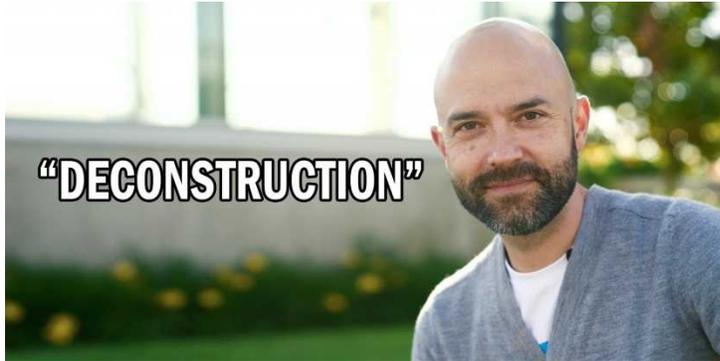


# When Culture Wins Hearts and Minds

Joshua Harris announced that he has decided to abandon his pulpit, family, and even faith.

Robin Smith · Aug. 12, 2019



What makes a man, specifically a pastor, leave his wife of over 20 years, his three teenage children, his ministry, and his entire faith — and publicly apologize for not supporting homosexual relationships and unions?

Joshua Harris, former lead pastor of Covenant Life Church, a megachurch in Gaithersburg, Maryland, was best known for his monstrosly popular book, *I Kissed Dating Goodbye*, which he wrote at 21 years of age. He served as pastor from 2004 to 2015 until departing for British Columbia for graduate studies at Regent College.

In recent weeks, Harris announced to the world that he had not only decided to abandon his pulpit but also his family and even his faith. The accounts, posted via Instagram, show that he and his wife have made a mutual decision to separate. Perfectly fitting for today's informal, less-than-committed culture, the post featured a photo of Harris and his wife announcing their plans to "continue our life together as friends" while alluding to "significant changes" faced by the couple during passing years.

A side note: Life is forever changing, but that does not equate with marital separation nor with the need to abandon one's beliefs. Yet, what a dramatic conflict in the heart, mind, and body of one who preached covenant relationships and their importance to God, even as an author who taught the call to purity in teen lives was clearly moved from what had been a very legalistic view to the polar opposite, appearing to skip that middle ground by lurching headlong into the ideology of secularism. This is apparently the story of Joshua Harris.

Not only did the young man, rooted in the theology of Calvinism, separate from his wife and kids and leave the pulpit, he also declared: "I have undergone a massive shift in regard to my faith in Jesus. The popular phrase for this is 'deconstruction,' the biblical phrase is 'falling away.' By all the measurements that I have for defining a Christian, I am not a Christian."

Harris continued, "But I specifically want to add to this list now: to the LGBTQ+ community, I want to say that I am sorry for the views that I taught in my books and as a pastor regarding sexuality. I regret standing against marriage equality, for not affirming you and your place in the

church, and for any ways that my writing and speaking contributed to a culture of exclusion and bigotry.”

Harris referenced his apparent “repenting of my self-righteousness,” in what would be assumed to be his past writings and teachings from his doctrinal view that dating in the teen years could lead to a focus of self and sex. But he didn’t stop there. The former shepherd of a very large flock, whose influence impacted many, went further by indicating his new support of homosexual relations and unions.

“Deconstruction,” “failing away” — this former pastor has chosen culture over Christ.

The “True Love Waits” movement, launched in 1993 by Southern Baptists, taught commitment and sexual abstinence. The movement intersected Harris’s book release in 1997. His book suggested abandoning dating completely. The “True Love Waits” effort was aimed to equip teens with teachings to avoid sexual intercourse outside of marriage as they dated. Harris’s book taught that abstinence *from dating* was best in a more extreme approach based on his upbringing and denomination.

Harris is just one example of many who are confronted with such a choice. His, however, takes on more celebrity in light of his story. A few observations.

At least Joshua Harris walked away from a post of leadership in his congregation as he clearly struggles with his own beliefs. He now lives in Canada and owns his own firm providing marketing and public-relations work. He struggles, as many do. Prayers are lifted for those in this fight to reconcile beliefs, truths, and our culture. But it’s critical to differentiate that which is denominational versus that which is Christian.

Denominations — are man-made rules that are incorporated into teachings to uphold traditions within church organizations. The Christian faith is a miraculous faith that takes the Bible — comprised of the Old and New Testaments, recorded in 66 books, written over about 1,500 years by 35-40 different individuals — and brings teachings to life. These truths are not necessarily the most accepted nor the most popular, but they are the best for believers, inspired by a holy, righteous God who loves us so much that He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to die in our place to pay the penalty required of all for our sins. Denominations don’t save, perform miracles, or change lives. Christ does. Yet, when Harris apologizes that his lack of inclusion and support of the homosexual lifestyle has contributed to a culture of bigotry, it’s pretty clear he’s abandoned not only a denominational teaching but also a Biblical truth. Joshua Harris is not deconstructing his faith. He’s arguing with God.

And so it is with us all. We are created in the image of God, yet have free will. God’s Word teaches us the best way, but our free will allows us to choose. Harris, as each of us, make choices daily. Harris battles his own beliefs from a public platform. But every single individual walks a similar path with a choice to either believe and say the same thing about love, sin, mercy, forgiveness, righteousness, peace, etc. that God does — homologeo (Gr), which means to confess — or reject what God says and make our own way.

Sometimes, culture wins hearts and minds, as it appears to have done in the case of Joshua Harris and countless others. But many times, Christ prevails with lives lived in liberty, not license, and freedom found in faith, not in the Secular Trinity — Me, Myself and I