

KEVIN M. YOUNG



RE CONSTRUCT

YOUR

FAITH

ANCIENT WAYS TO MAKE
YOUR RELATIONSHIP
WITH GOD
WHOLE AGAIN



JOSSEY-BASS™
A Wiley Brand

Reconstruct Your Faith

Reconstruct Your Faith

Ancient Ways to Make
Your Relationship with God
Whole Again

Kevin M. Young, DMin

J JOSSEY-BASS™
A Wiley Brand

Unless otherwise indicated, all scripture quotations are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (NIV) are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®, Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com The “NIV” and “New International Version” are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™

Scripture quotations marked (NRSV) are taken from the New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition. Copyright © 2021 National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Copyright © 2024 by John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Published simultaneously in Canada and the United Kingdom

ISBN: 9781394219490 (Hardback), 9781394219513 (ePDF), 9781394219506 (ePub)

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning or otherwise, except as permitted under Sections 107 or 108 of the 1976 United States Copyright Act, without either the prior written permission of the Publisher, or authorization through payment of the appropriate per-copy fee to the Copyright Clearance Center, 222 Rosewood Drive, Danvers, MA 01923, (978) 750-8400, fax (978) 646-8600. Requests to the Publisher for permission should be addressed to the Permissions Department, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 111 River Street, Hoboken, NJ 07030, (201) 748-6011, fax (201) 748-6008, or online at <http://www.wiley.com/go/permissions>.

Limit of Liability/Disclaimer of Warranty: The publisher and the author make no representations or warranties with respect to the accuracy or completeness of the contents of this work and specifically disclaim all warranties, including without limitation warranties of fitness for a particular purpose. No warranty may be created or extended by sales or promotional materials. The advice and strategies contained herein may not be suitable for every situation. This work is sold with the understanding that the publisher is not engaged in rendering legal, accounting, or other professional services. If professional assistance is required, the services of a competent professional person should be sought. Neither the publisher nor the author shall be liable for damages arising herefrom. The fact that an organization or Web site is referred to in this work as a citation and/or a potential source of further information does not mean that the author or the publisher endorses the information the organization or Web site may provide or recommendations it may make. Further, readers should be aware that Internet Web sites listed in this work may have changed or disappeared between when this work was written and when it is read.

For general information on our other products and services or to obtain technical support, please contact our Customer Care Department within the U.S. at (877) 762-2974, outside the U.S. at (317) 572-3993 or fax (317) 572-4002.

Wiley publishes in a variety of print and electronic formats and by print-on-demand. Some material included with standard print versions of this book may not be included in e-books or in print-on-demand. If this book refers to media such as a CD or DVD that is not included in the version you purchased, you may download this material at <http://booksupport.wiley.com>. For more information about Wiley products, visit www.wiley.com.

Library of Congress Control Number: LCCN 2024007108 (print) | LCCN 2024007109 (ebook)

TRADEMARKS: Wiley and the Wiley logo are trademarks or registered trademarks of John Wiley & Sons, Inc. and/or its affiliates, in the United States and other countries, and may not be used without written permission. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners. John Wiley & Sons, Inc. is not associated with any product or vendor mentioned in this book.

*To my wife, Sally, who deserves it and believed
in me, even when I did not,
and
to Libbie, Lucy, Harris, and Matthew, for all of
the sacrifices that you have made.*

Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>ix</i>
<i>About the Author</i>	<i>xi</i>
<i>Introduction</i>	<i>xiii</i>
PART I Deconstructing Faith	1
Chapter 1 How Did I Get Here?	3
Chapter 2 The Church	19
Chapter 3 The Bible	35
Chapter 4 Inerrancy	49
Chapter 5 Deconstruct-Reconstruct Cycle	63
PART II Reconstructing Faith	79
Chapter 6 Ancient Paths	81
Chapter 7 The Liturgy of the Hours	95
Chapter 8 The Church Year	109
Chapter 9 The Saints	123

Chapter 10	Feasts and Fasts	141
Chapter 11	Catechism	161
Chapter 12	Creeds	175
Chapter 13	Pilgrimage	187
Chapter 14	Wreckage and Mess	203
	<i>Epilogue</i>	209
	<i>Index</i>	213

Acknowledgments

It takes a village of expert herders to shepherd an author from proposal to publication. As such, I owe a debt of deep gratitude to the entire Wiley team, including Navin, Kezia, Pete, Sophie, and especially, Amy, who took a risk and believed in me. Also to Mark, Sarah, Jason, and Coal, whose feedback made this book far better.

