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Everything Good About God is True: Choosing Faith

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Introduction

At the end of 2021, the world lost a giant in the struggle for human dignity and the fight for social justice. I had just started writing this book when Archbishop Desmond Tutu died, and his death reminded me of my one interaction with the presence, wisdom, and joy that was Desmond Tutu.

In 2009 I had the privilege of attending the inauguration of the 44th president of the United States of America, Barack Hussein Obama. During inauguration week, I took in the inauguration festivities around the DC, attended the official inauguration worship service held at the National Cathedral, and froze on the National Mall with thousands of others as we witnessed the inauguration of the first Black president of the United States. The highlight of the week was participating in the processional of the Congressional Black Caucus inauguration worship service, which took place as part of the inauguration festivities. As the then-moderator of the Presbyterian Church (USA)—the highest elected office in a denomination of, at that point, over two million people—I was invited to represent the PC(USA) in the long line of denominational and political dignitaries.

These formalities came with the position in which I found myself, and I was doing my best to fit in. As a very nonfancy, middle-aged

dad of three, I felt much more comfortable spending the day tending to my houseplant jungle, on the soccer sidelines cheering on my kids, or lounging on the couch watching reruns of *The Fresh Prince*. Here, in this group of religious movers and shakers, I was definitely out of my element. So of course, as the Spirit or fate or luck would have it, when we lined up, I found myself standing right behind the former archbishop of Cape Town.

Desmond Tutu was the focus of the entire room full of people. I could feel the eyes of everyone upon him and, in their peripheral vision, on me. I can only imagine what these other leaders were thinking. “Who’s that youngish, not tall Asian American dude—and how the heck did he get to stand next to Bishop Tutu?” If I were them, I would have given me the side-eye too. But I tried to focus. I mean, how often do you get to stand next to an icon of the anti-apartheid movement?

So there I stood as we waited to process to the front, for what seemed like a lifetime. Now, I can chat it up with most people, and I’m rarely at a loss for words, but I was dying to talk to him and I had nothing. What was I going to lead with? “So Bishop, how was your flight?” “Whatcha been bingeing on Netflix these days?” “This Barack thing: pretty crazy, right?” This was DESMOND TUTU, for God’s sake. There simply *was* no worthy opening line.

Yet as his grace would have it, before I said something that would bring shame upon my family, my ancestors, and my denomination, he started chatting with me . . . like a regular person.

Of course he did! He asked me about myself, my family, and the church I served. He engaged me with all the exuberance and joy he was known for. During one of the most significant events in US history, this larger-than-life human saw me. This holy man, who had played a significant role in the dismantling of South Africa’s system of apartheid, been imprisoned for his efforts, and worked to bring

healing to his nation, asked me about my kids, my job, and my ordinary little life.

Right then, right there, he saw me when he sure didn’t have to. He could have turned to any number of more powerful people, for we were surrounded by them. But his power and influence came from his humble acknowledgment of our collective humanity and love for us all. And while Bishop Tutu was not God, through his honest and genuine gesture, God was made known to me.

That night the bishop preached a gleeful, prophetic sermon, moving his seventy-year-old body like a teenager as he danced with the gospel hip-hop duo *Mary Mary*. The night ended with the sanctuary filled with political, religious, and cultural leaders, most of them African American, singing the Black national anthem, “Lift Every Voice.” The groans of generations mingled with the exuberant shouts claiming a new day, hope for tomorrow, and pure joy.

At the center was a man who had grown up under apartheid, led a nonviolent movement that resulted in the overthrow of a regime that had dedicated itself to racist oppression, and modeled a courageous, faithful, and genuine version of faith. His Christian faith challenged his country to be the kind of place that he believed God intended, one of equality, justice, and humanity.

This much is clear: We who identify as Christian or Christian-ish in the United States—insiders to the church and outsiders, “believers” and doubters, Protestants and Catholics, evangelicals and mainliners—need a different story of Christianity than the one that is dominating right now. We need a gospel that looks more like the faith that animated Bishop Tutu before he died: compassionately just, beautifully complex, and excruciatingly kind.

I fear that here in the United States we are losing our collective imagination for the common good. We have barricaded ourselves behind false boundaries of wealth, security, and privilege. We have

broken apart any common understanding of what it means to be the body politic and what it means to pursue liberty and justice for everyone.

And Christians have been at the center of it all.

Is everything bad about Christianity true?

