

"TODD [IS] A FEARLESS AND SEASONED GUIDE WHOSE WORK HEREIN IS BOTH WISE AND ACCESSIBLE."

DR. BRAD JERSAK

DEAN OF THEOLOGY & CULTURE, ST. STEPHEN'S UNIVERSITY

The
RECONSTRUCTING



of
Your
MIND

A POST-DECONSTRUCTION JOURNEY

TODD R. VICK

FOREWORD BY KEITH GILES

Praise for

THE RECONSTRUCTING OF YOUR MIND

“Whether it’s rebuilding demolished Temples, devastated cities, or deconstructed faith, the Bible has much to say about ‘reconstruction.’ For such a major gospel theme, these are the days for authentic memoirs and thoughtful manuals that walk us through spiritual upheaval. I wouldn’t entrust my heart or yours to trendy cynics drunk on demolition. I commend to you my friend, Todd Vick, a fearless and seasoned guide whose work herein is both wise and accessible.”

DR. BRAD JERSAK
DEAN OF THEOLOGY & CULTURE, ST. STEPHEN’S UNIVERSITY

“Using conversational language that makes for easy reading, Todd Vick gets at the heart of what troubles so many. What has come to be called ‘deconstruction’ is a journey with significant confusion and pain. Allowing for diverse experiences and expressions, this book offers an honest account of life with and without faith ... with the possibility of a new faith.”

THOMAS JAY OORD
AUTHOR OF *GOD CAN'T* AND *OPEN AND RELATIONAL THEOLOGY*

“*The Reconstructing of Your Mind* poses the question, ‘What if the Great Commission is only really about love?’ Todd Vick invites you to follow him on the spiritual journey that brought him to that conclusion. The book is a quantum leap backwards in the name of exploring the earliest church from a cultural perspective to reveal the heart of Jesus, all while engaging the reader with real, raw—and above all

else—relatable stories from his well-trod journey. It lays bare the intent of the Gospel, while giving you all the feels. Todd helps Christians who have taken apart their faith rebuild a fresh foundation of hope, in the realization that 2,000 years of auxiliary theology cannot come close to representing the intent of Christ. Reconstructing your faith feels a lot like becoming the Phoenix rising from the ashes, something Todd captures perfectly. The book is a warm conversation about awakening from a staid slumber of the spirit. It is written from the perspective of a Christian who has questioned his faith and found it indeed strong, like that old rugged cross—roughhewn and solid—and built to last through our doubts and epiphanies. I cannot recommend *The Reconstructing of Your Mind* highly enough.”

JANA GREENE

BLOGGER AND AUTHOR OF *FIERCE RECOVERY: LIVING YOUR BEST SOBER LIFE NOW AND EDGEMISE: PLUNGING OFF THE BRINK OF A DRINK AND I TO THE LOVE OF GOD*

“Reconstruction itself is a reckless pursuit. It’s reckless because it is uncertain. It forces us to confront reality and to look beyond into an ever-expanding, unending universe. It’s a reckless endeavor as we reach out into the void to touch what we cannot see. Jesus was a reckless lover. He pursued the people society had deemed irrelevant. He saw their relevance. Jesus saw into their hearts by way of intimacy and he penetrated them with grace. Reckless love is redemptive. *The Reconstructing of Your Mind* is about a redeemed relationship—with God, with the self, and with the neighbor. A redeemed relationship is intimate, diverse, and multi-dimensional. Todd’s conceptualization of reconstruction incorporates the necessary attributes of redeemed relationships and practices for Jesus level compassion. His reckless words will captivate and encourage readers to confront cognitive challenges while reaching out toward what is real. For a fulfilling and reckless reconstruction, let this book be your guide.”

DANIELLE KINGSTROM

WRITER AND HOST OF THE *RECORDED CONVERSATIONS* PODCAST

“With the heart of a pastor and the presence of a friend with whom you’re having coffee, Todd joins you on the religious deconstruction

journey in this book. Each page gives language and next steps toward one's total spiritual reconstruction. So thankful to have his unique timbre in the choir of other Reconstruction/Deconstruction voices."

MEGGIE LEE CALVIN

PODCASTER AND BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *I AM MY OWN SANCTUARY:
HOW A RECOVERING AUTHOR FOUND HEALING AND POWER*

"As death is necessary to resurrection, so is the death of religious thinking to deconstruction and deconstruction to reconstruction. In *The Reconstructing of Your Mind*, Todd Vick takes through his journey through deconstruction and reconstruction. Simultaneously scholarly and conversational, this book takes the reader by the hand and leads them through this often painful but always rewarding experience. Rich with scriptural, empirical, and anecdotal references, Todd not only encourages the reader to take the leap into spiritual deconstruction but also helps them to build wings that will enable them to both soar through the experience but also to give them a safe landing. Todd reminds the reader, at every turn, that (s)he is loved and valued and that they and their experience are both unique and precious. This book helps deconstruct deconstruction, resurrect reconstruction, and gives a healthy reality check to all things church—all with a heaping helping of the Love of Jesus."

DERRICK DAY

AUTHOR, SPEAKER, AND PODCASTER

The
RECONSTRUCTING



MIND

A POST-DECONSTRUCTION JOURNEY

TODD R. VICK

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DEDICATION

For Rachel

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book was intimidating for me to write. Reconstruction is a subject I have never written or preached about before. There are several friends, podcasters, and fellow authors who have inspired and encouraged me on my decon/recon journey: Jason Elam, Keith Giles, Chris Kratzer, Seth Price, Cody and Elaine Johnston, Karl and-Laura Forehand, Michele Snyder, Meg Calvin, Brad Jersak, Danielle Kingstrom, Sean McCoy, Jon Turney, Wm. Paul Young, and the late Rachel Held Evans, to whom this book is dedicated. I hope this book of mine inspires someone as much as your friendship and books have inspired me!

I want to convey heartfelt gratitude to Dr. Andrew Newburg, a man of faith and a brilliant neuroscientist who examines the brains reactions to faith expressions. Your work is incredible, and I have learned so much from you!

I owe much gratitude to Rafael Polendo and the editors at Quoir Publishing. Thank you for including my work with the roster of amazing authors who push the boundaries of faith and religion seeking a more Christ-like way to live.

My family is my perpetual “why.” You are why I do what I do. I want to help create a better world for you all. My beautiful grandchildren have brought a joy into my life that I never imagined possible!

Jesus, you are the absolute love of my life. When I had no one else, I always had you. At my worst, you were there. At my best, you were there. No one loves me like you do. I want to always decrease so you can always increase in my life, family, teaching, and writing.

