

## Culture Segment

TOPIC: Hope for the Doubting and Deconstructing

GUEST: Nicholas McDonald

### TAPING:

**\*Studio Interview**

July 14, 2025

1:30 pm

Studio A

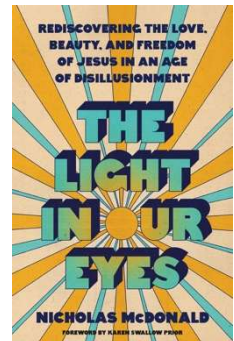
### AIRDATE:

July 31, 2025

SHOW#: 913

### Interview Direction:

- We'll explore Nicholas's definition of deconstruction and unpack his own personal testimony of deconstructing during college after bad experiences with Bully Evangelicalism.
- Nicholas will also respond to the criticism that people claim deconstruction to ignore moral law and live "freely."
- There is hope and renewal among doubt, disillusionment, and even deconstruction because Christianity is so much more than what's become of American Evangelicalism. Nicholas has some anecdotes about what understanding the gospel truly looks like, and how he's walked with deconstructing friends.
- Our conversation will close with practical opportunities to incarnate Jesus's vision for our life on earth.



Nicholas' website: [TheBardOwl.substack.com](https://TheBardOwl.substack.com)

**BOOK (This is a GOAA):** *The Light in Our Eyes: Rediscovering the Love, Beauty, and Freedom of Jesus in an Age of Disillusionment* (2025).

# GUEST BIO – Nicholas McDonald:

## Career:

- Associate pastor at Redeemer Presbyterian church in central Indianapolis. Served in ministry for over 15 years
- Author. Writes regularly for *The Gospel Coalition*
- Previously in youth ministry, Campus Minister of Reformed University Fellowship at the University of Missouri



## Education:

- Received his degree from Gordon Cornwell Seminary
- Studied creative writing at Oxford University

## Author:

- *Faker: How to Live for Real When You're Tempted to Fake It* (2015)
- *The Light In Our Eyes: Rediscovering the Love, Beauty, and Freedom of Jesus in an Age of Disillusionment* (2025)

## Personal Life & Accomplishments:

- Lives in Indianapolis with his wife Brenna and their three children, Caleb, Owen, and Russell

## Personality:

- Quite well-read. References Madeleine L'Engle, Jackie Hill Perry, Tolstoy, the Heidelberg Catechism ... and an SNL skit and Hamilton the musical.
- About rom-coms, "I feel the same way about them as I do about someone else's dog peeing on my lawn—if it's happening, it's not like I *won't* watch" (p. 24).
- A student named Rebecca: "The first time we met, she told me she was a feminist, but I already knew that because she had pink hair" (p. 36).
- Regarding his first time at hipster youth group: "As a homeschooled kid from the country, this was the best thing that'd happened to me since personally reading the U.S. Constitution" (p. 53).
- At a youth group missions trip to QwaQwa, a village in South Africa: "We ate wildebeest the first night, which I wanted to object to because I knew someone who was killed by wildebeests—his name was Mufasa—but I kept my mouth shut and ate in little forkfuls" (p. 54).
- In Chapter 9, titled "Shalom:" "Peace, for White Americans, often means, 'Everybody leave me alone so I can watch Wes Anderson films in the dark while straight-up eating a stick of deli salami.' No? Just me? Okay then" (p. 127).
- "In the same way Jim Henson 'sent himself' to be onstage with his Muppets, so the Father sent Jesus—and His Spirit—to be present with us that we might become our truest selves" (p. 177).

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# BACKGROUND:

- **Nicholas's own deconstruction journey**

- "The reason I was deconstructing in the first place was because, thanks to the culture of Bully Evangelicalism, the Christians around me interpreted the Bible in a way that let them continue in their biases, power-seeking habits, greed, and hatred" (p. 10). "For me as a post-Bible, post-church Christian, on the surface, I was angry. But deep down, I was sad. No one was giving me the hope I was searching for" (p. 11).
- "I never was Deconstructed, because I never closed my mind to what the ancient, global, historic church had to say about Jesus" (p. 12).
- Took him around 12 years to find healing after deconstructing (p. 11).

- **What is deconstruction?**

"[D]econstruction is not a one-size-fits-all description. ... That's why a better approach would be to see deconstruction as a spectrum of postures" (p. 5).