If you are reading this book in the 2050s, I hope you all have your clean-energy-powered jet packs and that pumpkin-spice anything has finally been designated as an affront to culinary decency. I also hope that the world has made a ginormous political and social course correction. Right now, in the 2020s, words like *surreal*, *unprecedented*, and *unbelievable* fail miserably to convey the cataclysmic dumpster fire in which we have found ourselves. I wish words like *dystopian* and *apocalyptic* were hyperbolic. Looking back, the past few years have proved that few acts, political or personal, are off the table.

If you did not have the pleasure of living through these times, pop on your time-traveling virtual-reality goggles and set your destination date to January 6, 2021. We find ourselves just after the 2020 election, and the Capitol building and Congress are being attacked by a group of white nationalist insurrectionists, supported by public officials, who are determined to disrupt the peaceful transition of power and the official certification of president-elect Joe Biden. Death chants can be heard echoing through the halls, names are being called out, nooses are being waved toward the Capitol, and people are being beaten with barricades and flag poles. We are on the brink of a political coup, and we will soon learn exactly how thin a thread our democracy is hanging on. Most sickening and enraging is the fact that, in the days and months to follow, not all political parties will condemn it.

Around this same time, the economic gaps between those who hold a disproportionate amount of wealth and those shackled by

poverty are widening at an alarming rate, limiting access to education, healthcare, and the basic survival needs of millions of people. Reproductive rights in some states are reverting to the 1920s, with some states criminalizing abortion and forcing humans to give birth no matter the situation or circumstance. Gun violence and mass shootings are everyday events, even as state officials increase open-carry laws, call on educators to arm themselves, and exert no political will to address this health crisis. Boards of education across the country are creating false narratives around racism, sexuality, and gender that are leading to book bannings and the criminalization of teaching about the history or the realities of race, sexuality, and gender. Every week we hear of another instance of police brutality leading to the death of Black and brown people, but there is no substantial movement to fundamentally change public safety practices: in fact, the funding and militarization of local law enforcement systems are increasing.

Meanwhile, self-appointed militias, vigilante mobs, and white nationalist hate groups posing as patriots and protectors are taking it upon themselves to harass, intimidate, and threaten violence toward immigrants, asylum seekers, and refugees at our borders; drag queens reading stories at libraries; folks marching in support of human rights, racial justice, or reproductive rights; as well as anyone who affirms or identifies as part of LGBTQIA+ communities. Basically anyone who does not wear the political garments of a white evangelical Christian nationalist “American” is fair game—and yes, “game” as in huntable, shootable, and killable.

Welcome to the 2020s.

Sadly, this is not an exhaustive list. I wish it were. But hate never ceases to surprise. Every day humans find ways to exclude, oppress, and otherwise create more division, not less.

Yes, there are many who have not been part of the white evangelical Christian nationalist movements. But whether we like it or

not, *that* is the dominant Christian narrative of the day. Voices that claim to be about “religious freedom” are, in reality, pushing for a theocratic country and expressing a nationalism dominated by a culture of white, straight, male, conservative, evangelical, fundamentalist Christianity. This brand of Christianity’s decades-long political effort is meant to legislate certain ideas of what society should look like, what activities should be allowed, and which humans deserve to be treated with dignity—and which do not.

Make no mistake: these voices move us ever closer to a society with legalized religious inquisition and unapologetic spiritual apartheid. What might have sounded like fear-mongering hyperbole a few years ago—predictions of a civil war in the United States—no longer seems that crazy.

Sometimes it seems like everything bad about Christianity just might be true.

How can we be sure there’s a better version?

We are in trouble, no doubt. No wonder those of us within or adjacent to Christianity sometimes want to run the other way. Better to be quiet, fade into the background, abdicate our positions of power and influence, or simply pretend we have nothing to do with *that* version of the faith. No wonder so many have deconstructed their way out of the faith entirely.

But those of us who make any claim to Christianity must not distance ourselves from what is happening. So much of what had been taking place was founded upon, reinforced by, and enacted by those who come from a Christian perspective, one that we need to roundly and loudly repudiate and reject. It is incumbent upon Christians in the United States who believe that our faith has been hijacked to offer something better. It is urgent. Christian nationalists

profess a gospel of exclusion that limits the expansive possibility of God’s creativity. It’s a faith built upon a theological absolutism that causes us to know God less, not more.