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FOREWORD

Deconstructing your faith isn't easy. In fact, it's probably one of the most painful seasons of life anyone could ever go through.

You probably already know this. It's probably why you're reading this book right now, I'm guessing. If so, you've made a wise choice. My friend, Todd Vick, understands how painful it can be to deconstruct your faith. He's not afraid to show you his scars, or to tell you the stories of how he got them.

That's one of the things I love most about Todd. He's painfully and sometimes almost uncomfortably honest. But this sort of honesty is so rare in our world today. It's very beautiful and refreshing to meet someone like Todd; someone who isn't afraid to tell you the truth, even when it hurts.

What I believe you will appreciate most about this book is that it is not only filled with real-world examples of how painful deconstruction can be, it's also filled with a lot of hope. In fact, if these true stories of rejection, loss, grief and deep spiritual trauma weren't followed by an equal number of stories about how Todd found a way through this pain, and fought his way back into the light again, it would hardly be worth reading.

Because we all have our own stories to tell, don't we? We all know how much it hurts to be rejected by our family, our friends, our church fellowship and even strangers on the internet over differences in theology. We really don't need any more proof of how much it hurts to question our faith, do we? No, we don't.

But what I do believe we need is what Todd has taken great care to provide us with and that's a healthy dose of hope to carry us through our darkness.

Now, as painful as deconstruction is, the reconstruction of our faith can be almost as difficult. At least, at first. But, unlike the deconstruction process that leads us out of certainty and into the wilderness of doubt, the reconstruction process is one we must undergo with great intention.

See, the process of deconstruction is mostly something that happens to us. We start to question something about our faith and as we begin to investigate and question it, we find ourselves seeing things we can't unsee and knowing things we can never un-know. It's probably why they call it the "slippery slope" because, once you start to ask these sorts of questions, the drop off is steep and the next thing you know you've got a dozen more questions to ask.

Deconstruction sort of just happens to us. But for those who want to take the next steps into reconstructing faith, there is something important to know right up front: It's going to take a lot of effort.

In other words, no one ever falls into reconstruction. Without an intentional, daily commitment to seek out a foundation for our reconstruction process, we'll never make it. Without a firm resolve to continually work our way towards a more hopeful way of living out our faith, we'll just keep spinning our wheels.

Reconstruction is hard work. There's just no easy way around it, my friend.

But here's the good news: in this book, my friend Todd Vick shows us how to do it. He lets us see how he made his way out of the wilderness of doubt and into the new frontier of spiritual reconstruction.

As you'll see, it's not a simple process. It takes courage. It involves a strong desire to move forward. It will take the rest of your life to get there. But as you begin to walk this road, you'll discover a few wonderful truths: God is good. God will never leave you. You are loved. And what's more, you are not alone.

If you decide to take the first step, this book will become a helpful source of hope and light for your journey. If you keep at it, you'll soon discover it's more than worth it to keep on going. Eventually, you will find yourself turning around to offer wisdom, strength, and hope to those who are coming up the road behind you. That's how it works.

I know you're eager to get started. I know you can do it. I'll be looking over my shoulder to see you coming up the road the rest of us have already travelled. It's going to be ok.

– **Keith Giles**

*Author of **Jesus Unexpected: How the End Times Ended and Jesus Already Returned***

PREFACE

I had hoped to travel the world more by the time I reached fifty-two. My journeys thus far have been mostly spiritual. There have been many forks in the road on this journey. Each time I stopped at the fork I had a crisis of faith, followed by a choice of which road to travel. Every decision I made, even the difficult, heartbreaking ones, brought me exactly to the place where I am now. I recently completed the faith journey known as *deconstruction*. Now I realize that the title of the book lends itself to *reconstruction*, but to better understand this concept, we need to examine deconstruction.

Deconstruction as it pertains to faith generally means to question every single facet of one's belief system until there is basically nothing left. Every deconstruction experience is unique to the individual. Some of us grew up in the conservative faith tradition and were even educated by it. Some of us are (or used to be) pastors. Some of us are just high-brained people who see beyond the *because God said so* approach to faith and practice. God said it, that settles it, and they believe it ... but not if they are deconstructing. Everything you have ever believed about God, Jesus, the Bible, Heaven, Hell, the Rapture, the Second Coming, and Evangelism has come crashing down because you can no longer get behind it as it is. The common word for this is *deconstruction*.

There are at least 5 different types of Deconstruction:

- 1. Religious Deconstruction:** For those who are weary of man-made religion and the restrictions it places on us.

2. **Theological Deconstruction:** For those who have been immersed in theological doctrine and dogma for so long that it has replaced simple and sincere faith.
3. **Biblical Deconstruction:** For those who dare to question the inerrancy of Scripture and its efficacy in modern culture.
4. **Church Deconstruction:** For those that are tired of going to a building every week to worship God, who needs no structure to contain him. And for those who have been hurt by the institution of Church.
5. **Faith Deconstruction:** For those (like me) who walked away from all the above, as well as belief in the divine at all.

We could probably create a bigger list if we needed to. To the Christian in deconstruction, or *decon*, your faith and practice just doesn't make sense anymore. You feel alone in a way that catches you by surprise. You feel guilty for questioning the things which have been indoctrinated into you all your life. You feel isolated from what was once your church family. Your blood family doesn't understand or even like what you're going through. *God's word is the final authority*, they warn you. You are afraid to deviate from what the Bible says. Adam and Eve questioned God's word. Afterward they were isolated and hiding. It's a scary thing to question everything you have ever believed and even more scary to walk away from it.

Decon feels like divorce. The person you committed to spend your life with tells you they are no longer in love with you, or that they just don't want to be married to you any longer. With that comes the unspeakable feeling of rejection followed by an unraveling of your beliefs about the institution of marriage. The two who were supposed to be one flesh are now two fleshes again. There is no emotional pain quite like it. When you decon, it is like a divorce. The Jesus you grew up with suddenly ceases to exist, at least in how you thought of him. Church that was a major part of your life suddenly isn't there anymore.

Decon is lonely, my friend. Questions like, *was there ever a God at all?* cause you some sleepless nights. *Was any of it real?* is another rough one. You recall the moments in prayer, worship, or youth camp where God really seemed to move in your life and wonder if it was just your imagination. Take heart...all of this does get better in time. However, you must first embrace the deconstruction dilemma. You'll be glad you did. I promise you that.

My first book, *The Renewing of Your Mind*, was an attempt to share my deconstruction journey. At the time I wrote it, I had never heard the word *deconstruction* regarding faith. I called it the renewing of the mind based on Romans 12:2. Whatever parts of my faith felt like a burden or were motivated by shame and guilt I ejected. I now seek a faith that spreads joy, love, and grace. I want to be a conduit of the authentic Jesus. I share a little more of that journey in Chapter One.

