

Another Gospel?

A Lifelong Christian

Seeks Truth in Response to

Progressive Christianity

Alisa Childers

FOREWORD BY LEE STROBEL

Deconstructed faith stories are the new normal. We all know people who once seemed to be solid Christians but have walked away. Alisa's story of her own reconstructed faith is a breath of fresh air. She shares her doubts and struggles and the journey God led her on to rediscover the solid Rock on which she stands. This excellent book is full of hope and sound reasons for faith in Jesus and God's Word.

RANDY ALCORN, author of *Heaven*, *If God Is Good*, and *Giving Is the Good Life*

Is it possible to reconstruct faith after deconstruction? Using her own season of spiritual doubt as a backdrop, Alisa Childers explores the validity of Christianity—as well as the inefficacy of progressive Christianity—with precision, insight, and intellectual integrity. *Another Gospel?* is a needed and welcome book that reveals the ways historic Christianity can stand up to our doubts, concerns, and questions.

MELISSA KRUGER, director of women's initiatives for The Gospel Coalition and author of *Growing Together: Taking Mentoring beyond Small Talk and Prayer Requests*

Another Gospel? is a timely, must-read book. Through the lens of her personal journey, Alisa Childers compares and contrasts the historic Christian gospel with the progressive “gospel.” Nothing is more important than accurately grasping the Good News of Christ and responding to challenges against it, which is why I am grateful for her courage and clarity.

SEAN McDOWELL, PHD, associate professor at Biola University and author or coauthor of over 18 books, including *So the Next Generation Will Know*

Another Gospel? is one of the most important books of our time. It shows how progressive Christianity redefines the nature of God, the mission of Jesus, and the message of the gospel—while undermining the authority of Scripture. In these pages Alisa Childers exposes this dangerous movement and points us back to a biblical faith.

MARK MITTELBERG, bestselling author of *The Questions Christians Hope No One Will Ask (With Answers)* and *Confident Faith*

If someone shares their story of deconversion from Christianity or a revisionist approach to historic Christian teachings, they'll be celebrated as authentic and find themselves trending on social media. But what about the people who look at the same evidence and decide to go deeper in their Christian faith? What I love about this truth-centered book is that Alisa shares her powerful journey of doubt on the way to a stronger faith. Readers will resonate with her honest wrestling with hard questions while at the same growing in their confidence because the answers Alisa shares are rooted in reality and Scripture. Contrary to what you may hear, you don't need to revise or reject the gospel, the atonement of Jesus, or the Bible to find real joy, peace, and love. I hope every Christian reads *Another Gospel?* so they are not taken in by the false promises of progressive Christianity.

JONATHAN MORROW, director of student discipleship at Impact 360 Institute and author of *Questioning the Bible: 11 Major Challenges to the Bible's Authority*

Alisa Childers has been where you may be now. She was *that* Christian hanging on the brink of deconversion until she found the truth—clearly explained and thoroughly defended with the facts. In *Another Gospel?* you'll find someone who has not only shared your doubts and faced your challenges, but also who found rock-solid answers to her own legitimate questions and concerns. In a witty, winsome, yet completely transparent and authentic way, Childers offers the wisdom and insight of a person who has gone through the battle and not only survived, but won.

If you've ever wondered deep inside, *Is Christianity really true?*; if you've ever agonized, *God, are you there?*, then *Another Gospel?* will be your lifeline—and God's answer to your prayer.

GREGORY KOUKL, president of Stand to Reason and author of *Tactics* and *The Story of Reality*

I love this book! Alisa Childers takes you on a captivating journey from her unreflective conservative Christian faith to the cliff of another gospel and then back home to the true Jesus. Along the way, she deconstructs progressive Christianity with wit, insight, and easy-to-remember evidence. *Another Gospel?* will inoculate you from a temptation far more seductive than atheism. And it's an enjoyable read too!

