

*Death to  
Deconstruction*

**RECLAIMING FAITHFULNESS  
AS AN ACT OF REBELLION**

**SMALL GROUP STUDY GUIDE**

# How to Use This Study Guide

This group study unfolds over eight sessions, between which each participant will read from *Death to Deconstruction*. On average, the reading amounts to about five pages per day (to facilitate pacing, we've outlined an approximate 'pages per day' figure leading to each session).

**About Group Sessions:** *Death to Deconstruction*—and its corresponding group study—broaches a wide variety of divisive, volatile topics considered deeply personal by many if not most people. Anyone can read the book and join the study, but a generous measure of grace, patience, and open-mindedness will go a long way in getting the most from the study. Let these principles guide your discussion:

- Listen.
- Resist the urge to correct.
- Disagree graciously.
- Be open *and* concise—don't monopolize the discussion time.
- Be humble and kind. The group study is a time for vulnerability, not for venting outrage.
- Encourage one another and build one another up (1 Thessalonians 5:11)

**Appointing a Leader:** Someone should lead the group study. The leader requires no special experience or qualification other than the basic willingness to keep the study on the rails as best as they can by watching the time and guiding the group from one topic to the next.

**Participating in the Study:** There are two simple prerequisites for joining and participating in the *Death to Deconstruction* group study:

1. A willingness and commitment to read the book within the group's appointed timetable.
2. A willingness and commitment to participate in the group's conversations.

That's it. Nothing sabotages a book club quite like a member who doesn't read the book or who doesn't really feel like talking about it. *Before* your first meeting, establish this expectation and hold one another accountable.

**The Format:** Each session unfolds like this.

- The guide will invite **one person to read a specified Scripture, then pray.**
- A set of **discussion questions** are offered to debrief the previous week's reading.
- Someone will read an **overview** of ideas to guide the session.
- A set of **discussion questions** will keep the conversation going
- Then, one person will **close in prayer.**

### **An Outline of the Reading:**

Week 1: pp 1-33 **Prologue to the Study** (33 pages, 5 pages day)

Week 2: 34-59 **Scripture** (25 pages, 4 pages a day)

Week 3: 60-86 **Scripture 2** (26 pages, 4 pages a day)

Week 4: 87-117 **Problem of Evil** (30 pages, 5 pages a day)

Week 5: 118-155 **Nationalism** (37 pages, 6 pages a day)

Week 6: 156-191 **Hypocrisy** (35 pages, 5 pages a day)

Week 7: 192-232 **Self-Denial & Conclusion** (48 pages, 7 pages a day)

### **Some tips on making it work:**

- Establish expectations from the outset (e.g., for this to work, everyone should plan on attending every meeting, completing the reading, participating in the conversations, etc.)
- Hold one another accountable. Send friendly reminders throughout the week about the reading and upcoming meeting.
- Encourage one another. Pray for one another and demonstrate gratitude for the participation of those in your group by thanking them for showing up and sharing, and by doing the same thing yourself.
- In each session, this guide will pose simple questions with broad, complex implications. The guide is written this way so that your group can spend more time in conversation than reading. Consequently, the guide (and your time together) will work best when the group is prepared to open up and talk.

# Week I: Prologue to the Study

Pages 1-33 (33 pages, five pages a day for seven days)

## Begin with prayer

Gather with your group in a comfortable setting. Have someone read Romans 12:1-2 out loud over the group, then pray, asking the Holy Spirit to lead and guide your conversation and time together.

## Talk through the following discussion questions:

- What stood out in this week's reading and why?
- Which of the three readers best describes you? Why?
- What differentiates deconstruction from transformation?

## Have someone read this overview to the group:

Every disciple of Jesus changes. They're supposed to. They don't just get older and taller; their faith itself evolves. If they remain faithful, their minds will be renewed and transformed across the winding journey of following Jesus. This is true of anyone who trains under a master for a way of life, be it a boxer, a pianist, or a plumber.

Throughout the process of transformation, the disciple of Jesus remodels the house of their faith and belief. Walls are painted. Broken fixtures are repaired. Small chairs are replaced with bigger ones as we grow. Old uncomfortable couches are thrown out and replaced with ones better suited for sitting. Anyone who follows Jesus *must* transform. This is the process of spiritual formation.

*Deconstruction*, on the other hand (as it is popularly understood), is a violent, reactive dismantling and demolition of faith and belief. Transformation unfolds *within* the ancient, sacred community of the Jesus movement, submitted to the Scriptures and to the teachings of Jesus. Deconstruction leaves home or tears it down.

**Keep the conversation going with the following questions:**

- If you follow Jesus, what are some ways your faith has transformed over the years of your discipleship? (Has your theology evolved? A doctrine shifted? The life rhythm of your discipleship—the way you read the Scriptures, pray, practice community—developed over time?)
- Have you or someone you've known been through a process of deconstruction?

**Close in prayer**

Invite one person to close in prayer over the group.