In this book, I wanted to lead you through my journey of *reconstruction*. To me it was a sometimes-painful process of rebuilding the structure of my beliefs into something that is not only more realistic but also extremely joyful! Your journey won't look like mine. Not exactly. You will also note that deconstruction/reconstruction occurs over and over. It's not a one-stop shop.

This book is divided into three parts. Part One focuses on deconstruction. Part Two begins the reframing process, and Part Three paints the picture of a reconstructed believer.

Again, your journey will look different than mine. It should. You're not me, you're you! My hope is that something from my journey will encourage you in yours.

Thank you so much for reading this book. It was a labor of love just for you.

– **Todd R. Vick**

Lexington, South Carolina

2020

Part One

THE TEARDOWN

Chapter One

THE DECONSTRUCTION DILEMMA

“Religion is the safest place to hide from God.”

- FATHER RICHARD ROHR

For as long as I can remember, I have believed in God. As a child, God was the imaginary friend who rewarded good and punished bad. My belief system consisted of finding ways to be good and not bad. As I got older, my earthly father chose alcoholism over his family. If God was my heavenly father, then it was just a matter of time before he abandoned me too, or so I surmised.

On the 70s TV show, *Happy Days*, Fonzie, played by Henry Winkler, would occasionally remind God that he was his favorite. I wondered if God really did have favorites. If so, could I be one of them? How could I make that happen? I tried bargaining.

“Hey God, if I study hard for my test, will you help me get an A?”

“God, if you’ll not let my Mom find out about me lying, I will be extra good this week.”

My spiritual journey really began in my freshman year of high school. One day in gym, this guy with braces and large super-nerd glasses approached and introduced himself. For a nerdy guy, he was noticeably confident and comfortable in his skin. I liked him right away. His name was Rick Stilwell. My lifelong pal Jay and I have nicknames for just about everyone we know. We called Rick, *Rickwell*. That became his nickname among our whole group of friends. Mine was *Frog* (Todd = Toad = Frog). A few longtime friends still address

me as Frog to this very day. Having a nickname was a rite of passage in our group.

It was Rick who not only invited me to his church but also came and picked me up. My first ever visit to a Southern Baptist church was at Trinity Baptist in Cayce, SC. There was a revival service going on. My first. The evangelist kept talking about being *born again* and having a *personal relationship* with God through Jesus Christ his only son. This was all new to me, and I really wanted that personal relationship with God. I had always believed in him, but I never really knew him. During the invitation/altar call, I went forward. Something had really stirred my heart that night.

The next thing I knew, I was carted off backstage and placed with a very scary old man who made me read out loud a tract called *The Four Spiritual Laws*. I was not comfortable at all. If this is what it meant to know God, maybe I was better off not knowing him. The scary man finally let me go. Then the evening got even more weird. When I returned to the sanctuary, total strangers were hugging me and patting my back. They congratulated me for becoming a Christian. I had become a *Christian*? I had thought I already was one. I was so confused. All I wanted to do was go home. As unpleasant as home was, it was far better than scary old men and pseudo-happy strangers.

The next day, I told Rick how I felt, and he was so cool about it. He encouraged me to at least try going with him to Sunday School. I never understood the purpose of Sunday School, quite frankly. Monday through Friday school was plenty for me. I quickly discovered, however, that my life was about to change in a big way.

The following Sunday, I was introduced to my Sunday School teacher, Frank Ward. I had never met anyone like him before. His lessons were so easy to understand and quite challenging. He spent a lot of individual time with me answering my many questions about the Christian faith and this business of having a personal relationship with Jesus. He genuinely cared about me. When I ran out of questions, Frank encouraged me to make a commitment to follow Jesus. On Saturday, April 11, 1983, I prayed the sinner's prayer along with Frank. The next day I joined the church as a full-fledged member. Two

weeks later, I was baptized by immersion. I stayed there for eleven years, I was saved and baptized there. I got married there. I dedicated my firstborn there.

I could write entire volumes about my experiences there and the many friendships I made and still enjoy all these years later. Rick was one of my dearest friends for thirty years. Over those years, he and I had many conversations about the state of Christianity. When I graduated Bible College, he and I had taken different theological paths. I was the staunch conservative, and he was more progressive. We both respected our journeys, even though I was kind of an ass about *my* theology. Rick and I always disagreed agreeably even when I was being a legalistic ass. He was reading Brian McLaren's *A New Kind of Christian* at the time. I was convinced that the old kind of Christian was more than sufficient. I have since read McLaren's books and wish that I could tell Rick what a fool I was.

Rick died very suddenly in January of 2013. The loss is still raw; the void he left is still there. It always will be. I dedicated my first book to him. It was inspired by our years of meaningful conversations about grace and theology. He had also tried to get me to read books by Rob Bell, Leonard Sweet, and several others. Being the conservative that I was, I politely passed. Our last conversation was so good that I took notes! Rick was years ahead of the rest of us. He was a deep thinker. He loved Jesus. He loved the Church despite her flaws and shortcomings. He was an amazing husband and father. He was a faithful and steady friend. I always knew he was there for me, no matter what. After his death, his friends and colleagues created a hashtag just for him, *#livelikerick*. That was his legacy. He lived like Jesus. He was someone whose life inspired so many people all over the world. He was a social media expert. He had friends all over the world, many of whom he had never met in real life, but they loved and admired him just the same. That is the miracle of social media and the connections it affords. He believed strongly in connection ... intimate, meaningful, human connection...over coffee when possible. He championed both caffeination and connection.

As I draft this book, it has been seven years since Rick passed away. I miss him profoundly. He was a very stabilizing presence in my life. He believed that questions could be more valuable than answers. He was all about growing and evolving spiritually and as a man. He was the first person to model deconstruction for me. Neither of us were familiar with the term, but there was no doubt that Rick was a true deconstructionist whether he knew it or not.

THE MINISTRY DECONSTRUCTION YEARS

At age sixteen, I was “called” vocationally to the ministry. I started out the ministry by teaching Sunday School, singing, visiting prisoners, and youth camp counseling. Later I was a minister of music and youth at a couple of churches in North and South Carolina. I decided to finish my college degree at Southeastern Baptist Theological College in Wake Forest, NC. When I was a student, we had four to five-hundred people on campus. Today it is at least five times larger! My classes were intimate—less than thirty people per class. I made some wonderful friends who challenged and cared for me. I lived on campus, mostly worked on campus, and seldom got out of Wake Forest. I was in a Southern Baptist “bubble,” in which I was indoctrinated in the authority of God’s holy, inerrant word, the Bible.

