**IN WHICH THIS IS FOR THE ONES LEAVING EVANGELICALISM**

*Posted on March 29, 2014 by*[*Sarah Bessey*](http://sarahbessey.com/author/Sarah/)

[](http://sarahbessey.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/For-the-ones-1.png)

Sarah Bessey, March 2014 [SARAH BESSEYBLOG MEET SARAH BOOKS DO GOOD SPEAKING CONTACT](SARAH%20BESSEYBLOG%20%20MEET%20SARAH%20BOOKS%20DO%20GOOD%20SPEAKING%20%20CONTACT) [Well before the 2017 Conference]

I walked this path years ago: it is not an easy path. But there are a lot of us out here waiting for you.

Can we ever really leave our mother church? Perhaps not. The complexity of tangled up roots isn’t easily undone. And yes, I think there is a way to reclaim and redeem our traditions with an eye on the future.

But maybe this isn’t your time to do that. Maybe this is your time to let go and walk away.

**I know you’re grieving. Let yourself grieve**. It’s the end of something, it’s worthwhile to notice the passing of it, to sit in the space and look at the pieces before you head out.

In the early days, when you are first walking away, you might feel afraid. You don’t need to be afraid. It can be confusing to separate from what so-and-so-big-guy-in-the-big-organization says about you or people like you. It can be disorienting to walk out into the wilderness on purpose. It can be lonely. It can be exhilarating. It can be terrifying.

**My friend, don’t stay in a religious institution or a religious tradition out of fear.**Fear should not drive your decisions: let love motivate you.

**Lean into your questions and your doubts until you find that God is out here in the wilderness, too.**

I have good news for you, broken-hearted one: **God is here in the wandering, too**. In fact, you might just find, as Jonathan Martin wrote, that the wilderness is the birthplace of true intimacy with God for you.

**Jesus isn’t an evangelical.** You get to love Jesus without being an evangelical.

Your pet evangelical gate-keeper isn’t the sole arbitrator of the Christian faith: there is more complexity and beauty and diversity of voices and experiences within followers of the Way than you know. Remember, your view of Christians, your personal experience with Christians is rather small sample size: there are a lot more of us out here than you might think. **A lot of us on the other side of that faith shift,** eschewing labels and fear-tactics, boundary markers and tribalist thinking.

There are a lot of us [notice this is Sarah talking] out here who aren’t evangelical theologically or politically. There are those of us who are evangelical perhaps in our theology still (I think I am but who can keep track these days of the master list we’re supposed to be checking?) while separating from evangelicalism culturally or politically.

I’m someone who believes that we are in the midst of major shift within the Church – what Phyllis Tickle calls a “rummage sale” [[Embracing Emergent Christianity, The Great Rummage Sale]](https://video.search.yahoo.com/yhs/search;_ylt=AwrTccKB_p1YkKkAkvkPxQt.;_ylu=X3oDMTByNWU4cGh1BGNvbG8DZ3ExBHBvcwMxBHZ0aWQDBHNlYwNzYw--?p=Phyllis+Tickle+Rummabe+Sale&fr=yhs-iry-fullyhosted_003&hspart=iry&hsimp=yhs-fullyhosted_003#id=1&vid=4c98aed2a58c519bc09789f85f2d71d5&action=view)– similar to the Great Schism, and the Reformation. **The Church is sorting and casting off, renewing and re-establishing in the postmodern age and this is a good thing**. The old will remain – it always does – but something new is being born, too. If it is being born in the Church, it is first being born in the hearts and minds and lives of us, the Body.

Maybe evangelicalism as we understand it doesn’t need our defense anymore: maybe we can open our fist, lay down our weapons for the movement or the ideology or the powerful, and simply walk away.

It was helpful when it was helpful. Now, perhaps, it is not. Evangelicalism doesn’t get our loyalty: that fidelity is for our Jesus.

Sometimes we have to cut away the old for the new to grow. **We are a resurrection people, darling.** God can take our death and ugliness and bitterness, our hurt and our wounds, and make something beautiful and redemptive. For you. In you. With you.

Let something new be born in you. There is never a new life, a new birth, without labour and struggle and patience, but then comes the release.

Care for the new life being born in you with tenderness. It will be tempting to take all the baggage with you – to bring the habits or language or rules with you. That’s okay. You might need to be angry for a while. That’s okay. You might need to stop reading your approved-translation-of-the-Bible and only find Scripture in The Message. That’s okay. You might need to stop praying the way you were taught and learn to pray as you work, as you make love, as you walk at night. That’s okay.

**I’m not afraid for you: you are held.  You are loved and you are free. I am hopeful for you.**

Nothing has been lost that will not be restored. Be patient and kind with yourself. New life doesn’t come overnight especially after the soil of your life and heart has been burnt down and razed and covered in salt.

Don’t worry about the “should-do” stuff anymore. It might help to cocoon away for a while, far from the performances or the structures or even the habits or thinkers that bring you pain. The Holy Spirit isn’t restricted to only meeting with you in a one-hour-quiet-time or an official 501-3(c) tax approved church building.

**Set out, pilgrim. Set out into the freedom and the wandering.** Find your people.  God is much bigger, wilder, generous, more wonderful than you imagined.

The funny thing for me is that on the other side of the wilderness, I found myself reclaiming it all – my tradition, the habits, the language. Your path may lead you elsewhere, but I’m back where I began with new eyes, a new heart, a new mind, a new life, and a wry smile.

Now, instead of being an evangelical or whatever label you preferred, perhaps you can simply be a disciple, a pilgrim, out on The Way, following in the footsteps of the man from Nazareth.

**You aren’t condemned to wander forever. Remember now: after the wilderness comes deliverance**