eyes*, I’ve spent the last three chapters doing the work for you. In these final chapters, I’m taking the three most common life narratives/heart longings I’ve heard from people over the years, and demonstrating how Jesus, ultimately, fulfills them. I use the simple categories of creation, fall and redemption (the way we tell the gospel story at Redeemer) to show how the stories we try to live from are placed inside us by God (creation), distorted by sin (fall) and ultimately fulfilled by Jesus (redemption).

Your job will be to decide which of these narratives most sings your dechurched friends’ name, and walk them through it. This is so key, especially for the dechurched. To share the gospel with someone who has some familiarity with it, a rote presentation won’t do. No. We need to share something they’ve likely never heard before: the very things they are seeking outside the church – love, beauty, and freedom – is exactly what Jesus’ dreams about for them.

I hope this is a great encouragement to you: Most people who’ve left the church have *no idea* that their deepest dreams are pointers to the gospel of Jesus. They’ve likely heard from the church that their desire for love, freedom and beauty are bad/sinful/secular. What you get to say is: Jesus cares deeply about your deepest dreams! And he longs to fulfill them in a truer, better way than you could ever imagine.

What does that look like? It looks like knowing your dechurched friend well enough to understand their dreams. So as you read each description, I invite you to ask: “Which of these speaks my friend’s heart language?”

Love: “I want to be loved/accepted/known. I want to belong unconditionally.”

- Creation: We were made to be loved and known. This is central to the way God created us.
- Fall: The secular vision of love – therapeutic love – is a thin and unworkable (and secretly vicious) imitation of what we’re looking for. Even your own poets have said so (Ted Goia, Birdman, etc)!
- Redemption: Jesus’ hospitable love on the cross is the truer and better fulfillment of our deepest longing to be truly known and loved.

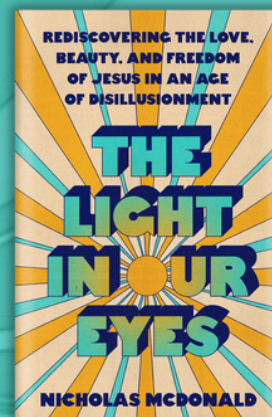
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Freedom: “I want to be my truest/best/most electric self. I want to fully express what’s inside of me.”

- Creation: You were created for freedom. Your desire to align your inner and outer self is your true glory.
- Fall: The secular version of freedom – the freedom of incompetence – can’t ever fulfill this longing. You don’t have the resources *within* yourself to *become* yourself. Even your own poets have said so (Jim Henson, Nate Bargatze, etc)!
- Redemption: Jesus gives us a better freedom: the freedom that comes from wisdom (mastery). He invites us to live life based on His creative word, and to become who we’re created to be. That’s true freedom.

Beauty: “I want to make the world a better/more just/more beautiful place. I want to see peace on earth.”

- Creation: You were made to live in a world of Shalom – a truly just, beautiful and harmonious reality.
- Fall: The secular vision for beauty – status-seeking justice – can never bring shalom. Without a Jesus of wrath, our ‘justice’ becomes an exercise in self-interest. Even your own poets have said so (Tom Holland, Nick Cave, etc)!
- Redemption: Only Jesus can truly establish justice in the world. This frees us to live in service to our neighbors, awaiting the day when Jesus brings judgment – and Shalom – to the world.

When I think of my friend who became a Christian this past year, I don’t think I ever drew a single diagram for him. I never had an argument with him. I did many times tell him how I saw the ways the weird indie films we saw together pointed to Jesus. I told him I thought the hardships he was going through were Jesus drawing him near. I told him how his deepest longings could only be fulfilled in Jesus.

When the time was right, we read through the life of Jesus together and talked about the meaning of the gospel, and invited him into Christian community, where his needs were met, through Jesus.

But that’s because I don’t believe Jesus is offering us an escape plan.

I believe Jesus is renewing everything.

Now, he does too.

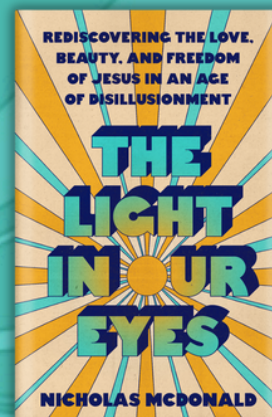
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For Discussion:

Icebreaker: Name something in culture – music, film, art – that really stirred you. What was stirring about that experience?