I learned biblical Greek and Hebrew. I was never an expert at either language, but I learned how to use my lexicons. I learned to be an expository preacher. I also learned arrogance. Maybe it was already there, but it really took shape in Bible College.

By the end of my first semester, I wanted to quit. I felt that I didn’t belong there. When one receives a vocational ministry calling, it is an amazing feeling. I arrived at the seminary campus thinking I was going to be the next Billy Graham. That didn’t last long. I thought I knew so much about God, Jesus, the Bible, and theology in general. Very quickly, I realized how over my head I was. I didn’t understand why I had uprooted my family and moved to Wake Forest. I thought I would make a terrible pastor. Many of my friends and classmates were already pastors. They were (and still are) some amazing people. I felt

like a blind man at a staring contest. I was unworthy of my calling in my mind. I wanted to go back home. One of my favorite professors and some good friends talked me through my first semester crisis, and I decided to stay and finish my conservative evangelical education and indoctrination with great humility. I graduated two years later and embarked on a thirty-year journey of pastoral ministry.

Almost all of my life, I wanted to be someone else. This mindset started as a child. Everybody I knew had a better life than I did. They had both parents, nice families, and nice homes. My father was an alcoholic and emotionally closed off. After they divorced, my mother was always tired from working to support my two sisters and I with no help from him. He abandoned us. Because of this, I always felt odd. My closest friends had good fathers, and I had no one. I never believed in myself, even when I was doing good or winning awards. I still felt less than everyone else. I think I overcompensated by trying to be the best at everything I did. Even when I succeeded, I still had a low opinion of myself. I had no faith in myself. This mindset followed me as a young man, a husband, a father, and employee, and later as a pastor.

I never trusted myself to be a good pastor, so I tried to emulate other prominent Baptist pastors who I admired, like Charles Stanley, Johnny Hunt, John MacArthur, and Tom Elliff. I studied these men and tried to be them. I even preached some of their sermons. I did Wednesday night Bible studies straight from MacArthur's commentaries. I couldn't remember the last time I had had an original thought of my own. Why? Because I didn't trust myself to lead as a husband, father, or pastor; I expected to fail, so I tried to become other people who I believed were way better than me so that I could be successful like them. They weren't always real people, either. I picked characters from television and movies to become. I was never enough as myself. I tried to live other peoples' lives. When I had my mental breakdown in 2016, I had no idea who I was. It had never even occurred to me to just be myself! Not one in my entire life did I just try to be Todd.

As a Christian, I simply tried to act like the people at church that I looked up to. I became good at wearing my church mask. My life at

home was difficult, so I spent as much time away from there as I could growing up. I had about five surrogate families during high school. I seldom had people over to my house. I never wanted them to know how dysfunctional my life really was.

It wasn't until 2016 when I went to intensive outpatient psychiatric therapy that I discovered who Todd really was: a big mess. At the time I was in my final pastorate and couldn't give the church what they needed. My heart wasn't in it at all. I asked myself why, and I realized that I wasn't even sure I believed in God anymore. What good is a Christian pastor who doesn't know if he even believes in Jesus? Did I ever? Or was I just trying to be accepted by my friends? Those were hard questions, and that is way understating it. Everything I believed, everything I thought I was, and everything I had known since high school, was suddenly gone. It was like the death of an old friend. I knew exactly what that felt like. I thought about Rick more than ever. *How was he so comfortable in his skin? Why wasn't I?*

After he died, I began to seriously ponder my life as I compared it to his. He left an amazing legacy to his family and friends. I had hurt my family and friends. I didn't know at the time that I was entrenched in severe anxiety and depression. I loathed myself so much that I sabotaged every good thing in my life.

When the spiritual rug of your life is yanked out from underneath you, it is perfectly normal to go into crisis mode. Something was terribly wrong with me. I had lost my faith. The very thing that I devoted my life to sharing was just ... gone. I was terrified. The fact of the matter is that I was more relieved than sad. I felt free—a lifelong burden had been removed from my sagging spiritual shoulders. If I didn't want to, I never had to go back to church ever again. *Let them have it!* I thought. I'm done. I'm out. The problem for me was that I no longer had a belief system. I am a spiritual-minded person. I needed *something* to grab hold of.

Before I left the church, I had acquired a job at a local furniture store. The owner and his family were Christians, but much different than what I was used to. They treated me like family from day one. I was doing really good there, and after a few months, a position

opened in another store. This store was a one-man operation, as there was nowhere near the foot traffic than at my store. The owners had been so good to me and I didn't want to let them down.

At the new store, there was literally nothing to do for most of the day except sit at the computer in the office. I played on social media and binge-watched several series I had been wanting to see. I watched old movies I had never seen. Mostly, I watched things that pushed me out of my comfort zone. Every now and then, a customer would come in and I would stop and wait on them. I made some good sales, so the owners didn't mind me sitting at the PC most of the day. It was a great time of mental unwinding for me. I didn't have to focus on much at all. I was getting paid to use the computer pretty much. It was a healing time for me.

I soon became bored with binge-watching. I started to think about faith again. I felt empty inside, even though my life was good. I took to the internet exploring beliefs and why we need them. I connected with an amazing Hindu swami, who was so full of wisdom and kindness. He even suggested that Hinduism was not for me. He said that Christianity is where my heart belonged. I felt a little put off at the time, but now I realize what an amazing thing Swami J did for me. I began to read books by John Assaraf, Vishen Lakhiani of *MindValley.com*, and I discovered books on the brain and faith by Dr. Andrew Newburg.

I spent hours in front of the company computer watching Masterclasses taught by some incredible people I had never heard of before. John Assaraf's *Brain-A-Thon* was also one of my favorite things to watch. John has met with brain experts all over the world. His teachings about the brain are geared toward living the life you dreamed of by unlocking yourself from unhealthy beliefs and traditions that have held you back. I was taking pages of notes and absorbing as much as I could from these incredible people. I started writing *The Renewing of Your Mind* during this time. It took me three years and several rewrites to complete. Plus, there was so much research that I had done. The book didn't feel right to me. I felt like I was sharing information that had already been shared by John, Vishen, Swami

J, and others. It wasn't *my* book. I wasn't using my own voice. I was going back to trying to be these people rather than myself again. I wanted to write my own book. Something was missing, however. Or rather, *someone*.

Jesus. Not the Jesus I had been preaching for so long. Not the Jesus that I could do nothing but fail. Not the Jesus who sits at the right hand of God, shaking his disappointed head at me.