FRANK TUREK, founder and president of CrossExamined.org and coauthor of *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist*

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*For my parents,
Chuck and Karen Girard.
Thank you for giving me
the true gospel.*

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Author's Note

This book contains my recollections of conversations from a class I took part in more than ten years ago. Those sessions challenged my beliefs, rocked my faith, and shook me to my core. I recognize that other class members may remember some details differently, but because our discussions guided the investigation I began after those four months of study, I thought it important to reconstruct some of the dialogue to the best of my memory. It provides context to my research and the conclusions I reached regarding historic and progressive Christianity. To support the narrative flow, I also tightened the timeline in some places.

Foreword

A friend took me and several others on a sailing trip through the beautiful British Virgin Islands. As a novice sailor, I was fascinated by the serious process of anchoring the boat at night.

We would sail into a tranquil cove and drop the anchor. In order to make doubly sure the anchor had gripped securely, someone would dive into the water and inspect it. If the anchor were at all loose, it might fail during the night when we were asleep below deck. At first, this wouldn't be a problem—the boat would basically stay where it had been left. But over the long night, the gentle current and imperceptible waves would gradually cause the boat to float away, threatening to crash it onto the nearby rocks or ground it on the sandy beach.

That imagery reminds me of the urgent purpose of this book. In Christianity, the anchor is sound biblical doctrine. What happens if it's not secure or if its line is intentionally cut? Well, says philosopher Mark Mittelberg, not much at

first. For a while the faith wouldn't drift too far. Tradition and habit would keep it hovering over the same spiritual vicinity, at least for a season. But the real danger is what would inevitably happen over time: The current of the culture would cause Christianity to crash on the rocks of heresy and sink into irrelevancy.

This is the alarm Alisa Childers is sounding in this powerful and persuasive new book. In a style that's at once winsome and convicting, she exposes the false gospel that so many "progressive" Christian leaders are espousing. Their aberrant beliefs are cutting adrift the faith of too many people—even though these folks may not realize it yet. As a result, Christianity is floating toward disaster—a trend that can be reversed only by returning to the sound biblical doctrine that has historically anchored our faith.

Alisa has accomplished something profound in these pages. She manages to keep her writing deft and personal, and yet she meticulously documents her points with facts and evidence. She makes concessions where appropriate, but she fearlessly confronts the distortions and outright falsehoods that fuel so much of progressive theology. With clarity, passion, and unrelenting charm, Alisa exposes the often subtle deceptions that too many Christians have been uncritically accepting as gospel truth. Her discernment is razor-sharp, her compass is pointed unswervingly toward the real Jesus, and her conclusions are solidly supported.

It's an understatement to say this book is important. It's vital. It's the right book at the right time. In fact, it may be the most influential book you will read this year. Please study

FOREWORD

it, underline it, highlight it, talk about it with others, give copies to friends and church leaders, use it in your discussion groups, quote it on social media. Take its admonitions to heart. Let it solidify your own faith so that you can confidently point others to the unchanging gospel of redemption and hope.

In sum, do your part in securing the anchor of biblical orthodoxy once more—for the sake of a church otherwise imperiled by dangerous theological drift.

Lee Strobel

Author of *The Case for Christ*
and *In Defense of Jesus*

1

Crisis of Faith

*You never know how much you really believe
anything until its truth or falsehood becomes a matter
of life and death to you.*

C. S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed*

The curve of the rocking chair arm dug into my hip as I held my restless toddler, singing a hymn into the darkness—darkness so thick it felt as if it were made of physical matter, choking the cries right out of my throat as I prayed to a God I wasn't sure was even there. "God, I know you're real," I whispered. "Please let me feel your presence. Please."

Nothing.

I didn't feel even the slightest goose bump or the familiar warmth that used to signify his presence to me. Swollen in breast and belly, my pregnant body ached as my little girl scampered around my lap trying to find a place to settle. Though the words seemed stuck behind my lips, I found a way to sing them out:

ANOTHER GOSPEL?

*Before the throne of God above;
I have a strong and perfect plea . . .*

Everything hurt. But I didn't protest. I remembered the promise I'd made while in the deepest pains of labor before my daughter was born. *I will never again complain about being miserably uncomfortable*, I'd declared to myself. When you're enduring pain that profound, you would give *anything* to simply be miserably uncomfortable.