I am writing this book, which repudiates that version of Christianity by offering a better one, because I believe deeply that these are not simply abstract theological, ideological, or political debates. This warped kind of faith leads to death: death of the body, death of relationships, death of faith. LGBTQIA+ folks are driven to death by suicide and death by violence inflicted by others; immigrants end up dying in the middle of deserts trying to seek bodily safety and economic opportunity; the environment is hemorrhaging; Black and brown people are being killed and incarcerated into chronic invisibility; and the unjust distribution of wealth and resources keeps people in poverty, unhoused, and starving. The list goes on. These examples are not hyperbolic, slippery-slope rhetorical examples. They are realities that we know to be true. And they are what drive many of us to fight theologies that are taking society further down this path of hate-filled division and destruction.

All this leads to why I am making an audacious and somewhat arrogant claim: That there is a better version of the gospel of Jesus Christ. That Christianity can actually be a healing balm for a hurt and hurting world. That there is, simply, a *better* choice of Christian faith.

Isn’t that kind of arrogant? you may say. How dare you claim that what you believe is better than anyone else? Isn’t that what you accuse *them* of doing?

All are appropriate questions. But the reality is we *all* believe there are better—and therefore worse—ways to do things. Parenting, cooking, sports, and yes, faith: we all believe that some ways of doing these things are better than others. I do not claim that I offer the One True Faith or the Only Way. But I firmly believe there is a more complex, nuanced, loving, and just version of the gospel that

is bubbling just beneath the surface of our social consciousness, ready for widespread renewal and rediscovery. These pages contain almost everything I believe about God, complete with all the joyful wandering, misdirected confidence, and revelatory doubt that brings life to my faith.

The Christian story that I present in this book, and the one I believe Jesus embodies and Scripture contains, invites—nay, *requires*—a struggle with belief. This gospel also challenges us to live out those beliefs in the world as if we actually believed them to be true. There is a better way, one that leads with love, empathy, and kindness, and one that leads to liberation, healing, and new life. It's the one that the Samaritan woman invited her friends to encounter when she told them, after having met Jesus at a well, "Come and see the one who has told me everything I've done! Could this one be the Christ?" (John 4:29).

Unlike many of my friends, who were steeped in toxic Christianity and have since tried to get as far away from it as possible, I have called this faith my home for many years. Each year I become a little more grateful that those versions of the Christian story did not inform the faith passed down to me (props to Trinity Presbyterian Church in Stockton, California!). While no gathering of humans is perfect, Trinity, my childhood church, is where I witnessed and received unconditional love, support, and sustenance during times of crisis and struggle. That community of faith taught me to explore, embrace, and celebrate the complexities of life, love, and faith. Trinity taught me the impact of community organizing and activism through our connection to the local school and city politics. Trinity taught me the importance of remembering my ancestors and reminded me to be present for generations to come. What I offer to you on these pages is a version of the Christian faith that has been received, cultivated, practiced, and adapted by a generation who then passed it down to

the next and equipped them to do the same. I submit to you that what has been passed to me, and what I hope to pass on to others, is worth retaining.

Please note that the title of this book is *Everything Good about God Is True* and not *Everything People Say about God Is Good*. I fully admit that "good" is a relative term and that the title may sound arrogant and brash. What one person perceives as good may not be experienced as good by another. Yet goodness exists outside our human definition of it—both mine and yours—and in these pages I am inviting you to be a theologian: someone who explores the nature of God in the world and makes claims about what is indeed good about God. We will all struggle with who God is and how God interacts with us, and we will all spend our lives trying to define the "good." I invite you to explore beliefs about God and expressions of faith that I not only believe are *good* but are timelessly *true*.

In this book, I don't offer you a gospel bound up in and defined by regulation, rigidity, and litmus tests. Rather, I attempt to provide an accessible primer on the Christian faith that offers up a vision of faith characterized by acceptance, curiosity, creativity, liberation, love, and what it is more than what it is *not*. I strive to offer accessible and clear explanations of significant theological concepts: about God, the Spirit, Jesus, and the church, as well as Christian involvement in public policy and the body politic. I hope this book can offer the "what's next" for people who are deconstructing—all in two hundred pages or less!

So yes, this book rebukes versions of Christianity that are claiming so much space in the national conversation. But make no mistake: We must do more than rebuke and reject and repudiate. We must boldly and unapologetically proclaim and choose a different way. We must choose a more loving, healing, and just way of following Jesus.

Now, before some pastor somewhere writes the first scathing review of this book from their big-ass oak desk that includes “There is nothing new here” or “But he left so much out!”—they will get no disagreement from me. In many ways, this book is simply a culmination of decades of ancestors and saints of the faith shaping my relationship with God. My contribution is unique only insofar as I also encourage you to boldly share a version of the gospel that has nurtured so many of us so well and for so long.