I wanted to rediscover the Jesus I met in 1983 as a teenager. Those first months as a Christian were like a dream. I talked to Jesus and he talked to me ... like a brother. I wanted everyone to know him. I didn't understand how I ever lived without him. I walked on clouds during that time in 1983. Nothing bothered me because I had Jesus in my life. I also had some of the best friends in all of explored space. I was the happiest I had ever been!

Until ... one day when I was sixteen years old. Something happened that forever changed me.

The scary guy that I mentioned earlier from the revival and his surprisingly sweet wife approached me after church one Sunday. They asked if they could talk to me for a moment. I said okay. They told me they had been praying for me and that God wanted them to tell me that I really shouldn't wear blue jeans to church. In 1983, I had two pairs of jeans. One with holes that I wore to school, and one pair without holes that I wore to church.

They also proceeded to tell me that God didn't approve of my long hair (my mane in my younger years was legendary!). They said it drew attention to me and not Jesus. Flummoxed and sick to my stomach, I thanked them and went home. I believed them. I was doing it wrong. I thought Jesus was pleased with me, but I was wrong. How dare I be so casual with the savior of mankind? I got a job and bought myself some appropriate church clothes.

For many years after that day, I served that "Jesus." The disappointed one that I could never please no matter how hard I tried. As a young pastor, I invested good money into my wardrobe. I had three nice suits, several shirts, a closet full of ties, and some kicking

wing-tipped shoes in both black and brown! My wardrobe was never again going to disappoint Jesus, my master and lord.

No, that is not the Jesus I wanted to bring with me this time around. I wanted the real Jesus again. He was still there. He had never left me at all. He was still closer than a brother and He loved, accepted, and affirmed me just as Todd. No conditions or stipulations were attached.

And that, dear reader, is my deconstruction story . The story doesn't end there, however, and it shouldn't. Not for me or anyone else who is deconstructing. We must realize that deconstruction is a *means to an end*, and not the end itself. The reconstructing of our minds is about replacing outdated information with new and better information.

The dilemma in all of this is whether you and I choose to take the journey or stay planted in our limiting beliefs and unhappiness. Reconstruction, which is the main theme of this book, begins with one small step. I promise we will get there!

Reconstruction begins in our minds. Our minds are powerful. We each have unique ways of viewing the world. We refer to these as *perceptions*. In our next chapter, we will consider perceptions versus reality.

Chapter Two

THE PESKY PERCEPTION PROBLEM

“All that we see or seem is but a dream within a dream.”

- EDGAR ALLAN POE

Philosophy and religion ask, “What is truth?” In this chapter we will attempt to answer science’s question: “What is *reality*?” Reality may not be what you or I think it is. Reality can be many things to everyone, *Quot Homines, Tot Sententiae* (*many men, many opinions*), and that can be problematic. The root of the reality problem is *perception*. Perception is how we see what’s in front of us. The problem or question with perception, according to Cognitive Research Science, is, *what if we are misinterpreting our perceptions? What if they are flawed or incomplete?*

Centuries ago, humans believed the world was flat. Why? Because it *looked* flat. Look to the left, look to the right...there is no round, it is all flat. That was common perception and it made perfect sense. However, Greek mathematician, Pythagoras, and Greek geographer Eratosthenes eventually proved empirically that Earth was indeed round. That is our current reality: a round earth.

Humans once believed that the Earth was the center of the entire universe. Why? Because it *seemed* that way and it made perfect sense. That was common perception. Polish astronomer, Nicolaus Copernicus, proved scientifically that we are not the center of the

universe after all. We revolve around the sun. That is our current reality: Earth is not the center of the Universe.

What ties both examples together, is that new and better information was discovered, applied, and it eventually proven to update two new realities: Earth is round, not flat, and Earth is not the center of the universe. Though it looked that way, the perceptions were flawed and incomplete. To be sure, the new truth was hard to accept right away. In fact, early astronomer Galileo was condemned by the Catholic church in 1633 for believing and teaching that the Earth rotated around the sun. They had even put his discoveries on trial! Imagine discovering the cure for some disease, being arrested, and tried for blasphemy. Three hundred fifty-nine years later, on October 31, 1991, Pope John Paul II acknowledged publicly that the Roman Catholic Church had erred in condemning Galileo for asserting that the Earth revolves around the Sun. The Pontiff declared him forgiven.

Why are we so afraid to shift our perception when there is new and more accurate information available through proven scientific research?

I have four pets. There are two dogs, Toby, the Hyper-Beagle, and Lucy, the frumpy Rhodesian Ridgeback; there is a bunny, Mr. Snuggles, and a white dove named Angel, who is twenty-two years old. The dogs have free reign of the house (as well as of the humans!), but Mr. Snuggles lives in a 10' by 6' pen and Angel is in a cage. Angel's cage is small, but she never complains. For years, she has lived in this small cage with two perches and some toys. Every day, she sings, and it is a beautiful, soothing sound. She also laughs and barks like a dog... welcome to my world!

The cage is small, but she is completely content and happy. We sometimes open the door to her cage to see if she will fly out, but she never does. She is content to safely remain in that cage, even though we have plenty of room for her to fly around if she wished. Her cage is all she needs, all she has ever had, and all she will ever need, from her point of view.

Many Conservative American Evangelicals are stuck in the tiny cages of their limited beliefs. I know this because I was one of them for so long. The Bible was more than enough for me. If someone said

that God had done something in their life that I could not confirm with scripture, I simply rejected it, and them. My spiritual beliefs were gathered over a thirty-year period. I worked hard to get and keep them. For a long time, no one could ask me theological questions or engage in discussion with me because I was unmovable in my conservative beliefs and perceptions. I lost friends and estranged loved ones because of my arrogance. I had my small, fundamentalist cage and everything I needed. I was not coming out of it. I was perfectly content and safe in there. I deconstructed all of that after discovering new and better information that altered my beliefs.

Conversely, Mr. Snuggles, the bunny, has no problem at all stepping out of his cage when we open the gate. He jumps around and around, looking for new things to explore (and power cords to chew). He isn't at all afraid to step out of his familiar environment and take in all that surrounds him.

In recent years, I have read books, attended seminars, webinars, and conferences to gather new and better information about faith, energy, and enlightenment. Slowly, I started venturing out of my conservative cage and exploring my own thoughts. I began to question the precepts which I had once held on to so tightly. I met with people from other world religions and even made a few friends. I attended churches from other cultures, denominations, and faith histories. A couple of them even had me come and speak. I was treated better by them than I ever was in any of my former churches!

I was shifting my perception and opening myself to new and better information.