After eighteen hours of back labor and five hours of pushing, Dyllan was born in distress. She was welcomed into the world by being swept out of my arms, laid on a cold metal table, and held down as tubes were stuck down her trachea. Those tubes saved her life. But it was a vexing cure. Her birth had traumatized us both.

Even so, God's peace overwhelmed me, and when they finally laid her back in my arms, I took one look at her and *I knew*. I knew with the kind of knowing that emerges from a place so deep inside, you don't even realize it's there until you need it. I knew there was nothing I wouldn't do for her now. No mountain so towering I wouldn't climb it for her. No ocean so deep I wouldn't swim it for her. No battle so formidable I wouldn't fight it for her.

But I had no idea this would be tested so soon. As I rocked my toddler that night, I was in labor again, but this time it wasn't physical. The labor was spiritual. And it wasn't a battle I had to fight just for myself. Two souls would depend on the outcome of this particular conflict of faith.

CRISIS OF FAITH

*A great High Priest whose name is love;
Who ever lives and pleads for me.*

But does he?

*Is God really on a mystical throne somewhere out beyond the
expanses of space?*

Is he even aware of me?

Is everything I've ever believed about him a lie?

What happens when we die?

*My name is graven on his hands;
My name is written on his heart . . .¹*

But is it?

Is the Bible really God's Word?

Is the only identity I've ever known a complete sham?

What am I supposed to tell my children?

Is religion really just the opiate of the masses?

Does God even exist at all?

ANOTHER GOSPEL?

“Remember, God, when Dyllan was born? Remember the peace that came over me in a wave I couldn’t control? I remember. Your peace.

“Remember New York, God? Remember that day? I needed you. I remember. I remember you cradling me with your presence as I lay in my bed, feeling like I would die.”

Or was it something else? Had those just been synapses in my brain firing in response to stress or excitement, sending a cocktail of endorphins and adrenaline through my body? Is that all it ever was? Every worship service, camp meeting, and Bible study?

I believe. Help my unbelief.

It felt like I’d been plunged into a stormy ocean with waves crashing over my head. No lifeboat. No rescue in sight. In the 2000 film *The Perfect Storm*, one of the last images (spoiler alert) is of the giant ship being capsized and pushed underwater by a wave the size of a skyscraper. The tiniest form of a human head peeks above the water for a split second before disappearing into the depths.

That was me.

The Real Deal

What on earth would cause a strong and devout Christian to doubt her faith? Why would a member of the popular Christian music group ZOEgirl, which toured the world giving altar calls and inspiring many young teens to proclaim

their faith and “shout it from the mountain,” suddenly have doubts? We’ll get to that in a bit. But first, a little background.

I was that kid. You know the one. The one who asked Jesus into her heart when she was five. The one who began studying the Bible as soon as she learned to read. The one who got up early to walk around her school and pray for revival among her peers. The one who led worship in chapel at her Christian high school and moved to New York at twenty-one to do inner city work with underprivileged kids. The one who went on every mission trip she could and who evangelized on the streets of Los Angeles and New York during the summer.

The one you would never worry about. The one you just knew would be fine. The one who would never doubt her faith.

When I was about ten years old, my mom was a volunteer at the Fred Jordan Mission in Los Angeles. She would take us with her to work the soup lines on weekends, and it was there that I watched her hug prostitutes and wrap blankets around smelly homeless guys. It was there I watched my dad, a Christian recording artist, lead worship for crowds of cold and hungry souls as they sang “Amazing Grace” at the top of their lungs.

Feeding the hungry. Clothing the naked. Loving the outcast. This is what was modeled to me as genuine Christianity. It’s just what Christians did. They prayed, they read their Bibles, and they served. It wasn’t perfect, but it was the real thing.

So I can’t say I grew up with a blind faith. My faith was informed by witnessing the gospel in action. But it was intellectually weak and untested. I had no frame of reference or toolbox to draw from when every belief I had been so sure

of was called into question. And it wasn't an atheist, secular humanist, Hindu, or Buddhist who facilitated my eventual faith crisis—it was a Christian. More specifically, it was a progressive Christian pastor.