- Loyal: to American Evangelicalism (p. 6).
- Doubting: "I don't want this book to bring you back into the Loyal crowd. If I do my job well, I'm hoping to bring you through a growth process beyond these categories" (p. 7).
- Disillusioned: "I wrote this book for you. We don't need another book merely telling us to burn down the American evangelical project. We need a way forward toward renewal and restoration" (p. 9).
- "The Deconstructing—where I once was—may consider themselves post-Bible or post-church Christians, looking for spirituality without all the American evangelical baggage ... Often these folks have a sense not only that American Evangelicalism isn't for them but also that it's deeply wrong and dangerous, perhaps because they themselves have experienced or witnessed the kinds of abuse—spiritual, emotional, physical—that Bully Evangelicalism culture makes so much space for" (p. 9-10).
- "[The Deconstructed] have publicly slammed the door on faith. They openly mock Christianity and Evangelicalism" (p. 12).

- **American Evangelicalism is the thing being deconstructed:**

- "The story evangelicals tell isn't a false story; it's just an incomplete one. It doesn't offer us hope or meaning, and we literally can't exist without those things. Something has to fill that vacuum" (p. 62).
- STORY—Childhood invite to join his Grandpa, "Grumpy"
  - "But if we understand only that part of the Bible's story, it's a bit like hearing, 'Your grandpa bought you expensive tickets to the builders' convention,' when we have no idea what a builders' convention is. It's a message that has the power to touch our hearts, but not to transform our everyday lives" (p. 67).
- "We evangelicals understand the sentiment of the gospel, but we don't understand the vision of the gospel." (p. 67-68).

- Post-Civil War, evangelicalism moved from freeing slaves to an “escapist” gospel that emphasized salvation and a spot in heaven to “help people escape the earth and their own bodies” and conveniently dismiss calls for justice as “ ‘worldly’ concerns” (p. 88).
- “Jesus says the church has something to offer to this world: a dream. If we lose that dream, we’ve lost everything. ‘The eye is the lamp of the body,’ Jesus said. ‘If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness’ (Matthew 6:22-23). ... So, church ... Is there light in our eyes?” (p. 33).
- **Is deconstructing just an excuse to take advantage of grace?**
  - “[T]here *is* something to the critique [that] there may lurk a simple unwillingness to follow Jesus into the hard things. Was that me in college, as a deconstructing Christian? Sure. ... While it may be fair to say the Deconstructing are sometimes looking to excuse a lifestyle, it’s also our responsibility, as followers of Jesus, to offer a compelling narrative: a stirring vision of Jesus’s love, beauty, and freedom that speaks to humanity’s deepest dreams” (p. 10).
- **What’s the goal? Are renewal and eventual restoration possible?**
  - STORY—He says this to his deconstructing friend Pete (pseudonym):
    - " ‘I’m not asking you to reconstruct your faith. I’m asking you to let the global, historic church renew you and restore you. ... What you’ve been living in is the world of Anabaptist Evangelicalism. I’d like to invite you back to historic Protestantism’" (p. 109).
  - The goal isn’t necessarily knowing your spot is locked in heaven. Rather, it’s allowing the ancient truths of the gospel restore you to Jesus’s vision.
- **Practical ways to love like Jesus and participate in his vision for us:**
  - Take communion: “[T]he ancient practice of participating in the Lord’s Table is how we’re meant to experience the physical, touchable proof that Jesus, our Priest, is *with* us” (p. 155).
  - Remember our daily need for mercy: “Embodying Jesus’s hospitable love requires daily and weekly *confession* of our sin in a safe, gospel-transformed community” (p. 158).
  - Eat with people who aren’t like you: “[F]eastings was meant to point to the rebellious, joyful hope of the Christian faith ... these feasts were also meant to be a place of radical inclusion, where strangers literally tasted the Christian hope for themselves, for the first time” (p. 165).
  - Out-narrate the stories of the world, fitting it “into the larger story of Scripture” (p. 189). “To me, the best evangelists are people who believe Jesus is at the center of everything, have the intimacy with non-Christians to see where Jesus is at work, in their lives, and have the courage to name it” (p. 193).

## STORIES/QUESTIONS:

- 1) Tell me more about your college experience “as a deconstructing Christian” and the 12 years it took to find healing after you deconstructed (p. 10-11).
- 2) When is deconstruction a healthy pursuit?
- 3) Why are so many young adults deconstructing? It seems like older generations of Christians before us weren’t reevaluating their faith in this fashion and in these numbers. Are deconstructed Christian “celebrities,” if we can call them that, contributing to the trend?
- 4) How do those who are disillusioned or deconstructing wrestle with the fear of losing their faith altogether?
- 5) How do we encourage our friends who are doubting, disillusioned, deconstructing, or even deconstructed?
- 6) What does evangelism look like, or mean, to you now?
- 7) It’s hard to be honest and confess our sins to one another. How do we start this?

**END** This is a GOAA:

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