Our perception of God, Jesus, Holy Spirit, Heaven, Hell, Homosexuality, Marriage, Divorce, and Morality is what it is because it has always looked that way and it made perfect sense. These insights have been passed down for generations and indoctrinated into believers everywhere. Church history is replete with people who challenged the popular beliefs of their day. Some were hanged, imprisoned, and exiled. For what? For shifting their faith perceptions based on new and more accurate information. Reformations and revivals happened as people began to see that God is much bigger than their mental

cages will ever allow Him to be! They opened their mental cage doors and courageously ventured out. It changed the world! Let's take a quick trip down under.

The Australian Jewel Beetle is brown, dimpled, and glossy. Only the male can fly, and he does just that, looking for a mate. Female beetles are larger than the males, and don't fly. Mating occurs on the ground. The female beetle has a large, shiny brown body covered in dimples. A male flying in search of a mate will scan the ground below him, looking for a shiny brown object with a dimpled surface. And therein lies the problem.

The beetles almost went extinct some time ago. Males were flying and landing on a brown, dimpled, and glossy object of their affections and mating. The problem was that they were landing on brown, dimpled, glossy discarded bottles of beer in the outback. In order to preserve the Australian Jewel Beetle, Australia had to literally change the color of their beer bottles from brown to white to save this species. It is the quintessential story of men leaving women for the bottle!

The male only saw the gloss, the brown, and the dimples. It never occurred to him that he had mated with an inanimate object. Furthermore, the male risks being devoured by ants or drying up in the sun, still trying his hardest to please his false "partner." He was instinctively drawn to the familiar color and texture. Even while crawling all over the bottle, he could not discover his mistake. Likewise, our human instinct is to see what we want to see. To perceive what we wish to perceive, based on what we know and trust because it makes perfect sense to us. Is that so awful?

What if there is an alternative? Evolutionists postulate that we have natural intuitions to see only what we need to survive, rather than perceiving reality in its broader context. These evolutionary "hacks" exist to keep us safe and should be taken seriously.

"See that snake? Do not pick it up."

"See that cliff? Do not jump off it."

"See that hot oven? Do not touch it."

These are perceptual symbols that God created us with to keep us safe and alive.

The problem is that, like the jewel beetle and my dove, we like our reality as we perceive it. We don't like to admit we are wrong. But here's the point: Once we let go of our stubbornly intuitive but massively false assumptions about the God and the Universe, we open ourselves to new ways to perceive life's greatest mysteries. When we jettison our misinterpreted, incomplete, flawed perceptions and beliefs and choose to step outside the cages of our minds, we will begin to discover that reality is more fascinating and surprising than we've ever imagined.

This cognitive shift is the beginning of *reconstruction*. Reconstruction beckons us to surrender our long-held beliefs, mind-sets, points of view, and opinions in favor of updated knowledge that leads to healthier attitudes and outcomes. Otherwise, like the Australian Jewel Beetle, we risk spiritual and mental extinction, or being devoured by the ants of our stubbornness.

This stubbornness we speak of is known as *Cognitive Rigidity*, which we will examine in our next chapter.

Chapter Three

THE COGNITION CONUNDRUM

“Cognitive psychology tells us that the unaided human mind is vulnerable to many fallacies and illusions because of its reliance on its memory for vivid anecdotes rather than systematic statistics.”

- DR. STEVEN PINKER

“To know that we know what we know, and to know that we do not know what we do not know, that is true knowledge.”

- NICOLAUS COPERNICUS

The scientific word for point-of-view is *cognition*. Your cognition takes many years to develop. It is the sum-total of all you have learned, everything you believe, and all your individual experiences. My cognition, or point-of-view could be completely opposite from yours regarding, well ... anything. Therein lies the conundrum: *We are who and what we are, and we are unwilling to change. What we know is all we need to know.* Instead of remaining polarized by our differences, we should embrace and celebrate them!

During my tenure in local church ministry, I encountered various understandings about God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the Bible, Soteriology (the doctrine of salvation), worship, communion, tithing/giving, servanthood, evangelism, Protestants, Catholics, and the

various expressions of these things. The conundrum is that everyone of us perceives these representations of faith in a myriad of ways. Thus, begs the inevitable question: *which expression is the correct one?* The answer is simple.

They all are ... according to our own unique perspectives .

As an evangelical pastor I held up the Bible as the final authority on all matters of life and principle. That viewpoint was indoctrinated to me in Bible college. I was warned of the potential dangers of doubting God and the Scriptures. *Sola scriptura—only the Bible.* All my sermons were centered around living up to the standards of God's word and the consequences for not doing so. I was a preacher of fear. Obey God, or else. Read your Bible every day, or else. Meditate on it day and night, or else. Bring it with you to church, or else. Leave it open during the sermon, or else. Stand in honor of its reading, or else. Memorize it, or else. Love it, or else. Hold it up against anything that dared to contradict it, even the Bible's own contradictions were our problem, not God's, or else! It's all part of the mystery. God's ways/thoughts are higher than our ways/thoughts. I believed that God superintended the copying of the inerrant original texts over thousands of years. *Sola-freaking-Scriptura!* God said it, that settled it, and I believed it! And by the way, you do too, got it? Anything less is heretical. B-I-B-L-E, that's the book for me. The end. *Ex cathedra.*

That was my expression of the Christian faith. There were other expressions more Jesus-centered. I merely dismissed them as the peddling of cheap grace. The social gospel was heresy to me. Catholics were all going to hell, along with all the people who reject, or have never even heard, the gospel. Collateral damage. Hell was hot and filling up more and more every day with unfortunate victims of pastors who didn't *preach the word* and their congregants who had the misfortune of being in their liberal, seeker-friendly churches. It was what it was—my cognition, or point-of-view of Christianity.

Would you like to know what turned my cognition around? It was, in fact, the *Bible*. John chapter one, verse fourteen, specifically. *The WORD became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood*

(MSG, emphasis mine). That verse stopped me dead in my fundamental tracks.

The Word of God was the ultimate expression of God in his perfect and unique son, Jesus of Nazareth. The word was not a book, it was a man who is at once human and divine. Jesus is the Word of God. He is the fullness of every aspect of almighty God. I had been worshipping a book, not a man—not *the* man, the Lord Jesus. I would discover that the teachings and the ways of Jesus stood in stark contrast to much of what was known as *Adamic, Mosaic, Abrahamic, and Davidic*. Lots and lots of “ics,” propagated by men like me. We were called Pastors and Scholars. The ancients were called Pharisees, Sadducees, and Rabbis. They upheld God’s law as it was contained in the original manuscripts. They rejected Jesus and everything he represented as God in the flesh. Every good, kind, and noble thing Jesus did was harshly criticized by the religious elite. Sound familiar?