We can no longer abdicate the Christian story to hate, violence, and oppression. Those of us who occupy this more loving, just, and extended version of the Christian story must do a better job of claiming, articulating, and speaking the hell up.

But how do I learn the language?

During the summer of 2021 and after two-plus years of pandemic life, I agreed to take *Minecraft* lessons from my five-year-old nephew. For those of you with no gamers in your life, *Minecraft* is an online game where you build cities, fight things, and do other stuff . . . I think. We didn’t get very far in our lesson before discovering that I did not have the tools, language, or instincts for this. As an expertise- and skill-building session, it was an utter failure. My nephew assumed too much about what I already knew about gaming and used words I’d never heard to tell me what to do. “Just create a world” meant nothing to me when I had no idea what a world was in the sanctuary of *Minecraft*. In the end, my nephew had to basically control my avatar’s movement, build a world, and join worlds he had already created. However, as a nephew-uncle relationship marker, it was a wild success. Despite my failure to master the world of *Minecraft*, we now have that “Remember that time you tried to teach me *Minecraft*?” memory.

As someone who spent more than a decade leading a new church in San Francisco, I constantly needed to translate churchy words and practices for those who genuinely had no church experience, positive or negative. The experience I had with my nephew mirrors how many folks experience the church when they are exploring the possibility of faith. Most churches are competent at presenting the general gist of what things are, how things happen, and even whispers of what they believe. But when it comes to the nitty-gritty, church people like me tend to make far too many assumptions, most notably that faith is passed down through osmosis, obligation, and potlucks. We assume that what we believe is clear, that people understand all the words, and that what we do makes sense. We think that communicating “belief” is unnecessary, condescending, and below us.

We come by these approaches honestly. Yet we end up giving the impression that we don’t really have any foundational beliefs at all, or at least any that we’re willing to share. Sure, we may be generally welcoming, but ultimately folks are left on the outside looking in—not for lack of desire on their part but simply because we, the churchy ones, have forgotten how to articulate our faith. We’ve forgotten that there’s a vocabulary of faith that can guide, accompany, usher—pick your metaphor—all of us into a deeper, more nuanced Christian faith. We’ve forgotten how the expansiveness of God, the journey of Jesus Christ, and the proddings of the Spirit can be lived out in the world, how so many actions of love and liberation are deeply grounded in and reinforced by faith like Desmond Tutu’s.

When you think of Christianity, you might identify less with my nephew in the story—the insider, the teacher, the One Who Knows—and more with me. You may be the one interested in learning about this thing called faith but unable to grasp the vocabulary because no one has figured out how to explain or model or teach it. You may feel baffled, inept, and totally out of your element. I write as

an insider of this world, so I run the risk of creating and reinforcing spaces of confusion, exclusion, and insider-ese. The Christian faith is more than a video game, and the last thing that I want to do is for you to identify with my newbie gamer experience when it comes to exploring this faith. Apologies for when I fail in this endeavor.

Maybe you are reading this book because someone in church has given it to you. Maybe you've had a bad church experience and yearn for a reminder of what you *used* to believe as good. Or maybe you've had a great experience in church and you're simply trying to get another view, another version of the gospel to think about, or to refresh yourself, or to have as a book study.

No matter where we find ourselves, I believe faith requires daily choices. I believe faith happens in that space between mediocre, inspired, and excruciating. I am here for a faith that has the power to change myself and the world but is also about every day: where I experience the divine in the everyday rhythms of life, see the power in the nuance of human interaction, and find beauty in the creation that surrounds us. Faith judged by measurable progress, human accolades, and religious accomplishment is false faith, and I choose each and every morning not to have any of it. I hope you will not either.

This book is my audacious claim that Christianity does not have to be bound by the trappings of productivity, guilt, competition, shame, or purity culture. I am not laying out a case to convince you to believe in the goodness and presence of God or the power and holiness of the one we know as Jesus Christ. Trying to prove—in mere words—why someone should believe: that's a fool's errand. The pages that follow are a glimpse into a faith that has formed me and one that has been passed along to me from earlier generations. Sure, it's a faith that gets shaped by culture and context. But at the end of the day, it's a durable, lasting story of faith, one that I sincerely believe can bring healing to the world.

