

EXCERPT



Walking Through Deconstruction *How to Be a Companion in a Crisis of Faith*

January 14, 2025 | \$18, 208 pages, paperback | 978-1-5140-0856-0

Ian Harber is a writer and Christian media producer. He has written for The Gospel Coalition, *Mere Orthodoxy*, and RELEVANT. He writes about reconstructing faith in his newsletter, *Back Again*, and about faith, media, and technology at Endeavor. He lives in Denton, Texas, with his wife and sons.

Defining Deconstruction

"I'm deconstructing my faith." Perhaps someone has said this to you recently. A friend, child, spouse, parent, coworker, or congregant. You don't really know what they mean, but it doesn't sound good. Just from the name, you can tell they are taking something apart. If it's their faith they're deconstructing, then they must be taking their faith apart. But why?

As you start asking questions, you quickly realize you've gotten yourself in over your head. They might start asking questions about the Bible, God, or the church that you've never thought about before. Or maybe you have thought about them, but they felt so big that you simply pushed them out of your mind and forgot about them. Maybe it's something you haven't thought about since seminary (if you went). They might start talking about large cultural and political issues that seem like they came out of nowhere. They begin accusing the church of doing this or not doing that. "Where is this coming from?" you wonder.

The questions and the accusations that you hear from them put you on edge. You start to feel anxiety well up inside of you. You think of the other popular deconstruction stories that you've heard of—Michael Gungor, Joshua Harris, Audrey Assad, and more, none of whom are Christians anymore. Your mind starts racing a hundred miles per hour. "Are they losing their faith?" "I thought they loved Jesus!" "I wonder if they're in some kind of sin." "I'm overwhelmed by all of these questions." And it all comes down to this one word to describe it: *deconstruction*.

The word *deconstruction* goes back to the philosopher Jacques Derrida, who used it in a technical way to describe the process of "critically reevaluat[ing] the fundamental arrangement and operations of any and all forms of analysis." If that sounds confusing, that's because it is. Deconstruction, by its nature, is difficult to describe because it's a process that deconstructs the very words needed to describe it. But it's insufficient to say that deconstruction is simply a process of analysis or critique.

Here's the primary difference: in other forms of analysis or critique, there is typically a method that is followed in order to reach a predetermined outcome. Think of the scientific method. After observing a phenomenon, you ask questions about it and research existing answers or solutions. If you don't find any satisfactory answers, you pose a hypothesis, perform a set of experiments to test your hypothesis, and draw conclusions from your experiments about whether your hypothesis has been proven right or wrong.

Deconstruction isn't like this. There is no set process and no predetermined conclusion to deconstruction. It's not a process you decide to undertake to investigate a problem. It's something you encounter and enter into. The only thing you can do in deconstruction is allow the process to unfold and follow it where it goes.

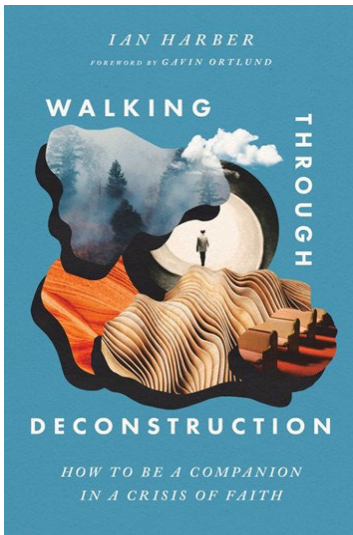


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“Ian Harber neither valorizes deconstruction nor dismisses this painful experience. As a result, he’s written a book that can help anyone undergoing this process as well as everyone who loves them. Walking Through Deconstruction deserves a wide audience and careful reading.”

—**Collin Hansen**, vice president for content at The Gospel Coalition and author of *Timothy Keller: His Intellectual and Spiritual Formation*

People don’t wake up one day with the conscious thought, “I want to be closer to the Lord. I guess I should deconstruct my faith! What’s the healthiest way for me to do that?”

The person who is deconstructing did not choose to deconstruct. You, the person walking with them, cannot control their process of deconstruction. Deconstruction is an experience that happens to you. You don’t make a rational decision to deconstruct your faith. You realize you’re deconstructing after it has already begun. This, as you might imagine, is a terrifying realization. The reason people who are deconstructing bristle at the idea of “good versus bad” deconstruction is that it feels as though people are trying to control them in a process that cannot be controlled.

You might be starting to understand why deconstruction can be such a difficult topic to discuss. It’s difficult to know exactly what we’re talking about when we talk about deconstruction. We need a working definition that captures the basic ideas of the process while being flexible enough to account for the various ways people experience deconstruction in their individual stories.

Here is how I define deconstruction: “Deconstruction is a crisis of faith that leads to the questioning of core doctrines and untangling of cultural ideologies that settles in a faith that is different from before.”

You can divide the definition into four parts:

1. A crisis of faith
2. Questioning of core doctrines
3. Untangling of cultural ideologies
4. Settling in a faith that is different from before

Each of the four parts of the definition are crucial to understanding what deconstruction is, but the most important part about this definition is that deconstruction is, before anything else, a *crisis of faith*. We can talk about doctrine, culture, and reconstruction all we want. Still, if we do not acknowledge that deconstruction is, first and foremost, a crisis of faith, then we have not understood deconstruction.

—Adapted from chapter one, “Defining Deconstruction”



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Ian Harber, Writer and Media Producer

What motivated you to write this book?

Ian Harber: Honestly, I was frustrated about the discourse around deconstruction. I wasn't happy that the only narratives about it were either:

1. Burn everything down because it's all corrupt.
2. Deconstruction is apostasy so avoid it at all costs.
3. There's a good kind of deconstruction if you just do it right.

There are aspects of truth to all three of these narratives, and yet they still miss the essence of deconstruction. Also, all of these narratives are to people who are deconstructing or who could potentially deconstruct. I wanted to write a book to the church that neither valorized or demonized deconstruction, but helped the church understand it and respond to it with both compassion and conviction.

What is distinctive about *Walking Through Deconstruction*?

Ian: Deconstruction is a crisis of faith that leads to the questioning of core doctrines and untangling of cultural ideologies that settles in a faith that is different than before. This book is written to the church by someone who deconstructed and reconstructed their faith. The goal is to serve the church and help foster both relationships and churches that have compassion on those who are deconstructing and help them reconstruct their faith.

What are the five main things you want readers to take away from your book?

Ian:

1. Deconstruction is a crisis of faith.
2. That crisis is experienced as grief.
3. Deconstruction is not something you set out to do; it is something that happens to you.
4. Deconstruction and reconstruction are primarily imaginative and emotional processes before they are intellectual.
5. The primary avenues of reconstruction are the Holy Spirit, loving relationships, and healthy churches.

Is there anything else you want to let us know about the book?

Ian: This book is honest about the failures of evangelicalism and the things that catalyze deconstruction; but it is also hopeful that deconstruction can be a means to a stronger faith than before—and that the church can be the place where that happens.



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