Meanwhile, people were being healed, delivered, and made whole by this man named Jesus. Twenty thousand people or more were fed by Jesus on a grassy knoll from a little boy’s meager lunch, of which twelve baskets of food were leftover and everyone’s bellies were full.¹ Jesus spoke of being sent to finish what God had started by doing His will on earth. God was with us, finishing what he started through Himself. John said that he *came unto his own (that’s us), and his own rejected him (that’s also us)*. Jesus made many bold proclamations about himself, as He was, *head and shoulders over other messengers from God*.² The other messengers were prophets, kings, scholars, and leaders like Moses or David.

What the heck was this guy’s problem? Jesus was upending what people had believed for centuries with one simple, but not easy, commandment: *Love God, Love Others*.³ What about the rest of the commandments? What about the sabbath? What about honoring your

1 John 6:1-15

2 John 3:31

3 Matthew 22:35-40; Mark 12:28-34, and Luke 10:27a

father and mother? What about not bearing false witness? Who did this guy think he was?

Emmanuel—God with us. He breathed the same air we all breathe. He was fully human. He likely had bad breath in the morning. He farted, belched, peed, and pooped. He was warmed by the same sun as we are ... the one *He* created. He ate and slept. He was human like us but also contained all the divine essence of God within himself. He shared that divinity with the world and left us astonished.

Jesus challenged every cognition of every person everywhere. He created a holy conundrum that He brought with him from heaven to earth. He spent time with lowlife IRS agents, adulteresses, foreigners, lepers, the demonized, and the outcast. He restored life to a man who had been dead for four days. He restored our lives by giving up his own on a Roman cross. He pleaded for us to be forgiven while we mocked him as he hung on that same cross. He obliterated the cosmic separation we were told we had from God. He revealed that he has always loved us and always will. He supernaturally evacuated himself from a borrowed tomb, placing once and for all the seal of His majestic grace and forgiveness on our lives. Jesus left us with another part of himself, the Holy Spirit, so that we could do what he did and so much more. Through this he revealed that divine ability has always been inside of us.

What have *we* done? We have imposed our arrogance-blinded cognitions on the gospel narrative so that we can control the outcomes. We have murdered to spread this faulty expression of grace. We took what Jesus did and turned it into a religion that demands conformity and cooperation, held together by the Bible, which we have also hijacked for personal power and gain. We have become judges, prominent leaders, and modern-day Pharisees. We decide what is truth and what is not. We hold up our Bibles and pronounce the authority of scripture that we probably have not even read. We blindly follow along with the rest of the Bible thumpers and pick up their mantle of exclusion and mockery of the “least of us.” We elected a President who is nothing like Jesus and held him up as the man, “God put in the White House.”

Not me. Not anymore. My point of view has been altered due to deep deconstruction. In no way am I trying to imply that I am better than anyone. I'm still perfectly flawed me, but I see things much differently now. Unlearning thirty-plus years of personal theology was harder than I can say in words. It was like the death of a long-time friend whom you trusted and believed in for so long. I have experienced this type of loss both literally and spiritually. In some providential way, it was my dear friend Rick who planted the seed of deconstruction in my life. I brushed a lot of it off back then. When he died suddenly in 2013, I started reading the books he had recommended and began to understand his cognition. His death inspired me to write *The Renewing of Your Mind*, and I proudly dedicated it to him. The funny thing is that while I was deconstructing, I did not even realize that it was deconstruction, technically. I was amending my beliefs to be more like Jesus.

Not Jesus, the white-American-fundamentalist-evangelical savior. I had to free Jesus from my indoctrinated cognitions and just allow Him to be who He truly is. He is God who came to us and traded his perfection for our imperfection. He gave his own life to demonstrate how deep his love for us is and always has been.

I did not change right away. Before I discuss reconstruction, I want to caution you that deconstruction can lead to cynicism and a critical spirit. That was me for a little while. Be careful with that. Jesus loves all of us, even those who don't think as we do. The religious right, left, and middle are deeply loved and adored by Jesus, whose grace permits us to have our own personal cognitions, popular or not. I personally believe that our diversity, if united within the unmeasurable grace of God, could turn the world upside-down with love. I really believe this!

So, what have we learned so far?

We have learned that our perception isn't necessarily reality. Just because the earth looks flat doesn't mean that it is. Just because you perceive the Bible as the final authority doesn't make it so. Thus, breeds the cognition conundrum. Which of us is right? All of us. We are all on a journey. Our journey. I am not on your journey any more than

you are on mine. When we come together with our various cognitions, or points of view, we create a larger, even better cognition. The conundrum transforms into a beautiful reality of living for each other rather than ourselves. I put you first, and you put me first. Imagine the possibilities!

Chapter Four

THE CASH COW CONFUSION

“No golden calf is needed for the relationship between God and God’s people to take root in the world—only a community of willing individuals.”

-C. ANDREW DOYLE

It has been said that we humans all have a “God-shaped” hole in our hearts, which is indicative of our deep need to have a god to worship in order to be whole spiritually and mentally. Everyone has their own image of God that is very personal to them. So much so that they are willing to fight for and defend it, even to the death. For centuries, humans have fought wars over religion. Their religion.

The late comedian George Carlin summed it up this way:

“Do you believe in God?”

“Yes.”

“Do you believe in *my* god?”

“No.”

(Points gun) *Kablam!*

In Exodus 32, Moses, the reluctant leader of the Israelites, who had rescued them from slavery, went up to the mountain to meet with the Hebrew God, whose name is, “I Am who I Am.”⁴ While Moses was away, the Israelites were feeling left out. They asked Moses’

brother, Aaron, who had been left in charge, to make a god for them to worship.

The text doesn't indicate whether Aaron protested their idea. It seems that he was right on board with the request. Aaron asked everyone to give him all their gold jewelry. I have always wondered how people who had been enslaved for over four hundred years had gold jewelry. Was that standard Egyptian slave *accoutrement*? "Here, slave, wear these gold earrings while you build our pyramids ..."

I digress.

Aaron took their gold, melted it down, and fashioned it into a calf. Not a cat or a unicorn. Not a statue of some great ruler. Not a pair of praying hands. Not a bunny or a dog.

A calf. A golden one. Why?

The story of the golden calf, the greatest scandal of the wilderness period, is recalled in Deuteronomy 9:9-21, based on the fuller account in Exodus 32. Images of bulls and calves were common in Near Eastern religions. In Egypt, a bull, *Apis*, was sacred to the god Ptah and emblematic of him. In Canaanite literature, the chief god El is sometimes called a bull, although this may be no more than an epithet signifying strength, and the storm god Baal sires an ox in one myth. Did you notice that there were five gods in one paragraph? A lot of people and cultures have their own golden calves!

