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CHILDERS**

WHEN A LOVED ONE
DECONSTRUCTS

Issue 115 | Fall 2024

Recipe for a robust faith

Over the past few years, “deconstruction” has become a popular theme, from TV cooking contests that deconstruct our favorite dishes to seminars that are deconstructing our faith. Breaking an item down into its fundamental elements improves our understanding of the subject and the interaction of its various elements. This allows us to experiment as we reconstruct it, making nuanced changes that improve the final product. In the case of a classic casserole that might be a bit salty and bland, we might lower the salt and add a touch of garlic or cayenne pepper.

In the case of our faith, deconstructing is often seen as evidence that we are intellectually robust, thinking deeply about the underpinnings of our faith positions, resolving irreconcilable components, and explaining obvious improbabilities. In the most positive light, this is considered healthy skepticism and labelled “progressive Christianity.”

But is deconstruction a virtue? When it undermines the core foundations of our faith, then it is not an innocent intellectual exercise but the planting of seeds of doubt that can

in the hope of eternity with that Creator, assurance of our salvation through Jesus, whom we have heard about but not seen. (For more on the topic, see our Innerview with Alisa Childers on page 10).

Jeremiah said, “Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls (6:16).” He was encouraging the people of God to consider the options, consider new ideas and new ways, and test them against the great truths that have endured the test of time. If new ideas are consistent with the whole teaching of Scripture, then embrace them.

This is not blind faith, but informed faith, a logical, reasonable explanation for the cosmic reality. We believe completely because we see and hear, and draw logical conclusions, running the ramp of reason before taking the leap of faith. Some pillars of our faith that we hold sacred are:

- a Creator God who formed the universe and made mankind (in His image, male and female, out of dust)



Mark Maxwell: President of Prairie College

- earth and love one another
- God’s final plan to dwell with mankind for all of eternity

In his letter to the Galatians, the apostle Paul warned: “Even if an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God’s curse” (1:8). In chapter 5, Paul compares false teachings to yeast where a little spreads through the whole batch of dough. We are warned against false teachers, who are like wolves among the sheep. Let us take great care to identify false teaching and with God’s wisdom to stand against it.

The enduring objective of the devil is to undermine the redemptive plan that God is working through Christ. From the time of the temptation in the Garden of Eden, it has been the goal of the devil to cast doubt on God and his Word. We believe the Bible is God’s sacred and authoritative written Word.

Based on a solid reading of the Bible, let us clarify our core faith positions and hold them with deep, but gracious conviction. May God give us the courage to speak his words, in his way, when the time is right. Stand firm, with courage, contend for the faith...for we do not labour in vain. ✠

“In the case of our faith, deconstructing is often seen as evidence that we are intellectually robust...”

blossom into unbelief. This is not the healthy investigation of Christianity. It is the insidious undermining of components that require the step of faith. Christianity is called a walk of faith: we consider the evidence available to us (like creation) and believe that there must have been a Creator. To apply Hebrews 11:1, we have confidence

- the sinful nature of humanity, separated from God by our choices
- God’s redemption plan through Jesus (the Messiah, virgin birth, sinless & miracle-marked life, crucified, resurrected, ascended to the throne room of heaven, coming again)
- Humanity’s mission to care for the



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One family's dark secret. Would they ignore the shadows? Or step into the light?

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Former ZOEgirl Alisa Childers on reconstructing with clarity, confidence, and grace.

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SEVEN QUESTIONS FOR GARY SCHMIDT

TELL US A BIT ABOUT YOUR PERSONAL BACKGROUND.

Lori and I have been married almost forty years and have four adult daughters. I grew up in rural Alberta and experienced spiritual “growth spurts” at key points in my early life. As I responded in obedience, God brought people and situations to teach me how to study his Word, walk in the Spirit, and be part of the Great Commission.

YOU DIRECT PRAIRIE’S BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION PROGRAM. HOW DID THAT COME ABOUT?

I had gone on a summer mission trip to the Congo to do evangelism but ended up helping with accounting and supervising construction. God spoke to me clearly that *whatever* he gives me to do is spiritual work. The feedback I got opened my eyes to my management abilities so I returned to university and added a management minor to my degree. Eventually that would lead to a doctorate in Business Administration and a career in teaching.

WHAT ELSE HAS PREPARED YOU FOR WHAT YOU’RE DOING TODAY?

My past experiences include several overseas business assignments, pastoring, and being the former chair of the Business Department at Simpson University. All good business principles are found in Scripture. So where other programs try to integrate some Bible into their curriculum, here at Prairie we augment a biblical curriculum for business with some key secular concepts and practices, teaching young people in business to be ministers.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE LIFE CHALLENGES YOU’VE FACED?

The first greatest challenge I remember facing was being robbed while sick with hepatitis in Africa. Later came a series of crises our family overcame while doing lay ministry in Venezuela. Then it was enduring burn-out as the bivocational pastor of an inner city church in Miami. Most recently would be pre-



Gary and Lori with their family: (l to r) Josh, Katya, Donnel, Laurelyn, Stefani, Sam, and the dogs (Levi and Theo).

siding over the funeral of my niece after her death by suicide. All of these experiences have grown my ability to believe God can get us through anything.

WHAT DO YOU LOVE ABOUT TEACHING?