- Of the three practices listed in chapter 11 – Ancestry, Covenant Community and Wisdom – which most resonates with you?
- Which of these three practices would you like to grow in? What would that look like over the next six to twelve weeks? Be as specific as possible, and ask your group to help you brainstorm. What is one habit or rhythm that could be the first “stepping stone” toward making this part of your life? It doesn’t need to be a radical shift in living. Think small, simple and concrete.
- **Read John 4:1-26.** What do you notice about Jesus’ interaction with the woman at the Well?
- The gospel, in simple terms, is a three part story: Creation: God made everything in the world good, to point to Himself. Fall: Everything is broken, because of our own wayward hearts. Redemption: Jesus came to heal everything, starting with us, by reconciling all things to Himself. He accomplished this through his life, death and resurrection. Jesus, in this passage, artfully weaves this story into the woman’s own story.
- How does Jesus point to the ways that all of this woman’s life is about him (Creation)?
- How does Jesus name the ways God has been drawing the woman to Himself...through her own broken life patterns? How is life ‘not working’ for her (Fall)?
- How does Jesus draw the woman’s needs, desires and brokenness into an invitation toward himself (Redemption)?
- Notice the way Jesus’ deflects when the woman tries to move into religious cliché. How does he redirect the conversation? Why does he do that?
- How do you already see God at work in the life of your dechurched friend or friends? Which of the three stories above speak their heart language?
- In Acts 17:28, Paul appeals to secular Greco-Roman poets to make his point about God’s sovereignty. He doesn’t do that to impress them, but to speak their heart language. What are some of the “poets” of your dechurched friends? Who are the influential voices in their lives?
- How is life ‘not working’ for your friends?
- What might a conversation connecting their desire for love, beauty or freedom to Jesus look like?
- Take some time to pray for your dechurched friends.

Reading:

Read *The Light in Our Eyes*, Chapter 12 and Benediction

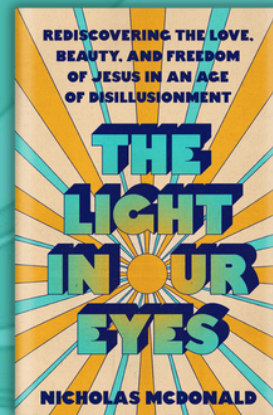
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BY NICHOLAS MCDONALD



Week 6: Justice is a Witness

There is a long and tortuous history of the war between what is often called the Social Gospel and the Evangelical Gospel. On the one hand, it is said, the Social Gospel argues that God's kingdom is about improving society. Therefore, our mission as Christians is to do as much as we can to improve the conditions around us.

The Evangelical Gospel, on the other hand, is about personal transformation: each of us need to be reconciled to God, through Christ. Therefore, our mission as Christians is to share the gospel through evangelism.

This dichotomy is relatively new to Christian history, and it began around the turn of the 20th century (you can read more about this in chapter 6 of *The Light in Our Eyes*, titled "Escape"). As we saw in Zechariah's proclamation, the good news about Jesus is meant to be proclaimed. It's the sun that rises on us! But Zechariah also states that the climax of that revelation is this: Jesus the Messiah – the "just and righteous king" – will "guide our feet into the path of peace" (Luke 1:79). As I show in chapter 12, the "path of peace" is a very specific Old Testament way of speaking about the ways we embody and extend justice toward others.

In other words: if we're not extending justice to our neighbors in our lives, Jesus isn't finished with us. Which also means: proclaiming the gospel without also living a life of justice is only a half-testimony to the work of Jesus...maybe even a hypocritical one.

But do these two missional projects – proclamation of the gospel and acts justice - fit together? Well... the Apostle Paul uses a word to describe his evangelism that I believe is incredibly helpful toward unlocking this whole conversation:

"And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God." – 1 Corinthians 2:1-5

Paul uses a key word here that I would love to use to replace the word "actions" or "deeds" or "social improvement" in every single conversation we have when we talk about our mission: *demonstrations*.

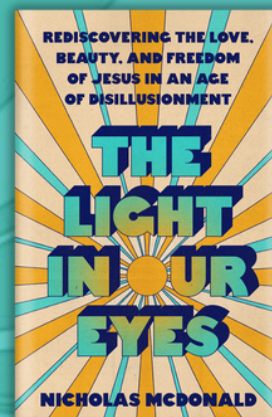
6 Keys to Reaching the Dechurched

The Light in Our Eyes 6-Week Study for Small Groups



WATERBROOK

BY NICHOLAS MCDONALD



We can debate until we're blue in the face about what's more important in sharing the gospel: verbal proclamation or acts of justice. But Paul uses a word – *demonstrations* – that shows us there is a vital bridge between these two things. Interestingly in Paul's case, he says that (at least in his ministry to the Corinthians)...these demonstrations were *more important* than his persuasive words! Not as a replacement to those words, of course – the good news is, first of all, news...but as evidence that the good *news* being proclaimed was true.