To the staff and monks of the Abbey of the Genesee, thank you for your hospitality, homemade bread, and for rescuing my faith.

To Portland Seminary doctoral Cohort 13, where the roots of this journey began, as well as Loren, Cliff, Matt, Chris, Jordan, Nathan, and especially Leonard Sweet.

About the Author

Dr. Kevin M. Young is a pastor, speaker, consultant, coach, and avid weightlifter. He holds degrees in Media Communications and Theology from Cedarville University, Christian Education from Dallas Theological Seminary, and a Doctor of Ministry in Semiotics and Future Studies from Portland Seminary.

He is an award-winning producer in church communications and media production, and he has pastored several churches, one of which was named among the Fastest Growing Churches in America.

Kevin is Lead Clergy at Christ's Table, a hybrid ministry he founded to bring community, healing, and resources to those who are disillusioned, disconnected, or done with the institutional church but not God.

He is an NASM Elite Certified Personal Trainer and RP Nutrition Coach.

He is the cohost of the *Jacked Theology* podcast.

Kevin and his wife, Sally, live in Birmingham, Alabama, with their four children: Libbie, Lucy, Harris, and Matthew.

Introduction

The room is almost all elephant. Almost none of it isn't.
Pretty much solid elephant. So there's no room to
talk about it.

—Kay Ryan, “The Elephant in the Room”

Not one, but three.

That is the number of elephants in the pages of this book,
and they are rather sizable at that.

Deconstruction is the first elephant in the room. The very word
itself sends a cold shudder down the spine of the church. Depend-
ing on where you stand, deconstruction is either the greatest
problem facing the church or it is the only hope for the church's
future.

Passions run high on both sides. Lines have been drawn in
the sand; churches are increasingly divided on the topic, as are
families and friend groups. Entering a process of deconstruction
of one's faith often sounds the death knell for all of a person's
spiritual connections.

Deconstruction is almost always a desert experience.

Pastors are understandably concerned.

Be it harmful or healthy, deconstruction isn't just changing the nature of their congregants' spiritual journey, it is changing the landscape of the church itself. Many who deconstruct seem to walk away from the church, walk to a different church, or become advocates against certain dogmas in the church.

Deconstruction feels like an indictment, and that doesn't feel good at all.

If the word *deconstruction* is too harsh or off-putting a word, consider *disentangling*, *disassembling*, *deprogramming*, or *decolonizing* instead.

Try as the church might to prevent parishioners from traveling a path of deconstruction—or whatever we choose to call it—the church's attempts to control it have only fueled the fire, sending even more people down the path of deconstruction.

While most within the church would rather avoid the deconstruction conversation altogether, that may not be the best path.

Whenever there is an elephant in the room, we have options:

- Avoid it.
- Ignore it.
- Deny it.
- Silence it.
- Face it and hope to understand it.

Of those five options, “Face it and hope to understand it” is the preferred path, and within these pages that is the stance for which I will advocate.

Those who walk a path of deconstruction rarely desire to walk it alone. If they end up alone on the road, it is more likely that the church abandoned them than that they abandoned the church.

How do I know?

I am a fellow sojourner.

Reconstruction is the second elephant in the room. For those on the path of deconstruction, the word *reconstruction* can be quite off-putting. It brings a lot of baggage and assumptions with it, and those in the process of assessing their faith need unburdened hearts and minds.

I understand the concern. *Reconstruction* implies that:

- The process is as simple as putting the pieces back together again. *Usually, it's not that simple.*
- There is a single path to take on the journey. There isn't.
- A path must be taken at all. *That's false.*
- There will be an end to the journey. *There probably isn't.*
- One will never deconstruct again. *Cycles of deconstruction/reconstruction are more likely.*
- It must be done as part of a church. *It doesn't.*
- One will remain within Christianity or still consider themselves a follower of Christ at the end. *That isn't always the case.*
- Something must be done rather than nothing. *Some prefer to simply sit and be happy. Others prefer to sit and mourn.*

But in the end, we are bound to words, and while we may choose a different word—such as *remodel, reclaim, renovate, restore, renew, or reform*—we can hopefully all agree to allow others to make their own journey, or even no journey at all.