I feel like I am getting to share true treasure with those who will use it for building God’s kingdom in their lives and in the world. The best part is watching them grow while at school and keeping in touch as they launch out into their calling.

WHAT DON’T YOU LOVE?

Grading. I tell students that I have two hats: The one I enjoy is the one where I am teaching and learning with them. The other is where we find out how well the students have or have not learned the material. Many of the results are encouraging and sometimes I could practically do the happy dance. But watching someone struggle is hard and

if they completely check out it can be heartbreaking.

TELL US THREE THINGS YOU HOPE YOUR STUDENTS NEVER FORGET AFTER SITTING IN YOUR CLASSROOM?

- 1) God loves them passionately and unconditionally.
- 2) He has a high calling for their lives, but it won’t be easy or simple, and it might turn out very differently from what they expect.
- 3) Who they are becoming, all the way through life, is far more important than the tasks they take on or the career they choose. ✎

Gary Schmidt is Director and Professor of Prairie’s Business Administration Program. He just received the Connie Kondos Award, given to a faculty member for “exemplary involvement in students’ lives.” Connect with him at gary.schmidt@prairie.edu.



Into the Light

Everyone lives in the shadows of decisions we made, as well as the choices of those who came before us. We can either ignore the shadows or step into the light.

CHRIS FABRY

The shadows fell heavily on the heart of Kai Höss when he was fourteen. In an interview on my radio program, *Chris Fabry Live*, Höss talked about a day in the seventh grade when he uncovered a truth about his grandfather that overwhelmed him.

"In Germany, it's a government mandate to teach the Holocaust, to educate students on the Third Reich," said Kai, "and that also includes the atrocities that the Nazi regime carried out on the Jews and many other people."

That day, Kai's teacher was describing the concentration camps of Dachau and Auschwitz-Birkenau. The architect of the massive Auschwitz camp, part of Hitler's "Final Solution" to exterminate the Jewish race, was Rudolf Hoess. Knowing that Hoess was not an uncommon surname in their part of Germany, Kai went home after school and asked his mother if that name had anything to do with them.

"Yes," she told him. "That's your granddad."

That shocking truth led Kai Höss (the spelling was changed later by the family) on a lifelong journey of discovery that is showcased in the film, *The Commandant's Shadow*. In it, Kai accompanies his father, Hans-Jürgen Höss,

into the past to explore the truth about their lives and the dark legacy left by the Commandant of Auschwitz.

"It was incredibly difficult to come to terms with the horrific reality of my grandfather's actions," said Kai. "It's hard to process that someone I'm related to could be responsible for such immense suffering and killing, murdering millions of people. My heart broke when I heard that."

Kai's father Hans and his siblings were raised in the shadow of Auschwitz. But instead of dark memories, he describes his childhood as idyllic. The home and the grounds were a

person, part of the silent generation he was born into. "I think he was ashamed. They moved away to southern Germany after the camp was liberated because they felt the further they could get away from all of that, the better. I think he felt guilt and shame because that's what I felt."

When Kai was seventeen, he was drawn further into the shadows when he found an item on his mother's bookshelf. It was a German copy of *The Commandant of Auschwitz*, penned by Rudolf Hoess while he was awaiting his execution. As he read, Kai encountered the coldness of his grandfather's soul.

The architect of Auschwitz was Rudolf Hoess. One day Kai went home after school and asked his mother if that name had anything to do with them.

playground of sorts, with a garden and a pool. He recalled happy memories of that home, birthday parties, and joyful celebrations, even though the crematorium was visible from his bedroom window.

Kai describes his father as a quiet

"It really broke my heart to read how clinically he described his job, his responsibilities. Numbers, actions, orders. That's when I felt for the first time such pity and compassion for all those people that he hurt."

The question that haunted Kai was,



How? How does a person become so calloused to humanity that they participate in mass murder—and justify their actions as good? “The problem with my grandfather,” he believes, “was that he had already learned to kill. He volunteered in the First World War with the Ottoman Regiment based in Palestine where he was the youngest non-commissioned officer. He had already murdered someone and after the war was lost, he returned to Germany and attached himself to an anti-Communist cell group that was planning to assassinate a local Communist leader and politician.

Willing to kill based on his ideology, my grandfather murdered that man. He was caught, tried and imprisoned, but the Nazis freed him and trained him in Dachau. Then they utilized his skills to conceive an extermination camp to annihilate an entire race of people. So he had already been desensitized, his conscience seared as with a hot iron.”

Kai was left to struggle with the question of how to respond to his family’s shadows. In the process, after his military service, he found success traveling the world and working in the hotel industry. But the success was empty. He worked hard and played hard, but found no satisfaction in his accomplishments. While in Singapore he became ill and underwent an unsuccessful surgery where he almost bled to death.

“I was in so much pain,” he remembers. “I started looking for something to read and found a Gideon Bible next to the bed. I read Psalm 51 and it blew me away.” Kai encountered grace in that passage. And as God had done for King David, who was guilty of terrible sin, Kai knew that same forgiveness and mercy was available to him. “I realized I was a wretched man. But God allowed people to come into my life and I heard the gospel. Salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone.”

That decision around Easter of 1989 changed the course of Kai’s life. “That was the beginning of a U-turn. I knew I was on a long road to be freed from the power and penalty of sin and that really changed my life.”