How did Paul proclaim the gospel? With words, obviously. But he also notes that one of the chief ways he “proclaimed” the gospel was by *demonstrating* it.

So here is my thesis: sharing the gospel with words, and demonstrating Jesus' Just Kingship to our neighbors, are not two separate and parallel projects. They are two strings, twined intricately together to form a rope.

Doing justice is a vital demonstration of the gospel.

We see this even more clearly in the life and ministry of Jesus. Notice the way Jesus tells his own disciples to preach the gospel to the villages around them: “Preach as you go, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons.” (Matthew 10:7-8).

Now...one way to read this would be:

“Hey, go tell people about me. Also, as a second thing I want you to do of slightly less importance, kind of a side project really just because I gave you all that Spirit juice...also try to help people with their problems. Those are the two separate things I want you to be about.”

Personally, I don't think that's the natural reading of Jesus' words. I think the natural reading is this: “Preach to people about the kingdom with words *and* demonstrations.” These are not two things we need to ‘balance’ out with one another, because they are *all part of the same project*.

In other words: doing justice is an integral witness to the message you're proclaiming. Don't try one without the other.

So why do we tend to give such a tortured reading to Jesus' words, here?

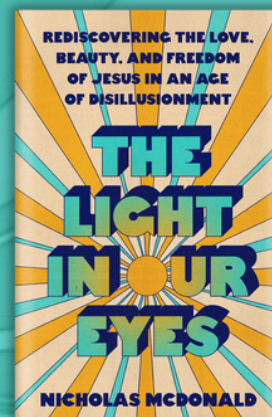
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It's simple, really: that's the gospel of escape, creeping into our interpretation of scripture. If Jesus' message is "escape the earth to go to heaven", then doing justice cannot be part of the gospel. No matter how much we try to make these two fit together, they simply won't. How could doing justice ever fit into a story that tells us our bodies and our earthly lives don't matter?

It can't.

So, we've reasoned: "Jesus also cares about justice even though it has nothing to do with our true mission. So we should do that, too. But not too much!" It's not the most compelling vision, is it?

But if the gospel is about Jesus' renewal of all things as our true prophet, priest and king...then justice is integral to our proclamation of the gospel. These things are woven together: Jesus is renewing all things. That's why He invites each of us to personal renewal through his life, atoning death, and resurrection.

So to my more progressive friends, I would say:

- Why would you join Jesus in renewing society without ever inviting individuals to receive Jesus' personal renewal for themselves? What good is that?

And to my conservative friends, I would ask:

- Why would you invite Jesus to personal renewal without ever joining him in the renewal of all things? What good is that?

Now...what does all this mean for our witness to our dechurched friends and neighbors?

Everything.

As author and playwright Dorothy Sayers once put it: "How can anyone remain interested in a religion which seems to have no concern with nine-tenths of his life?"

To which I would say: "He (or she) can't!" And...we shouldn't *ask them* to be interested in a religion which is uninterested in renewing all things through Jesus. But here's the positive way of saying this: I believe that once we start embracing justice as part of our gospel witness, there are literally millions of people waiting to see this. People are hungry for a gospel that *matters*.

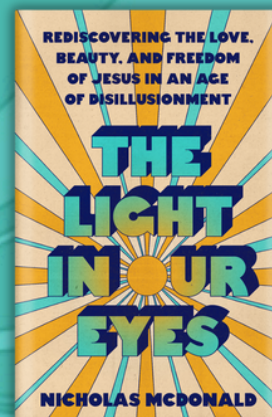
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What does that look like? How does that work?

Let me offer three ways I've seen this happen:

1. **Justice as a witness for.** My first time seeing this was in Jackson, Mississippi. I was helping to repair houses in an at-risk neighborhood through Redeemer Presbyterian Church. One day, I was asked to go on a prayer walk to meet the neighbors. There, I saw something I'd never seen: people smiled when we said Redeemer's name. That was true for people who'd joined the church, of course. But it was also true of people who hadn't joined. That's because each of these folks saw the way Jesus was renewing their neighborhood...and it was a witness to the truth of the gospel.
2. **Justice as a witness *against*.** This is maybe a neglected category, but sometimes, doing justice can be a witness *against* those who don't know Jesus...especially when done in love, humility and a non-retaliatory spirit of service. In the same way the Old Testament law was a witness "against" the people of Israel in order to be a schoolmaster to lead them to Christ...so our own acts of justice can be a witness against our unjust neighbors, in order to lead them to Christ.