This pastor asked me to participate in an invite-only, small, and exclusive discussion group. He told me it was a ministry training course that would result in a theological education comparable to four years in seminary. “Education” was an understatement. It was more like an upheaval. The class lasted four years. I lasted four months.

We've all heard stories of Christian kids who walk away from their faith after being challenged by skeptical professors in a college classroom. My faith was confronted in a similar way . . . but not at a university. It was challenged in the pews of a church. It was rocked by a pastor who had won my trust, respect, and loyalty. This wasn't some random weirdo I'd met during a street outreach on Hollywood Boulevard who spouted vitriol against God as I handed him a gospel tract. This was an educated, intellectual, calm, and eloquent church leader—someone who expressed love for Jesus. He was a brilliant communicator, and he had a bone to pick with Christianity.

Meeting after meeting, every precious belief I held about God, Jesus, and the Bible was placed on an intellectual chopping block and hacked to pieces. Identifying himself as a “hopeful agnostic,” this pastor began examining the tenets of the faith. The Virgin Birth? Doesn't matter. The Resurrection? Probably happened, but you don't have to believe in it. The Atonement? That would be a nope. And the Bible? God forbid you believed Scripture was inerrant. He pointed out that

even the high schoolers had moved beyond that primitive notion. During our discussions, many in the class dismissed “fundies” (fundamentalists) as fearful dimwits who simply followed what they were told to believe.

Sure, I’d seen some of these claims before on the cover of *Newsweek* magazine or in a television special trying to debunk Jesus on the Discovery Channel. But that was no surprise. I expected non-Christians to disbelieve. I could just close the magazine or turn off the TV and go about my day. Yet in that small discussion group, there was no escaping. It seemed I was the only one in the room who was troubled by what I was asked to respond to. But I didn’t have answers. *I had never even thought of some of the questions.*

I would later learn that this dismantling of doctrinal tenets—where all the beliefs someone was raised with and had never questioned are systematically pulled apart—is something progressive Christians call deconstruction.

After four months we would part ways. The pastor and the church went on to become a “progressive Christian community.” At the same time, Christians all across the country were having the same types of conversations on internet message boards, in coffee shops, and in church classrooms. They were questioning their long-held assumptions about the nature of God and the Bible, the exclusivity of Christianity, and biblical norms regarding gender and sexual orientation. These disenchanted souls found each other. They wrote blogs. They penned books. Churches began identifying as progressive and removing or editing the faith statements on their websites.

ANOTHER GOSPEL?

Today, many of the most popular Christian authors, bloggers, and speakers are progressive. Entire denominations are now filled with those who identify as such. Yet many other Christians sit in pews every Sunday completely unaware that their church has adopted progressive theology.

Progressive Christians tend to avoid absolutes and are typically not united around creeds or belief statements. In fact, progressive blogger John Pavlovitz wrote that in progressive Christianity, there are “no sacred cows.”² Because of this, it might be more helpful to look for certain signs, moods, and attitudes toward God and the Bible when trying to spot it. For example, progressive Christians view the Bible as primarily a human book and emphasize personal conscience and practices rather than certainty and beliefs. They are also very open to redefining, reinterpreting, or even rejecting essential doctrines of the faith like the Virgin Birth, the deity of Jesus, and his bodily resurrection.

When progressive Christianity first entered the scene, its proponents raised some valid critiques of evangelical culture that the church needed to examine and reevaluate. But those progressives who reject essential teachings—like the physical resurrection of Jesus—can confuse unsuspecting Christians and kick the foundation out from under them.

After leaving that progressive church, I was thrust into a spiritual blackout—a foray into darkness like I’d never known. I knew *what* I believed; now I was forced to consider *why* I believed. Dog-paddling to keep my head above water in that storm-tossed ocean, I begged God for rescue: “God, I know you’re there. Please send me a lifeboat.”

Over the course of the next few years, God did send a life-boat. Then another. Then another. The first one came while I was driving down the interstate fiddling with the radio in my car. I stopped when I heard a gentle, grandfatherly voice addressing one of the very claims that had been lobbed at me by the progressive pastor. What I heard took my breath away and then poured it right back into my lungs. The man on the radio, who I discovered had been recorded at a university answering questions from skeptics, systematically took down objection after objection with no fear or anger. He was kind. He was resolute. He was far more convincing and fact-based than the progressive pastor. I had been searching for truth, and on the radio that day, I found it.