With that change of direction, Kai began to see the truth about God’s dealing with the children of Israel. He

it, for whatever it’s worth. That’s when I changed from shame to hoping there would be an opportunity to reach out to Jewish people in some way.”

That opportunity came when Kai received a phone call from the director of the documentary *The Commandant’s Shadow*, asking him to participate. “When Daniela Volker first called me four years ago, I told her right from the start, I don’t mind doing that but I have two conditions. One, that the Holocaust was not skewed in any way, and secondly that I could talk about my faith, about my Jesus, about my salvation, and that he is the way out of any curse.”

On the day the film crew came to his church, Kai, now a pastor, preached on the sins of the fathers being passed down through generations. He emphasized the importance of seeing the sin, confessing it, and repenting of whatever sin might be continuing in that person’s

“The Nazis...utilized his skills to conceive an extermination camp to annihilate an entire race of people. He had already been desensitized, his conscience seared as with a hot iron.”

had led them through great sufferings and through all their failures. That was a picture of his life as well. This grandson of a Nazi persecutor began to cultivate a love for the people of Israel. “I realized there was very little I could do, but I also understood the one thing I could do was come clean. I can tell people that’s me, and tell them I’m sorry about

life. Instead of exhibiting a Christianity that leans on its own goodness for acceptance by God, Kai made it clear that we all need to stop, see our sin, confess it, and repent and receive the grace and mercy of God.

In the documentary Hans finally reads from his father’s memoir and is confronted with the truth of what





Face to face: Kai and his father, Hans Jurgen Hoss, meet (from left) Anita Lasker-Wallfisch and Maya Lasker-Wallfisch at Anita's apartment in "The Commandant's Shadow."

actually happened at Auschwitz. His fond memories of childhood become mingled with the bitterness and death just across the barbed wire fence. Kai's father agrees to travel to the camp and with the aid of his walker, he slowly makes his way to the gallows where his own father was hanged for his crimes against humanity.

"There is a transition clearly from

"I felt so much pain for them," says Kai, "and I knew I couldn't turn back the clock, but I could just show these people that I love them."

Höss is now the senior pastor of Bible Church in Stuttgart, Germany. He sees the growth of antisemitism around the world and he believes the answer is not in modifying people's thoughts or behavior, but in a change of

used by God. But he didn't understand Romans 11 and the Nazis used some of his writings to justify their actions and their hatred against the Jews."

For anyone living under the weight of a shadow, Kai says forgiveness is the key that can open the door to what God wants to do in and through you. Forgiveness is the light that chases the shadows.

"Don't harden your heart," he says. "That's what we're so prone to do. We turn it off. We brush it under the carpet. Don't. Stay pliable. My dad and I were separated for nearly thirty years after he left my mom. There was a very ugly divorce and I could have hated him. But when he called me one Saturday after not speaking with me for twenty-eight years, I said, 'Dad, it's so nice to hear your voice.' I knew I was going to have the opportunity to speak to him and unravel all the convoluted relationships that were in our family history. And we did." ■

Asked to participate in the film, Kai had two conditions: "That the Holocaust was not skewed in any way, and secondly that I could talk about...my Jesus...the way out of any curse."

denial, to some extent," says Kai, "but in the end he admitted that his father had received the just punishment for his sins."

The film also leads into the past with an Auschwitz survivor, Anita Lasker-Wallfisch, and her daughter Maya. What was true in the Höss household of never talking about what happened was also true in their home.

heart that only God can accomplish.

"We live in a post-Christian era," he says. "And politics and looking at the Holocaust is important. But the fundamental understanding about who Israel is, that is where we start healing. Christians often don't understand. They don't question or rightly divide the Word of truth. Look at Martin Luther. I'm not criticizing him, he was an amazing man

Chris Fabry is an award-winning author and radio host of Chris Fabry Live. He and his wife, Andrea, live in Arizona. His latest book The Forge, is based on the movie by the Kendrick brothers.

DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI 2024

In a recent chapel, Prairie College recognized the following alumni who are impacting their world and faithfully serving God:



LIFELONG CHRISTIAN MINISTRY

Duane Howe (PHS'55, BS'61)

After marrying his wife Nadine, Duane went to the Brazilian tribes of the Amazon under Ethnos 360. Faithfully sharing the gospel there for 48 years, they saw many come to know the Lord and become witnesses for Christ. Duane has been used by God to encourage many young people to follow God's call.



INTEGRATION OF CHRISTIAN FAITH AND PROFESSIONAL ACHIEVEMENT

Nahum (PHS'86, BS'90, PGS'00) and Shelly (Ritz, BS'90) Ip

In his many years of experience as a first responder, Nahum recognized the need for a Christian presence in that profession and now counsels and assists his colleagues with critical stress and mental health issues. Shelly serves as a Sunday school teacher and supports families in their neighborhood. Nahum often preaches in Chinese churches.



EARLY CAREER EXCELLENCE

Tarek (BS'11) and Brittany (Dye, BS'11) Williams

Tarek is a portfolio manager and partner at Tower Asset Management and lends his professional and financial expertise to numerous charitable boards. Brittany is a registered nurse in the Emergency Department and both are involved in multiple ministries, including an organization in India and refugees and youth who are newcomers to Canada.