In his book, *Cities of God*, Rodney Stark argues that Christians practicing everyday justice toward the poor was an integral reason for the massive spread of Christian faith in the early west. The church simply cared for people in a way that wasn't possible through any other institution. But you don't need to take Stark's word for it. Here's 4th century King Julian, complaining about the church:

'the impious Galileans [Christians], in addition to their own, support ours, [and] it is shameful that our poor should be wanting our aid.' He goes on, later: 'Why then do we think that this is sufficient and do not observe how the kindness of Christians to strangers, their care for the burial of their dead, and the sobriety of their lifestyle has done the most to advance their cause?'

The church's justice was a witness against the Roman Empire's injustice. And this drew millions and millions of people from all over the world into the church.

3. **Justice as a witness *alongside*.** When I doing campus ministry at the University of Missouri, I would take our freshman out once or twice a month to serve at a local retirement home. Interestingly, a few students without a Christian background began to join us. These students weren't coming to Bible study.

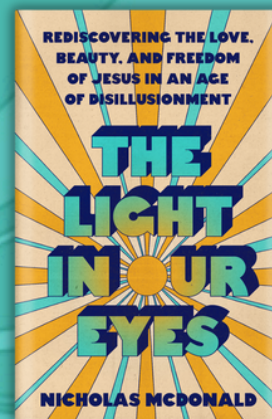
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For the first year, they never came to hear preaching at large group. Rather, they saw the gospel at work...and decided to join us.

After a year of this, two of these students started coming to large group, then Bible study, and one of them became a baptized member of a church for the first time.

It was interesting to see their stories play out: they joined us in Jesus' mission of renewal before they ever experienced their own personal renewal in Jesus. They came alongside us to work, before they ever joined us face to face. When it comes to reaching dechurched friends, this is actually the easiest starting point, counterintuitive as it may seem.

Not an intense conversation about dechurching.

Not even a party in your home.

Just a simple invitation to join Jesus in what he's up to, through you:

- Would you like to help us rake someone's yard this week?
- Would you like to join us in serving at the homeless shelter?
- Would you consider working for this organization – started by someone at our church - committed to our city's good?

Surprising as it may seem, I've seen that doing justice alongside our dechurched neighbors can often be the first step back toward Jesus. It's the thing that causes them to say, "Hey. Maybe there's something to this, after all."

This may sound surprising to many of us...but it really shouldn't be. It's only because of our late history that we feel this way. The testimony of the global, historic church is all in on witness. And that means the church is all in on proclaiming and demonstrating the gospel, by living it out in simple acts of service.

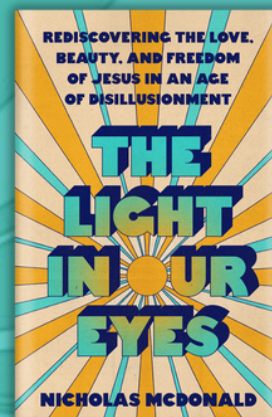
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For Discussion:

Icebreaker: Have you ever had an experience where someone advocated for you? What was that like?

• Of the three practices listed in chapter 12 – Seasonal Prayer, Partnerships and Service – which most resonates with you?

- Which of these three practices would you like to grow in? What would that look like over the next six to twelve weeks? Be as specific as possible, and ask your group to help you brainstorm. What is one habit or rhythm that could be the first “stepping stone” toward making this part of your life? It doesn’t need to be a radical shift in living. Think small, simple and concrete.
- **Read John 8:1-11.** How is Jesus’ justice a witness ‘for’? How is Jesus’ justice a witness ‘against’? What is the relationship between verses 10-12 and the rest of the story?
- Are there ways in which your dechurched neighbors need to see the peace of Jesus at work *for* them? What are they?
- Are there ways in which acting with justice can be a witness against your dechurched neighbor? Perhaps think specifically about your own vocation. Are there ways in which your commitment to integrity, justice and peacemaking may demonstrate the power of Jesus’ kingship to your co-workers or others?
- Are there spaces where you can invite your dechurched friend to come alongside you in renewing the world? This could be joining in a strategic, justice-oriented partnership you’re already involved in. Or it could be as simple as beautifying your neighborhood or yards together. Jesus cares about renewing all things, remember?
- Take some time to pray for your dechurched friends.