Some traditions are built upon the idea that security and belonging are best known through rigidly defined steps and a calcified set of beliefs: doctrines that will guarantee some reward at the end of life. Any questions—about belief or institution or scripture—are seen as signs of weakness and a lack of faith. But I believe belonging is found in the exact opposite: in understanding that context dictates how we move the world, and in letting our beliefs shift. I believe we find true security and belonging by rejecting any transactional endeavors in which we attempt to earn God's love. What if we viewed questions and curiosity as vital elements of a strong, secure faith? What if this approach to faith is not theological relativism but an expansive approach to faith that takes the movements of the Spirit and ever-revealing truths of God seriously? What if, by choosing faith, we learn to ask better questions?

If you are hoping for a direct map from point A to point B, this will be a disappointing book. The story is intentionally winding and wandering, because I choose to believe that it is precisely in the exploration where we best grow to know the divine in ourselves and in the world.

Are you a theologian?

Speaking of God: As the title indicates, this book claps back to the warped version of a God who emboldens hate, supports oppression, rejoices in suffering, and reinforces marginalization. It maintains that *all* the good things that so many of us have understood to be true are, in fact, *true*: that God is accepting of difference, expansive in perspective, loving of all creation, righteous in the face of injustice, compassionate in times of sorrow, and kind—always kind. No matter what you've heard about God in the past, no matter what you are hearing said about God today, I want to say that all these good things

that you have imagined God to be are, in fact, true. Yes, life will cause us to doubt, waver, and reject. But each day we can choose, again and again, to believe that everything good about God is indeed true.

No, I cannot provide empirical evidence that what I have just said about God is true. Rather, I choose to believe in the words and ways that God has spoken to me through the communities that have raised me, the strangers who have surprised me, the loved ones who have loved me, and the many moments of wrestling with the Spirit, conversing with God, reading Scripture, and observing the world.

Many books about faith are written by people with kickass experiences: dramatic and life-altering events that have forced the writer toward monumental transformation. This book is not those. In fact, this is where I come swooping into view with the less-than-inspiring grandeur of some random brown sparrow that you barely even notice at the bird feeder because, well, we're flippin' everywhere. I bring no compelling origin story other than what I have and continue to find holiness and meaning in every day. Sure, I have had my share of drama and struggle, but haven't we all? What I have to offer is a story of choosing faith: not because life forced me to make a choice, but because life has made itself clear that there are a series of choices to be made every day, every hour, every moment. And it is precisely in the cracks and crevices of these moments where I still meet the divine that my faith comes alive, and I choose this journey with Christ over and over again.

I am as surprised as anyone else that I am writing this book about faith and theology. I believe, on one level, that we are all theologians, but for most of my life, I have resisted embracing the idea that I am one. Descriptors like “public theologian” can seem so pretentious. Plus, I did not want to disrespect my friends and colleagues who are legit academic theologians who sacrificed so much to get those PhDs. For many people, their image of theologians is a bunch

of old white dudes with British accents sitting in a room droning on about patripassianism, latifundalization, or syncretism. First, *yawn*, and second, I *did* pay some attention in seminary. Thankfully, in many places, the realities and persons in those rooms are changing. There are many Black, brown, young, queer, female-identifying, and otherwise diverse theologians out there speaking into theological conversations.

But, like it or not, doing this work of faith is theological work. I am not an academic, but together you and I can expand what it means to be theologians. Together, as theologians, we can wrestle with our relationship to God. As theologians, we can listen for and translate the movement of the Spirit with our communities. Should we choose to acknowledge it, we theologians are holding in tension bold and courageous claims, all the while leaving room for the prodings of our heart, mind, and gut for the guidance of the divine. This theologian thing is quite the adventure. So all together now, doing our best “I am Spartacus!” impression, no matter where you are—café, church pew, the dentist's chair, or waiting in line at the grocery store—say to yourself, “I am a theologian!”

I promise no answers, I offer no destination, and I am not trying to convince anyone of anything (if you are questioning why you bought this book, then *fair enough*). What I do offer is a view of the full landscape of the faith that I am determined to practice every day. I hope that, in doing so, it will help as you practice yours. I hope that, by reading some stories of how I have encountered God, you will take your own stories more seriously. This is a faith of embraced mediocrity, excruciating discernment, joyful liberation, and unexpected revelation. Our everyday experiences are portals through which we encounter God. If everything good about God is indeed true, we learn that goodness each time we take a breath and each day we get to be alive.

What is a faith montage?

I am suspicious whenever I hear truisms like “Everyone should have a mission statement for their life.” It’s as if all we need to succeed is some catchy little saying cross-stitched on a pillow. I cringe whenever I hear a self-help guru give off a sound-bite motivational parrot vibe (yes, I have issues).