Thank you for your support of SERVANT over the years!

We hope the stories and interviews continue to challenge and encourage you.

As our printing and mailing costs have tripled in the last eighteen months, we have sought ways to reduce our expenses. In an effort to be good stewards, we will **NO LONGER BE INCLUDING RETURN ENVELOPES** in the magazines.



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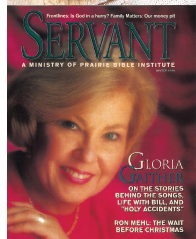
BEST OF INNERVIEW—35TH ANNIVERSARY



JONI EARECKSON TADA—*paralyzed in a diving accident as a teen*

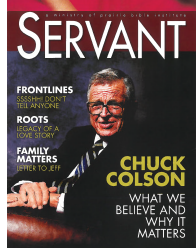
Bitterness toward God can be understandable but it can also become a root that poisons your life and you've got to deal with it. Sometimes I'm not happy about God's ways, but that doesn't mean that they're not in his plan for my good. It's like a ten thousand piece puzzle and we only have a few pieces, some of which don't fit. The pieces that don't fit are those that we cut out by our own design. But the pieces that God gives us do fit. Life to me is a gradual revealing of what that puzzle is all about.

(Issue 5, 1989)



GLORIA GAITHER—*gospel singer and songwriter*

We were going through a distressing time when I became pregnant unexpectedly. The Vietnam conflict was in full swing, a disillusioned generation was drowning its questions in drugs, and racism was tearing our country apart. Who in their right mind would have another baby? But when I gave birth to a precious baby boy, God showed us that it isn't because the world is stable that we have the courage to live our lives or start marriages or have children...so we wrote, "This child can face uncertain days because He lives." (Issue 49, 1998)



CHUCK COLSON—*disgraced political advisor to Richard Nixon, founder Prison Fellowship*

My personal experience in the Watergate scandal convinces me of the historic proof of the Resurrection. The most powerful men around the president could not keep a lie for three weeks. And you'd have me believe that twelve apostles literally gave their lives for a lie? Impossible....people will die for something they believe to be true; but men will never die for something they know to be false.

(Issue 84, 2010)



HELEN ROSEVEARE—*missionary who was raped and savagely beaten in the Congo Simba uprising*

I realized that the Lord was saying: "Can you thank me for trusting you with this situation?" It was as though he said: "I have a purpose. You cannot understand now, but are you willing to be part of my purpose?" "Yes, God," I whispered and immediately I was flooded by his peace and a huge sense of privilege. Never count the cost in the sense of saying "Is it worth it?" "Ask instead, "Is he worthy?" and you'll always know that he is absolutely worthy of anything you can give him or do for him. (Issue 85, 2010)



PHILIP YANCEY—*author, speaker*

Don't blame God for the church. He took an amazing gamble turning over the whole message to the likes of us. We have messed it up so many times but we have also proclaimed God's love and grace. Wherever I go in the world, there are orphanages and clinics and wells, efforts against sex trafficking. We have proclaimed the gospel by our deeds. (Issue 110, 2022)

NOW YOU KNOW

Millennials attending church on a weekly basis in 2019: 21%; in 2022: 39%.

[Barna.com](https://www.barna.com)

Between 1990 and 2021, the percentage of Americans reporting that they had no close friends at all quadrupled.

American Perspectives Survey

Deaths in Canada from euthanasia (MAID) in 2016: 1,018; in 2022, 13,241.

Health Canada

44 percent of women and 31 percent of men say social media has had a negative impact on their emotional health.

New York Times

The human eye can change its focus 50 times a second.

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Phil Callaway



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*To request this book, make sure your order is postmarked no later than February 15, 2025. Offer limited to SERVANT subscribers at North American addresses. Please allow 4-6 weeks for delivery.

Crisis of Faith

ALISA CHILDERS

Alisa Childers—from searching for truth to standing on a stage: “I never saw myself as somebody who would be in this space at all.”

Deconstruction. Social media is flooded with it. On TikTok, posts containing the word are approaching one billion views. Artists and authors like Joshua Harris (*I Kissed Dating Goodbye*) and former DC Talk’s Kevin Max employ the term to describe their exit from historic Christianity, which many regard as toxic, abusive and oppressive. Alisa Childers, co-author with Tim Barnett, of the bestseller *The Deconstruction of Christianity*, was an ideal candidate to “deconstruct,” given “depression, the tension of celebrity, the shallowness of so much of the commercial Christian world...and some bad church experiences.” In this interview with *Servant*, Alisa (daughter of Chuck Girard, one of the founders of “Jesus Music”) talks about her own unlikely journey from the pop group ZOEgirl to an in-demand apologetics speaker, and how to respond to difficult questions with clarity, confidence, and grace.

I USED TO PLAY YOUR DAD’S MUSIC TO MY KIDS AND THEN THEY STARTED PLAYING ME YOURS. MY DAUGHTER LOVED ZOEgirl AND NOW LISTENS TO YOUR PODCASTS. DID YOU EVER IMAGINE YOURSELF IN THIS KIND OF MINISTRY?

No, I never did. The realm I’m in now is more of an intellectual realm. I never saw myself as somebody who would be in this space at all, maybe more of a flaky artist or something [laughs].

