

Last year Urban Dictionary added "eXvangelical": anyone who has left (or been ejected from) evangelicalism, either for more progressive churches or for no faith community at all.

Series offers tools for navigating process called “deconstruction”— an important part of life in general, of growing up, of changing our minds, and an essential part of any intentional spiritual growth.

**Deconstruction** different than **destruction**. Where you one of those kids who took things apart in order to figure them out? That’s deconstruction: taking something apart piece by piece to figure it out. For kids and us, an essential part of learning how to build things. If we want to destroy something, we just smash it. We deconstruct things to figure them out, eventually build.

People often feel guilty or disloyal in process of deconstruction—often it is prompted by strong emotions that are unpleasant or viewed negatively (anger, resent). But it’s a healthy and positive process—that’s our assumption in this series.

If you’ve ever done therapy, or worked with a sponsor in a recovery group, you know learning family history and how it affected you is an important growth step. Amazing the things you don’t know about your family until you poke around.

### **Let’s start there: Where did “Evangelical” come from?**

Word is English version of a GK word that means “proclamation” or good news; gospel. First used to describe a church in Protestant Reformation 500 years ago. What we now call Reformed (Calvin) and Lutheran churches first called themselves “Evangelical.”

In US, term took on a more specific meaning during 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Here’s the story. In early 20<sup>th</sup> century, new movement called **Fundamentalism**. Reaction to modern science and modern trends in biblical studies. An attempt to defend against what was viewed as anything that threatened or undermined traditional faith.

**Separatist**: own churches, schools, not involved in civic life (voting)

By mid 20<sup>th</sup> Century, group of Fundamentalists wanted to be less separatist, called themselves “Evangelical.” *Christianity Today* took over or started some seminaries, and Billy Graham was their main spokesperson. Evangelicals would be “Fundamentalist-Lite.”

By 1980's Fundamentalists & Evangelicals re-joined forces to form "The Religious Right," which became a potent political force.

[David Neff re how CT came out in opposition to legal abortion] n.

Like many families, Evangelicalism doesn't tell its history and tends to see itself as "true Christians" compared to everyone else.

QUADRANT

Phyllis Tickle Quadrants of the Christian Landscape

LITURGICAL/SOCIAL JUSTICE/EVANGELICAL/RENEWALIST

TFAM as an example of the mixing going on today.

Evangelicalism arguably most influential: powerful presence in all sectors. Catholics who think Pope Francis is "liberal" Mainline Protestants who voted for Trump. Even if you weren't part of an "Evangelical" church, your understanding of what "Christianity" is strongly shaped by E.

"Evangelical" not used much by African American churches, though many share conservative beliefs about Scripture, but often with a strong social justice message, unlike most white evang.

**Offer a better metaphor for deconstruction than "Don't throw the baby out with the bath water"** Problem: easy to tell difference between a baby and bath water.

Examining a formative faith when you see that it's run off the rails, is not an easy process—it's quite difficult to separate good from bad, healthy from unhealthy, authentic from inauthentic.

Better: **Tangled ball of yarn.** Start where you can—no single starting point for everyone, loosen on spot, another—until yarn completely unwound and you decide what you want to knit now

**Deconstruction is a time-honored part of the Jesus tradition.**

First meet Jesus speaking in Lk 2: questioning elders in temple. Likely shaped by Pharisees but by time he starts teaching as a rabbi, he has accepted some tenets but rejected others.

Paul also went thru an intense period of deconstruction. Paul trained under Gamaliel, Pharisee who advised caution in responding to early Jesus followers—let's not be reactive, let's see where this goes, see whether it produces good fruit or bad. Paul is a young foggy--takes a harder line than his teacher, becomes a fierce persecutor.

Then Paul has a vision that triggers his process of deconstruction: cognitive dissonance (he sees/hears/feels something that doesn't fit his view of how reality is constructed)—so intense, he literally can see for a few days.

In Gal 1 Paul rehearses this: ***“You have heard of my previous life in Judaism, how I violently persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it [Jewish gatherings of Jesus followers] I advanced in Judaism beyond many people of the same age for I was far more zealous for the traditions of my ancestors But when God, who had set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me, so that I might proclaim him among [in] the Gentiles, I didn't confer with any human being, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were already apostles before, but I went away at once into Arabia .... Then after three years I did go to Jerusalem”***

This 3-year period was his time of intense deconstruction, un-tangling ball of yarn, and deciding what he was going to knit with it

Offer interpretation—see what you think. I see Paul describing a process of finding his own voice as part of hearing voice of Jesus.

Young men in patriarchal systems enjoy thrill of rising through a hierarchy to gain increasing prestige. I see him doing this [***I advanced in Judaism beyond others my age***]. When you're doing that, it's about the ascent, and you naturally line up with trusted authorities, and sometimes, in that process, you defer or forget to do your own thinking, wrestling, reflecting [as he puts it ***“I was far more zealous for the traditions of my ancestors.”***]

But hearing the voice of Jesus [an interior experience] gave him a sense that God was in him all along, had called him all along, and was pleased to reveal his Son “in him” [preferred to “to him”]

Pause on this: Paul describes his dissonance triggering experience, not as a violent rebuke, getting knocked off his horse, but as a more gentle experience [***God was pleased to reveal/uncover his Son in me***] Paul from youth must have had a longing for Messiah and that longing was an expression of Messiah already in him. He covered up the

presence with his rivalry, ambition, his wanting to show how zealous he was, but then the Spirit revealed his Son in me.

Similarly, Paul wasn't sent to proclaim Messiah to the Gentiles—but in them, already among them. Uncovering not imposition.

It left Paul shaken. He didn't trust himself to interact with the leaders of the Jesus movement because he knew his own tendency to just see that as another hierarchy to advance in.

So he took 3 years to get in touch with his own voice, along with the voice of God in him .... And then he compared notes with leaders. Someone with a different history and psychology than his might have taken a very different approach.

What if God isn't in rivalry with us at all? Not standing over us to pressure us in any direction. What if the Spirit, instead, is about **uncovering the divine image** that is already in us? To be human is to bear the divine image within us—that's Israel's creation story.

There's a process of **trusting yourself** that is very much a part of the process of **trusting God**, if God is not a rival to us.

Recently talked about Jewish understanding at the time of Jesus that identified Logos [Divine Reason] with Sophia/Lady Wisdom [Divine Feminine] and how early Jesus faith saw Jesus and the Spirit of Jesus in this light.

I find myself calling out to Jesus or Spirit as Sophia/Divine Feminine when I need to untangle emotions or thoughts. When I can't think my way through a dilemma or problem or situation

Here's a suggestion: If you find yourself in a process of deconstruction, maybe triggered by some experience or accumulation of experiences that gave you a sense of cognitive dissonance [your beliefs not matching what new evidence] ....

Call out to Lady Wisdom for help. You don't need answers imposed from on high. You need something more like a divine dance partner.