In no time I was reading every apologetics and theology book I could get my hands on, and I even began auditing seminary classes. The progressive wave that slammed me against the Rock of Ages had broken apart my deeply ingrained assumptions about Jesus, God, and the Bible. But that same Rock of Ages slowly but surely began to rearrange the pieces, discarding a few and putting the right ones back where they belonged.

Stronger than Before

This, then, is my account of reconstructing my faith. Today, my Christianity doesn't look exactly like it did before. I've adjusted my beliefs on certain theological points and have become much more careful in how I interpret the Bible. I've dropped some not-so-biblical ideas that were such a part

of my Christian identity that I'd never thought to question them.

But throughout this journey, I've discovered that the core historic claims of Christianity are true. I've learned that the Bible, though attacked and maligned century after century, stands tall atop the rubble of accusations that have been piled up against it. I've come to know that the Christian worldview is the only one that can sufficiently explain reality. I've rediscovered Jesus . . . the confounding preacher from Nazareth who split history in two and who kept his word to never leave me. As you follow me on this journey, I pray your faith will be strengthened too.

I'm more convinced than ever that Christianity is not based on a mystical revelation or self-inspired philosophy. It's deeply rooted in history. In fact, it is the only religious system I can think of that depends on a historical event (the resurrection of Jesus) being real—not fake—news.

When I have doubts about my faith, or deep nagging questions that keep me up at night, I don't have the luxury of finding "my truth" because I am committed to *the* truth. I want to know what is real. I want my worldview (the lens through which I see the world) to line up with reality. God either exists, or he doesn't. The Bible is his Word, or it's not. Jesus was raised from the dead, or he wasn't. Christianity is true, or it isn't. There is no "my truth" when it comes to God.

Unfortunately for many people today, determining what is true in all areas of life has become nothing more than a game of "he said, she said." For example, I just googled "health benefits of pork" (because bacon), and I discovered

all kinds of fun “facts.” I discovered that pork is high in protein, low in carbs, gluten-free, and contains a good balance of every essential amino acid. I also read an article that claimed pork gives you healthier skin, promotes heavy metal detox, and prevents “adult disease” (whatever that is).

Obviously, what I gleaned in a five-minute Google search is a mix of facts and fantasy. How should I wade through all the information to know which sources to trust and which “facts” to believe? Should I just pile a bunch of bacon in a bowl and call it a gluten-free salad? As much as I might want to pick and choose what to believe and allow others to do the same, it’s not realistic.

If “my truth” says pork is the new kale, the consequences of that idea will bear out in reality—despite how strongly I may feel about it. My feelings about bacon won’t change what it’s doing to my heart, my blood pressure, and my thighs. This is why “my truth” is a myth. There is no such thing. Bacon is either good for me or it’s not (or it’s somewhere in between, please God!). And what I believe about it can have life or death consequences.

Likewise, as I navigated through my faith crisis, I realized that it’s not enough to simply know the facts anymore . . . we have to learn how to think them through—to assess information and come to reasonable conclusions after engaging religious ideas logically and intellectually. We can’t allow truth to be sacrificed on the altar of our feelings. We can’t allow our fear of offending others to prevent us from warning them that they’re about to step in front of a bus. Truth matters for bacon eaters, and truth matters for Christians.

ANOTHER GOSPEL?

Maybe you're a Christian who feels alone in your beliefs. Maybe you're a believer who has drifted into progressive Christianity without realizing it—or who is concerned that a friend or loved one is on that path. Maybe you feel frustrated when your social media news feed is flooded with articles, blogs, and videos that send red flags flying, but you can't articulate why. Maybe there's a pebble in your shoe because you've witnessed hypocrisy in your church or been a victim of spiritual abuse. Maybe you're tempted to let the wave take you under and give up on your faith altogether.

Whoever you are, it is my prayer, dear reader, that this book will be a lifeboat *for you*.