WHAT MADE YOU WANT TO WRITE ON THE TOPIC OF DECONSTRUCTION?

About fourteen years ago a lot of people in my life were deconstructing and

I went through a faith crisis where I busted everything down to the studs and rebuilt from the ground up. I called it deconstruction. But then I realized that’s not actually what happened to me because deconstruction is a very specific thing that manifests in a very specific way, which is really the shift of authority from an external source to

becoming the source of truth yourself. That wasn’t what I did because I was searching for truth outside of myself.

My co-author Tim and I could see that this was something we needed to speak to because there is a real battle over that word right now, with people defining it in different ways.

HOW DO YOU DEFINE IT?

Faith deconstruction is a post-modern process of rethinking your faith without regarding Scripture as a standard. There’s no objective meaning that can be known. It’s sort of always in flux, always arising but never arriving. And therefore you can sort of reframe it, based on the new information you have in culture. So what we see in the deconstruction movement is this redefinition of, and sometimes even rejection of, evangelical Christianity, things like any doctrinal stance that would be rooted in objective truth that would cause you to have to submit to it whether you like it or not. So there’s a whole mixed bag, from doctrinal things to ethical things, to political things that are all put in that bag and thrown out under the evangelical hashtag.

HOW NEW IS THIS?

In many ways, deconstruction is like a rerun. It plays out in the pages of Scripture. It’s an old idea that goes back to the Garden of Eden. In Genesis 3, Satan sought to deceive Eve by questioning God’s Word: “Did God really say?” Then he denies it. “You will not really die.” Then he deconstructs God’s character, who God is.

WHERE DO YOU START WITH SOMEONE WHO TALKS TO YOU AND YOU CAN TELL THEY’RE GENUINELY WORKING THROUGH THIS?

If the person is sincere and truly searching for truth outside of themselves, they’re probably not deconstructing. Deconstruction is a very particular way of rejecting the beliefs you grew up with, a method of re-evaluating your

“...when doubts come along, it’s important to keep them in the light. Questions can be good. Jesus asked over three hundred of them in the Gospels.”

belief not requiring Scripture as a standard. So if someone is genuinely sincere, I would just ask a lot of good questions

like: What do you think the word truth means? Is truth something that is a standard that you find outside of yourself? Do you make it up or do you discover it? If they think truth is something that's objective, then that's great because then you can share about the objective truth claims of Christianity. But if they say, "What can be true for you is true for you, and what's true for me is true for me, I would take a different route. What you're trying to do is sort of shine light on the self-refuting nature of what they're saying so that you can get them to objective truth because we are living in a culture that thinks truth is just relative to each person's ethnicity or cultural context. We have to help people kind of take a step back and just think about truth, because Christianity stands or falls on truth. It isn't something that is different for each person. It's outside of us.

WHY IS IT SO IMPORTANT THAT WE KNOW THE BIBLE?

If you want to know God, read his Word. The Bible is primarily a story about God. He is the main character. Over and over the Bible says, "God loves," "God says," "God does." Every time we read about God, we get to know what he is like. His desires, his personality, his character. There's nothing greater than knowing God. Sadly, this is often in

"...it's so important for Christians to stay connected to God through his Word, which is truth. Your faith can't be whatever you want. It needs to match up with the faith."

conflict with what culture says is good. That's why it's so important for Christians to stay connected to God through his Word, which is truth. Your faith can't be whatever you want. It needs to match up with *the* faith.

WHAT'S THE MOST COMMON QUESTION YOU HEAR AFTER YOU SPEAK?

The "how" question. So many people want to know how to navigate a relationship with a loved one who's in deconstruction. That's why we tried to really spend a good chunk of the book on that question because you're not just dealing with someone who might disagree with you; you're dealing with

someone who actually thinks you're a toxic and unsafe person, and that requires a totally different approach.

YOU SAY CRISIS IS THE BURNING FUSE FOR DECONSTRUCTION. WHAT CHARACTERIZES THOSE WHO DEAL WITH A SERIOUS CRISIS AND STILL KEEP THE FAITH?

You can have two people who grow up in the same house, go to the same church, have the same pastors, and even face the same crisis—maybe abuse or a really bad church experience—and yet

"If the person is sincere and truly searching for truth outside of themselves, they're probably not deconstructing."

one will go into deconstruction and the other comes back even stronger than before. I think those who survive a faith crisis are the ones who realize that we don't get to make the rules and instead they search for what's *really* true and don't blame Jesus for the things that have happened.

WHAT ARE SOME PRACTICAL THINGS CHURCHES SHOULD DO?

We should be better at questions because when doubts come along, it's important to keep them in the light. Questions can be good. Jesus asked over

three hundred of them in the Gospels. But not all questions are honest questions. When it comes to faith some questions seek answers, some seek exits. We're all in this wrestling match with truth and when we ignore our doubts and push them down and don't deal with them, we're really setting ourselves up for something like deconstruction. If we aren't willing to be honest and investigate and get to the bottom of the questions, they just keep building until it gets overwhelming and then people end up throwing the whole thing out.

MANY SEEM TO BE VERY EVANGELISTIC IN TRYING TO DRAW US DOWN

THE DECONSTRUCTIONIST PATH.