That said, there is something appealing to me about the discipline of claiming what you believe. For as much as I hate trite personal mission statements, and even though our beliefs shift and expand over time, we all have core beliefs. We all express our values, whether or not there is a framed poster of a majestic mountain scene at the golden hour with the word “BLESSED” plastered across it. So, with a dash of chagrin, a little bit of cringe, and a heaped scoop of humility, this is where I begin: with a mission statement. In this case, it is a statement of belief crafted and molded into what I call a faith montage.

Montages are a series of brief moments spliced together to create a whole. They’re a bunch of short clips strung together to create an impression, a summary, a feeling. A good montage succinctly and effectively communicates place, personality, growth, breadth, and movement. The mid-film montage is a rom-com movie staple. The scene usually consists of someone trying on outfits in front of their friends or a couple falling in love while wandering the streets of New York, Paris, or an old-timey farm. Montages help the story progress without wasting precious production minutes.

The chapters in this book are built around my own faith montage, which serves as a framework for this sweeping primer on the Christian faith. Each chapter contains snippets of my faith montage. You’ll find my full faith montage, as well as guidance for creating your own, in the back of the book. I hope this is a compelling invitation for you to

ponder your own list or poem or statement of things you choose to believe about God.

My faith montage is a story, a prayer, a poem, a catechism. Okay, fine, it’s a personal mission statement. (Darn you, motivational spiritual gurus!) This prayer will feel comfortable and lovingly worn for some of you, while for others it will be like hearing a foreign tongue (much like my nephew’s gaming instructions sounded to me). Hopefully it will hold just enough familiarity for you not to feel completely lost.

I also know that some words will likely, for many of you, trigger pain and trauma from past hurts perpetrated by those supposedly acting in the name of God. Your past interactions with toxic Christian spaces may have left you battered, bruised, and disillusioned with faith. For this, I am deeply sorry. While I will not presume to apologize on behalf of other church leaders, please know that you are not alone. I hope that if you still feel pangs of hurt when talking about faith, you will feel loved and seen in these pages. Even reading this book is an act of courage, so I hope to honor the choice you have made to do so.

I try to stay away from church jargon and Christian-ese as best I can, but I have no illusions that any amount of creative prose will make it feel any less dense. I hope to give texture and depth to words that may have lost their luster or meaning but are worth holding onto in order to find a common language with others on this path of faith. My faith montage is intentionally packed with ideas and concepts, and I do not apologize for the complex and winding nature of this prayer. Our relationship with God is often complex, sometimes contradictory, and constantly evolving. My theological positions have changed and evolved over time, and I expect that they will continue to do so until I take my final breath.

Whether you read my full faith montage at the back of the book all at once or read it as it is revealed chapter by chapter, I hope that you will return to it as you craft your own, whether by writing, drawing, sculpting, or another approach. Read it as a meandering prayer that draws you in new directions and not as a direct map that lands you in a particular place. After you read it once, reread it, this time as a familiar self-guided tour of faith, and see where it takes you. My faith montage is meant to be a progression of beliefs, a library of ideas, and an invitation to theological exploration. Pick and choose where you start and stop. Notice words and phrases that speak to you. Note the places where you feel discomfort because of past experiences or instinctual resistance. Notice the moments of unexpected exhale, brought on by familiar or new ideas. Reflect on how particular phrases land with you. From one line to the next, be open to the affirmation of what you already believe to be true and surprised by something new that stirs your soul.

And through it all, I hope you will also be critical in noticing what is missing, what questions are not addressed, and what is perhaps being avoided. In many ways, any faith montage acts as a kind of “Frequently Asked Questions” for faith, an invitation to further exploration and inquiry. Trust your instincts and curiosity to dive deeper when you feel so moved. I hope you feel all the feels, experience some glimpses of common faith, and try on the title of “theologian.” I hope you unapologetically and unabashedly explore your relationship with and understanding of God.

The end of each chapter includes a few questions that may prompt more individual and communal inquiry about faith, a challenge to begin to craft your own faith montage, and a breathing prayer. A breathing prayer (often called a breath prayer) is a simple prayer that you can repeat throughout your day, inhaling as you pray one phrase and exhaling as you pray another.

Should you choose to craft your own faith montage, it will be about who you are in and amid a relationship with God. You will deconstruct long-held beliefs, shed systems that no longer serve your journey and, hopefully, build a theological, spiritual, and holy space. That space may not remain the same for the rest of your life, but it can be a potent and powerful expression of who you are now and who you understand God to be.

Okay, let's do this.