Why did all these people create all these gods for themselves?

You will recall from chapter two we discussed perception. Why did they worship these inanimate objects? Simple. They looked like gods. I mean, seriously, what does God really look like? Really? No one knows. Many have speculated. DaVinci, Michelangelo, Raphael, Salvador Dali, Jean-Francois Millet, and El Greco have all attempted to portray God through their famous paintings.

A few actors have portrayed God on film. George Burns, Morgan Freeman, Alanis Morissette, and Octavia Spencer are among the most culturally relevant. Each one's portrayal of God is more tied to the characteristics of the actors, however. There are innumerable attempts throughout history to try and show how God is. Only one has ever succeeded ... Jesus.

Jesus of Nazareth was born in humble stature and died a humiliating death. In between those two events, he portrayed God in every way. Dr. Brad Jersak introduced us to *A More Christ-like God* in his book with the same title. The people were looking for a King; Jesus showed them a servant. They wanted a King who would cleanse the world of oppressors; Jesus washed their feet. Social outcasts were shunned and ignored; Jesus befriended and dined with them. The people wanted a condemning King; Jesus showed them forgiveness. Everyone's brazen imagery of God was annulled in the person of Jesus ... fully God, fully human. The real and authentic "golden calf" is actually a *lamb*.

The Israelites went wild in their "worshipping" of their golden calf. In return, they were forced by Moses to drink the powdered remains of their golden calf to punish them and then he had them all killed. The Law permitted him to do so. Killing people as an act of worship under the Mosaic Law was totally accepted but looked nothing like God.

To worship our lamb, however, is to help (not kill) the needy, feed the poor, and stand up for the oppressed. Not by raising up huge buildings and trying to abscond political power and influence. The Israelites choked down their powdered water leading to their death. Jesus told us that if we drink the water that he gives us, not only will it refresh us, but will spring up within us with eternal life.⁵ He wasn't proclaiming this truth dressed in a silk suit. He was likely dressed in ragged clothing. He wasn't preaching at the First Christian Baptist-Presby-Costal Church, be assured of that.

Are you ready for this?

He was talking to a Samaritan woman at a well in the center of town. *A Samaritan woman*.

Whiskey. Tango. Alpha. Foxtrot.

Let me explain. In the culture Jesus was in, Samaritans were sworn enemies of the Jews (remember that Jesus was a Jew). Instead of rejecting the woman at the well and calling her a "dog" or a "half-breed,"

5 John 4:14 (ESV)

like his Jewish contemporaries did, He offered her a refreshing drink, intimate personal conversation, and eternal life to an enemy of God's people who also happened to be a woman in a culture that was insanely male dominated.

What was the big deal about the Samaritans? Why were they so hated by the Jews?

The nation of Israel was divided into two nations in the days of Rehoboam (1 Kings 12). Israel was composed of the ten tribes to the north, and Judah was made up of Judah and Benjamin. The animosity between the Jews (inhabitants of the Judah, the southern kingdom) and Israelites began immediately after the division, as Samaria was the capital city of the northern kingdom (with Jeroboam as her first king). Rehoboam assembled an army to make war against Israel to reunite the kingdom, but God intervened through His prophet Shemiah (1 Kings 12:21-24). Later, in speaking of the reign of Abijam, Jeroboam's son, 1 Kings 15:6 says, "there was war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam all the days of his life."

Immediately after the division, Jeroboam changed the worship of the Israelites in 1 Kings 12:25-33. No longer did the inhabitants of the north travel to Jerusalem to offer sacrifice and worship (cf. Deuteronomy 12:5-14). Instead, Jeroboam set up idols in Dan and Bethel.

Later, after Israel's fall to the Assyrians, they began to intermarry with the Assyrians, contrary to Deuteronomy 7:3-5. Therefore, the Jews hated the Samaritans as "dogs," or "half-breeds."

It's true ... the ancient Hebrew culture had ugly disdain for dogs. To be identified as one of our furry little friends was the ultimate insult.

The Samaritans were also a continuous source of difficulty to the Jews who rebuilt Jerusalem after returning from Babylonian captivity (Ezra 4:10; Nehemiah 4:2).

Eventually, the religion of the Samaritans evolved to the point that they held only the Pentateuch (Genesis-Deuteronomy) as being the Law of God, rejecting all the books of poetry and prophecy. Furthermore, they claimed their copy of the Pentateuch was the only

original copy (a claim still made today by what few Samaritans still survive). Obviously, this was/is a claim rejected by the Jews.

Jesus treated the Samaritan woman like a good friend. He didn't chase her from the well and tell her to get back over the wall to her own people. He showed her grace and offered her the highest blessing!

The propensity for men and women who say, "God is so good," or, "I am so blessed," almost always reflects financial or material blessings. When the job is lost, or the money stops flowing, is God still good? We need to separate money from grace. One has nothing to do with the other. Money by itself is not evil and is even nice to have but should never be traded as a replacement for authentic fellowship with Jesus.

The story of the Golden "Cash Cow" reminds us of this powerful truth—Jesus turns the deathly powdered water in our hearts into living water! There is no confusion there. Also, grace has no walls or boundaries. It is free and available to all! So, throw away your golden calves and take a great big gulp of the Living Water!

You will never thirst again.

Ever.

APPENDIX

- *A More Christlike God*, and anything by Brad Jersak
- *Apparent Faith, and The Tea Shop*, by Karl Forehand
- *Blue Like Jazz, and Scary Close*, by Donald Miller
- *Bringing Your Shadows Out of the Dark*, by Robert Augustus Masters
- *Edgewise*, by Jana Braden Greene
- *God Can't*, by Thomas Jay Oord
- *Jesus Unbound, Jesus Untangled, Jesus Unveiled, and Jesus Undefeated*, by Keith Giles
- *Out of Sorts*, by Sarah Bessey
- *Pastrix*, by Nadia Bolz-Weber
- *Searching for Sunday, and Faith Unraveled*, by the late Rachel Held Evans
- *The Renewing of Your Mind: Asking Modern Questions to Ancient Answers*, by Todd R. Vick

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Todd R. Vick is an award-winning writer, bestselling author, event speaker, and ex-pastor. He has helped countless people achieve transformation through the renewing of their minds and the elimination of unhealthy religious beliefs. Todd and his family reside in South Carolina.

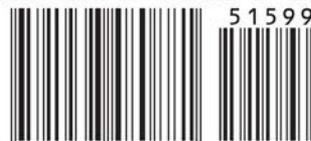
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