Oh yes. Much of evangelical/deconstruction social media is about making converts. And that's the difference with what we see happening today. There have always been people walking away from the faith or disconnecting from their church community. But now there is an entire community online that is very, very evangelistic because it's not just that they don't believe it anymore; they actually believe it's unhealthy, harmful, and toxic. So it's seen as virtuous to try to get people

into deconstruction because they see themselves as helping to free people from this really oppressive ideology. It actually mirrors evangelical culture in many ways.

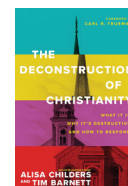
WHAT WAS THE BEST THING SOMEONE DID OR SAID TO YOU WHEN YOU WERE LOOKING FOR TRUTH?

I don't actually use the word deconstruction to describe what I went through anymore, because I was always looking for truth, but I was very confused and it was an agonizing experience. I didn't talk about it much, but there were several people in my life, one of whom reacted with a lot of fear and it made me not want to be around them anymore. But there was another person who was willing to talk openly about my questions and invited me to share what I was thinking with them. So I think not freaking out or reacting in fear can be a really important way to respond. Building and maintaining the relationship is so important.

HOW DO YOU WANT TO BE REMEMBERED?

To be honest with you, I don't really care if I am remembered. What I hope would be remembered would be that the Church would stay on track with the gospel and let my name be long lost to history. 

Alisa and Tim's bestseller is available wherever you buy books.



When I am weak

MIKE OLVER



Mike and Bev Olver: *"As a young man I valued strength and the ability to be active, never thinking that those days would come to such an end."*

Growing up as a staff kid at Prairie, I lived for sports. School was made bearable by the promise of a pick-up game of hockey, baseball or football after the final bell. Every day, if it bounced or rolled, we chased it. I wasn't the fastest kid on the diamond, but my body worked fine. I couldn't have dreamed up a better life.

After graduating from Prairie High School in 1985, I signed up for Bible College like a lot of my friends. But to be honest, I didn't come for the Bible; I came for the hockey. After the first semester hockey was going well, but school wasn't. One day the dean called me in with bad news. Since he was also my father, we met in the living room. "I don't think you should return second semester," he said. That was fine with me. I was no scholar anyway. I never dreamed of going into the ministry, just of marrying the girl I loved and finding meaningful work.

That led me into the restaurant business for a few years and, in one of the best decisions of my life, I married Bev Wilson, a fellow staff kid and former classmate. Then in 1989, an unexpected call came from Prairie: they

wanted me to join them in the food services area as a chef. One of the perks was time off on summer afternoons to perfect my golf game, and the college also offered me an opportunity for schooling to upgrade my skills. That sounded good to me, so I joined the team in the dining hall. My son Theoren and daughter Christina came to join our family and for the next twenty-one years we enjoyed life in the campus community. I left a few times for other jobs, but always seemed to find my way back, ultimately becoming the head of Prairie's food services where I served until recently.

We loved watching our kids grow up and it was such a joy to us when grandchildren began to arrive. But about eighteen months ago my body began to let me down. First it was the tingling in the left leg, then the twitching in the left arm. I consoled myself with the fact that there was no pain. But one day when my left foot wouldn't respond to my brain's command to lift and take a simple step forward in the dining hall, I tripped and fell heavily against the wall. It was clear that something was very wrong.

That began a long search for answers: X-rays, bloodwork, ultrasounds—all yielded nothing. A neurologist requested an MRI which also came back clear. It wasn't until I went for a nerve and muscle test in Calgary that the mystery was solved. On March 13, 2024, we sat silently in an office awaiting the verdict. A sober doctor entered and gave me a nervous glance. There was no way to soften the blow.

"You have ALS," he said. "Lou Gehrig's Disease."

In an odd way, there was almost a sense of relief after so many months of not knowing. But that could not hold back the shock that threatened to overwhelm us. The silent drive home was almost unbearable as we wondered how we were going to tell our children who were anxiously waiting for news. Tears flowed freely over the next weeks as we began to share our new reality with other family and friends.

ALS is a neurological disease that slowly robs its victims of the ability to control voluntary movements. Nerve cells in the brain and spinal cord are affected, causing loss of muscle control,

and muscles get weaker as more nerve cells die. I had always been physically strong and it seemed so ironic to be stricken with a disease characterized by increasing weakness.

We hadn't realized, however, that ALS treats everyone differently and it's impossible to know exactly where the losses will be felt and when. At this point, mainly my left arm and leg have lost strength, but I still have the general use of my right side, for which I am very grateful, and it hasn't affected my mind. Decline can be slow, as it has been with me, or take a sudden spurt, and there is presently no cure. Research into the disease holds promise, but there is no getting away from the fact that one day, sooner than we'd planned, I may very well be changing my address and meeting my Saviour face-to-face.

In spite of the difficult path that lies ahead, however, I remind myself often how blessed I am. Each new day brings reminders of the goodness and love of God. With the help of my parents, I came to know Jesus as a young boy and have never regretted the decision to follow him. Bev and I have seen others in absolute despair over a similar diagnosis and there are certainly dark moments, days when I feel useless and don't even want to leave the house. But I believe that the eternal hope we have and God's constant loving presence in our lives have made it possible to deal with this situation in a positive way. A good friend advised us to live our lives intentionally and that is what we are choosing to do. I'm not dying from ALS; I'm *living* with ALS.