It is neither my choice nor yours as to whether a person reconstructs or the path they take to do it, if they so choose.

So why this book?

We all need an “alongsider,” someone to walk with us on our journey. Though my path of deconstruction and reconstruction will differ from yours, it is helpful to know that you are not alone.

It is also easy to get overwhelmed, stalled, or stuck on journeys like this. It can be helpful, even hopeful, to know what helped others move forward. I also hope to convince you that you can and will make it through.

For those who desire to reconstruct a more Christ-like faith, I want you to see that it *can* be done. For those who aren't sure what they want, don't worry too much. I'm still not certain where my road leads either.

The third elephant in the room is me. Does the world really need another book by someone who looks like me? That is a valid question, if you are asking it. In many ways, I represent the church's greatest problem. I am a privileged insider.

I had an advantageous home situation (white, Midwest, middle-class, nuclear family), an advantageous educational journey (respected, conservative Christian universities and seminaries), and an advantageous career path (staff and senior pastor positions in some of the largest and fastest-growing churches in America).

But when a privileged insider begins using their voice to ask questions and question actions, the tides can turn quickly.

I am used to being an outsider to Evangelicalism, having grown up in the somewhat infamous Independent Fundamental Baptist (IFB) movement. We were King James Version (KJV) Bible-only, didn't go to movies, weren't allowed to dance or play cards, and were quite convinced of our own righteousness. While many of those who grow up in ultra-fundamentalism ultimately reject faith altogether, I did not. Instead of leaving, I bought a New International Version (NIV) Bible, became Southern Baptist, and went to see a movie.

In moments where many reject their faith, I pivoted. By the time I found myself in the throes of deconstruction, I had not only spent significant time in Baptist churches, but also

seeker-sensitive, nondenominational, Evangelical Quaker, Calvary Chapel, and mainline congregations.

Over the years of ministry, I realized that I am hard-wired to be a *revolutionary*, one who fiercely and fearlessly advocates for needed change, challenging systems, ideas, and the status quo. But I am also hard-wired to be a *healer* and deeply driven to bring wholeness, health, and peace to brokenness.

Somewhere along the way, though, the church broke me.

This is the story of my deconstruction and how God is reconstructing me. This book is an invitation to join me on an ancient path.

PART

I

Deconstructing
Faith

1

How Did I Get Here?

He who thinks that he is finished, is finished. Those who think that they have arrived, have lost their way.

—Henri Nouwen

I can't believe I am here.

The thought had been rolling around in the recesses of my mind for days.

Perhaps, longer.

It was one of those uneasy feelings that a person gets deep in their gut when something, somewhere is off. The kind that begins as a simple nagging thought that gnaws at the edges of your sanity in moments of quiet reflection, but which, when unattended, becomes a raging fire of fear and self-doubt that threatens to overtake a person's spirit and irreparably wound their soul.

If I gave the worry my attention, I was wary of losing my soul. I was spiraling fast, and I was uncertain as to whether I had passed the point of rescue.

Was I too far gone to be rescued?

I can't believe I am here, I repeated to myself.

What was once just an abstract question about the direction of my life had become a very literal concern as I stood facing what was in front of me.

A set of doors.

Large ones. Very large.

These are the kind of doors that are designed to be imposing, to make one feel insignificant. The doors could not have known that there was no need to make me feel unwelcome or unworthy.

I had arrived broken, and, I feared, beyond repair.

On the other side of those doors lay hope ... or confirmation of my defeat. We only arrive at these moments when we have no other options left.

Sometimes, the only way out of a storm is through it ... through *those* doors.

Behind me, the gently rolling hills of western New York's Genesee Valley rose to meet the sun as the afternoon beams lit up the trees, setting their brilliant orange and yellow leaves afire on this late-Autumn day.

Beyond those hills was the life that I had all but outgrown. It was out there, behind me, awaiting my return. *But could I?* I had desperately tried to hold to the roots of my faith as the storm raged around me. I had desperately tried to avoid facing the difficult questions that threatened to destroy my faith. I had pushed everything down to the depths of the darkness within, hoping to forever avoid them. I was aware that questioning everything I thought I knew could destroy everything that I had ever built, or worse, dismantle everything on which I stood as a pastor.

Some questions are too dangerous to ask.

But the pain of going back to *what was* now seemed as unbearable as the thought of moving on, moving forward, into the unknown.