# Week II: Scripture

Pages 34-59 (25 pages, 4 pages a day for seven days)

## Begin with prayer

Gather with your group in a comfortable setting. Have someone read Psalm 1 out loud over the group, then pray, asking the Holy Spirit to lead and guide your conversation and time together.

## Talk through the following discussion question:

- What stood out in this week's reading and why?
- Do you find the literary complexity of the Bible troubling or freeing? Why?

## Have someone read this overview to the group:

Watch [this video](#) from The Bible Project.

We get frustrated with the Bible when we approach it as an entirely literal, linear one-size-fits-all manual for life in the modern world. But the Bible wasn't designed as a convenient reference manual, or as a textbook, or as a rule index for winning arguments.

The Bible describes itself as a library designed for a lifetime of *ongoing meditation*. The Bible *is* meant to change us but by *formation* rather than *information* alone. Information is fast and efficient, but formation is complex, and it takes a lifetime.

**Keep the conversation going with the following questions:**

- What role did the Bible play in your earliest church experiences and how do you think those experiences shaped your understanding of the Bible?
- What does your practice of reading the Bible (if you have one) look like right now? How did you get to that point?
- What baggage do you bring to your understanding of the Bible (fear, confusion, boredom, skepticism, etc.)?

**Close in prayer**

Invite one person to close in prayer over the group.

# Week III: Scripture, Part Two

Pages 60-86 (26 pages, 4 pages a day)

## Begin with prayer

Gather with your group in a comfortable setting. Have someone read 2 Timothy 3:14-17 out loud over the group, then pray, asking the Holy Spirit to lead and guide your conversation and time together.

## Talk through the following discussion questions:

- What stood out in this week's reading and why?
- If it's true that "the Left does not receive the Scriptures as truth from God. The right doesn't enter into the complicated work of inspecting the Scriptures to discover what they actually teach," (p. 70) which side of the spectrum best describes the way the Bible has been presented to you?

## Have someone read this overview to the group:

American Christians often feel as if the only two camps are Biblical fundamentalism or Biblical progressivism, but all over the world the Bible continues to change lives.

Dr. Gina Zurlo is a historian, sociologist, and demographer whose [research](#) indicates a few fascinating things about global Christianity.

- 67% of the world's Christians live in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Oceania.
- The largest share of them is in Africa.
- The majority of them are women.
- The median age of Christians in sub-Saharan Africa is just 19.

Maybe it seems as if the historic Christian movement is being deconstructed to death by jaded American ex-vangelicals, but it simply isn't true. The average Christian is not represented by some cynical white Californian post-Christian podcaster dude, the average Christian is a Black teenage girl in Nigeria.

As Professor A.J. Swoboda writes: "For every millennial, affluent, white college student who is choosing to deconstruct their Christian faith, there are five nonwhite people with less privilege in this world who are finding in the Bible the greatest message one could ever imagine."

**Keep the conversation going with the following questions:**

- What might be some reasons why so many Christians struggle to understand the Bible as a work of artistic, literary sophistication?
- Why do you think many Christians seem so conflicted by a Bible that utilizes both straightforward fact *and* literary prose, metaphor, parable, and poetry?
- What lenses do you think you bring to your reading of the Scriptures (upbringing, denominational tradition, politics, worldview, etc.)?

**Close in prayer**

Invite one person to close in prayer over the group.

# Week IV: The Problem of Evil

Pages 87-115 (26 pages, 4 pages a day)

## Begin with prayer

Gather with your group in a comfortable setting. Have someone read 1 John 3:8 out loud over the group, then pray, asking the Holy Spirit to lead and guide your conversation and time together.

## Talk through the following discussion questions:

- What stood out in this week's reading and why?
- Has there been something you've experienced personally, or that you've observed in the life of someone you know or in the world that has made you grapple with the claim of a good God in the reality of a broken world?

## Have someone read this overview to the group:

Though it takes many shapes, every human being experiences suffering. No amount of planning, saving, or attempted control can stave off bereavement, sickness, betrayal, financial ruin, or an innumerable host of troubles and tragedies that come creeping into your comfort and security to needle the bubble of your otherwise happy life.

Life itself is forever subject to forces beyond your control. Comfortable or otherwise, you and everyone you love will die. Christians know this, on some level, but we struggle to make sense of it because, as far as we can tell, we're being asked to believe two things many of us cannot bear to reconcile.

That God is good, but the world (mostly) isn't.

**Keep the conversation going with the following questions:**

- Josh offers several paradigms for confronting the problem of evil (the devil, the God-given freedom of human and spiritual beings, and chaos). Where do these ideas connect or conflict with what you've previously believed or assumed about the problem of evil?
- How has your theodicy (your answer to the problem of evil) helped or hurt your navigation of suffering in the past?

**Close in prayer**

Invite one person to close in prayer over the group.