In high school I dreamed of going on a trip with my sweetheart and now I have the chance. When Bev and I were both working, it was difficult to get away, but since I retired from my job, we have taken several wonderful trips to places like Oklahoma, Montana, and Ontario, not knowing so many would bless our socks off. One trip, in our haste to leave, I neglected to purchase American dollars. While visiting a friend, I mentioned I needed to get to a bank. When he learned why, he said, "Absolutely not." He vanished, then returned with an envelope. "We want you to have this," he said. I opened it and stared wide-eyed at fives and tens.

And twenties. Then fifties and hundreds. To this day, I can't talk about it without tears. It was like God was saying, "I've got even this. I will never leave you."

As we've connected with extended family, dear friends, and fellow classmates, we have been rewarded over and over with incredible support and encouragement. It seems like those we once hoped to bless are now blessing us.

The absolute best years of our lives have been those we've spent at Prairie, but when you are just focused on doing your job and honoring the Lord, you may not realize what an impact you're having. Being on staff, we took the opportunity to serve as class advisors for several years before we got busy with our children, and were able to accompany a group of students on an unforgettable inner city mission trip to Chicago.

Lately, we've reconnected with so many that we knew over the years, and we're seeing how those relationships have touched lives, including those of young people who worked for me in the dining hall—even one I had to fire! Some have even gone into careers in the food industry and for others, kindness, a listening ear, and just being a "good

us with their love and time. When I told a friend that our daughter and her husband were moving so they and the grandkids could be near us, I broke down in tears. I can't begin to count the number of people who have told us they are praying for us. What a wonderful illustration to me of the incredible privilege of belonging to the family of God. Why would we *not* count our blessings?

Dining hall highlights included the frenzy of hosting Chinese conferences from Christmas through New Years, and the Alberta Senior Games, complete with a roast beef banquet for 1,200. I'm comforted to know that a far greater banquet is coming in heaven.

When Pastor Tim Keller received news that his cancer was terminal, he said, "I'm not suffering from anything that a good resurrection can't fix." I share this hope. It is the greatest blessing of all. Yet I have my moments when hope takes a backseat to the challenges and uncertainties.

As a young man I valued strength and the ability to be active, never thinking that those days would come to such an end. Where do we turn when life leads us into a new season that

"A sober doctor entered and gave me a nervous glance. There was no way to soften the blow."

boss" made a lasting difference.

Recently we travelled to Seattle, WA, to watch my Toronto Blue Jays play the Seattle Mariners, and what a memorable trip it was! I was constantly reminded that the relationships we build throughout our lives and the precious memories that we store up are priceless treasures that nothing can take away from us.

I can't say enough about my wife and wonderful caregiver, Bev. She has been at my side through all of this and there is very little that I can do now without her assistance, including finding my cane! The ALS Society has been a great help, especially in the area of equipment, and the generosity of our local community has surprised us again and again. Our children have showered

we weren't prepared for? Meaningful music and God's promises have meant so much. Bev and I were both drawn at different times to the words of Isaiah 41:10, "Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."

Our strength fails. Yet, he is our strength. The way ahead is uncertain. Yet, he is our hope. We did not choose this journey, but one thing we can choose is to rest, knowing that we are held in his loving hands, and he will give enough light for the next step. ❧

Mike and Bev would love to hear from you. You can reach them at mb2olver@telus.net or visit them on Facebook.

MEET THE STUDENTS



HOW DID YOU HEAR ABOUT PRAIRIE?

I heard about Prairie in high school when my wife and I were missionary kids in Papua New Guinea (PNG). When my application to the Canadian Air Force

DAN GOUD

"Four days before my flight test in 2014 I broke my leg and couldn't continue."

didn't work out, the Lord led me to Prairie to train for mission aviation. Four days before my flight test in 2014 I broke my leg and couldn't continue.

SO! A CHANGE OF PLANS?

Yes. I moved to Nova Scotia where Jen was taking nursing. Several years later we got married and I eventually did join the military, not as a pilot, but as a combat engineer and combat diver. In 2019 we were in PNG on a volunteer project when the Lord reignited our passion for mission aviation, so I finished my contract with the Forces and re-applied to Prairie. In March of 2023, I arrived in Alberta with my wife and three small children.

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES OF GOING TO SCHOOL WHILE RAISING A FAMILY?

My time management skills are being

tested and sometimes I have to prioritize family time over assignments. It's hard, but ultimately the right choice for my family's well-being. It matters more to God that I love my wife and kids than that I get a perfect mark.

WHO IS IMPACTING YOUR LIFE?

The experienced instructors and veteran missionary pilots at PATC are not just teaching me about flying, but more importantly, about life. It's an honor to train under these humble professionals.

WHAT ARE YOUR PLANS?

We are training to become a missionary pilot family overseas. I've been so blessed to come back to Prairie and complete my original goal. It was a huge disappointment to let go of my plans, but in hindsight, we have seen God give us experience where we needed it and we're learning to trust his timing.

GOING UP!



Residence Progress

God has worked through many of you to move the *Campaign for Greater Impact* forward by your prayers, generosity, and sharing with others about Prairie College. To date, the Campaign's Phase 1 total of donations and pledges is **\$31.8 million**. We are so grateful to God! Please consider partnering with us through a one-time or monthly gift to help complete the following projects:

New Student Residence: The walls are going up! Through major donations and your contributions, we are 84% funded. Your gift today will be matched and help us reach 100% by Spring 2025.

Prairie Aviation Training Centre: Along with our partners, Mission Aviation Fellowship of Canada, we are moving forward on this much-needed expansion of the facility. Pray that pre-construction steps will be finalized and this project fully funded.



NATASHA ROBB

"My grandparents...met here."

WHERE DID YOU GROW UP?

My dad is from New Zealand, so I grew up

there and in China and a little bit in North America.

YOUR FAMILY HAS PRAIRIE CONNECTIONS.

My grandparents, Violet and Allan Bienert, met here. My grandpa went on to teach at the high school for many years and all of their kids attended Prairie. I'm enjoying exploring my family's heritage by actually living here and experiencing the culture.

WHAT APPEALED TO YOU ABOUT PRAIRIE COLLEGE?

The combination of a biblical foundation, Christian community, and vocational training. The Digital Media program has allowed my creative skills an opportunity to grow in a Christian environment.

WHAT HAS GOD BEEN TEACHING YOU LATELY?

To bring everything to him, big or small, to invite him into every moment and into the deepest parts of my heart. To be in conversation with God about everything in my life has transformed my relationship with him.

WHO HAS HAD AN INFLUENCE ON YOU HERE?

There have been so many here who have influenced me significantly, both friends and professors. If I had to pick one, I would say Dr. Roberts because her classes have totally transformed the way I read the Bible and relate to God. Her passion for God and the Bible is incredibly contagious.

ANY PLANS FOR THE FUTURE?

At the moment I'm working for the Marketing Department at Prairie. I plan to continue taking more Bible classes part time because I've loved my learning experience here so much. I'm not ready for it to be over yet. ☺



All in the Family

Our three children have decided to have lots of children, which means their families are the same size as some families of the '60s who had their own postal codes. From personal observation, here are seven benefits of a large family.

1. **The milk in the fridge never expires.**

2. **No more banging your head getting into small cars.** Or playing Tetris to wedge stuff in the trunk. You now have yourself a people mover.

3. **The kids are never bored.** Sure, they get on each other's nerves, but there's never a dull moment. Remember going to a circus? Who gets bored at a circus?

4. **Parents get to use all the names in the Old Testament.** That's right. You always liked that name Mahershalalhashbaz but couldn't use it. Now you're running out of other options.

5. **Group discounts on just about everything.** Family swim passes. Two-for-one deals. Charter an airplane. It may be cheaper.

6. **Nothing is wasted.** Clothes, shoes, hats, coats, bikes, gum—even toothpicks are recycled by appreciative siblings.

7. **No more bullies.** Sure, your kids get in each other's hair and food, and they may tease each other, but nothing gets them more riled up than someone else doing the job for them. Look out. They have each other!

Of course, not everyone is excited about you having this many children.

Many view kids as a liability, not a blessing. Our daughter Rachael and her husband Jordan have five kids. While shopping, they provide better entertainment than Hollywood. Here are actual quotes people have lobbed their way.



"Okay, Sweeties. You're all going to need to go naked for a day or two 'til Mommy catches up with the laundry."

"Better you than me."

"You've got your hands full!"

Rachael smiled and said, "Not really. After you've had three, they pretty much take care of each other. It's like *Lord of the Flies*, only they don't kill each other, you just think they might."

"You'll need a school bus soon!"

"Yep, just like you'll need an ice pack for your black eye." Rachael didn't say this. She's kind. And tired. And there were children present.

And this from a wannabe comedian: "You know what causes that, don't you?"

"Yes! We just figured it out so now we keep our toothbrushes in separate glasses."

One lady clutched her pearls and said, "Are they ALL your kids?"

Next time this is said, Rachael will whirl around, count them, and say,

Some wannabe comedian asked, "You know what causes that, don't you?"

"Actually, I have no idea who they are. I thought they were yours. Kids, where are your mothers?"

And then there was the middle-aged guy who high-fived our son and said, "Waytago, man!" And the lady in church: "We need more kids raised by moms and dads who love Jesus and love each other. Well done."

Remember what God said through the prophet Jeremiah to those carted off

to hostile Babylon: "Everybody panic! Run for the hills!" No. He said, "Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper...For I know the plans I have for you...plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future" (Jer. 29:5-7, 11).

I rarely load up on as much hope as I do while holding a small child. From little Abby, so fresh from Heaven, I get the sense that God is not finished with this weary world quite yet.

Some of us are from small families, some from large, some are single, some wish they could have kids. We're all God's children; let's speak words that build each other up. And the next time you see a tired parent with a troupe in tow, try this: "I love seeing large families." Or, "I have four siblings. It was the best!" Or, "You're doing great, Mom and Dad."

And, if you're still undecided, here's one more benefit of a large family: The more kids you have, the more chances there are that you'll find one you like. ☺

To request a copy, see page 9.



Phil is a Prairie alumnus, an author and speaker. Visit him at philcallaway.com

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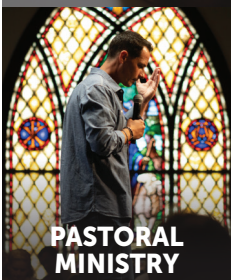
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