# Week V: Nationalism

Pages 117-155 (37 pages, 6 pages a day)

## Begin with prayer

Gather with your group in a comfortable setting. Have someone read Acts 17:6-8 out loud over the group, then pray, asking the Holy Spirit to lead and guide your conversation and time together.

## Talk through the following discussion questions:

*PLEASE NOTE: This practice is not an appropriate space to discuss and debate politicians and policies. Please demonstrate a willingness to hear from your group without correcting, arguing, or inserting your political opinions.*

- What stood out in this week's reading and why?
- In what ways has a politicized Christianity intersected with and affected your journey with Jesus?

## Have someone read this overview to the group:

Talking about God and government can be... complicated.

Some of us take politics very seriously—either by way of upbringing or personal conviction. Some of us were raised within a political ideology, or to prioritize a certain issue. Others of us have almost nothing invested in the world of politics, familiar with only what rises to the surface via memes, social media, and pop culture.

Some of us tense at the mere mention of a certain politician or policy, others of us don't know or care enough to be uncomfortable. Either way, our culture is one of political division and acrimony.

As the world lumbers awkwardly from one election cycle to another, disciples of Jesus face complicated questions and conversations about what it means to follow Jesus well in a politically divided world.

**Keep the conversation going with the following questions:**

- How would you describe the political environment of your upbringing?
- How would you describe your current connection to the world of politics? Do you feel as if you are often sucked into the outrage hysterics of social media or the for-profit partisan news media? Do you feel totally detached? Something in between?
- Does the idea of being politically homeless in the name of allegiance to Jesus comfort or disturb you? Why?

**Close in prayer**

Invite one person to close in prayer over the group.

# Week VI: Hypocrisy

Pages 156-191 (35 pages, 5 pages a day)

## Begin with prayer

Gather with your group in a comfortable setting. Have someone read Isaiah 64:6-7 out loud over the group, then pray, asking the Holy Spirit to lead and guide your conversation and time together.

## Talk through the following discussion questions:

- What stood out in this week's reading and why?
- Can you recall a particular moment or season in your own life when the hypocrisy of Christians made you question your commitment to Christianity?

## Have someone read this overview to the group:

Open the Bible's epic narrative, and on page one, you get God's infinite creative love and incredible artistry and "it is good, it is good, it is *very* good," but then turn the page, and everything gets screwed up.

It is now as it was in the very beginning: Given the choice between what's best for everyone, or what *we* want (even when it's at the expense of other people and all of creation), we will eventually choose the latter. For more on this, see all of human history.

The human project is busted. And you're in it.

**Keep the conversation going with the following questions:**

- Has there been a particular person or people in your life that have exemplified the paradox of righteousness and brokenness coexisting in the same person? How did it affect you?
- In what ways have *you* exemplified the paradox of righteousness and brokenness coexisting in the same person? How do you think it has affected the people in your life?
- How can we learn to accept the inevitable brokenness of all people without being undone by it?

**Close in prayer**

Invite one person to close in prayer over the group.

# Week VII: Self-Denial & Conclusion

Pages 192-240 (48 pages, 7 pages a day)

## Begin with prayer

Gather with your group in a comfortable setting. Have someone read Matthew 16:24-25 out loud over the group, then pray, asking the Holy Spirit to lead and guide your conversation and time together.

## Talk through the following discussion questions:

- What stood out in this week's reading and why?
- If orthodoxy is a broad countryside with many camps (p. 229), what has been your experience of that countryside and those camps?
  - Have you experienced the coexistent confidence and freedom of belonging to one tradition while learning from others in gracious humility?
  - Have you experienced the fretful, walled-off, us vs. them idolizing of one tradition while demonizing others?

## Have someone read this overview to the group:

Really, we already know that self-denial is a necessary part of life. Deep down, we know that, at least sometimes, we want things that aren't best for us or others.

Anyone who embarks on any disciplined way of life, be it ballet, veganism, or kung fu, understands that in order to do so, they must relinquish part of their autonomy. Anyone who has ever navigated a meaningful long-term relationship—as a friend, a spouse, or a

parent—realizes there are times when we must set aside our natural and sincere desires in order to prioritize the good of others, ourselves, and something bigger than both.

**Keep the conversation going with the following questions:**

- Of all the Great Predators (biblical illiteracy, the problem of evil, politicized Christianity, hypocrisy, or self-denial) has presented the greatest challenges to you following Jesus?
- “The way out... [is] neither the hardened distortion of the Christian movement known as American evangelicalism nor the amorphous ‘you do you’ spirituality of the deconstructionists. The way out [is] orthodoxy: right belief.” (p. 228)
  - What aspects of the historic Christian movement do you find most vital in maintaining faithfulness? Which are the most challenging? Why?
    - Faithfulness to the authority and inspiration of the Scriptures
    - Faithfulness to the family of God, the church
    - Faithfulness to the teachings of Jesus as a way of life, the spiritual disciplines
- How can the people in this group call and encourage you to greater faithfulness?

**Close in prayer**

Invite one person to close in prayer over the group.

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