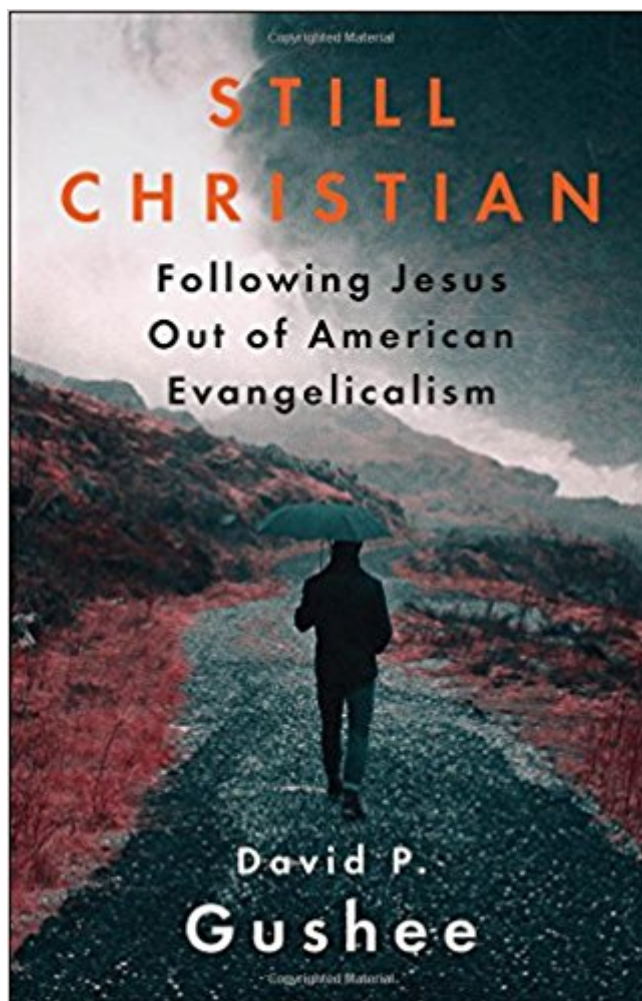


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# Still Christian: Following Jesus Out Of American Evangelicalism



## Synopsis

In this provocative tell-all, David Gushee gives an insider's look at the frictions and schisms of evangelical Christianity, based on his experiences that began with becoming a born-again Southern Baptist in 1978 to being kicked out of evangelicalism in 2014 for his stance on LGBT inclusion in the church. But Gushee's religious pilgrimage proves even broader than that, as he leads his reader through his childhood experiences in Roman Catholicism, his difficult days at the liberal Union Seminary in New York, his encounters with the Christian Right, and more. In telling his story, Gushee speaks to the cultural divisions of a generation, as well as of today, and to those who have themselves been disillusioned by many battles within American Christianity. As he describes his own struggles to find the right path at different stages of his journey, he highlights the turning points and decisions that we all face. When do we compromise, and when do we stand our ground? Is holding to moral conviction worth sacrificing friendship, jobs, and security? As he takes us through his sometimes-amusing, sometimes-heartbreaking, and always-stirring journey, Gushee shows us that we can retain our faith in Christ even when Christians disappoint us.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Memoirs are fragile genres for theologians, but Gushee's memoir is a must read for Christians and non-Christians so both kinds of readers will better understand the challenges of being Christian in this fearful time. Stanley Hauerwas, Gilbert T. Rowe Professor Emeritus of Divinity and Law, Duke University Divinity School Anyone who wants to know what a Christian ethicist is and does can

begin here, with the compelling account of how one man makes life-bending decisions about things that matter, without ever losing faith in the tender Jesus who has hold of his soul. Barbara Brown Taylor, author of *Leaving Church and Learning to Walk in the Dark* Still Christian takes us on the journey of a Christian leader who endeavors to maintain his integrity while navigating his way from a rigid fundamentalism with its right wing political agenda into a progressive world view. The author describes the conflicts and pains that may have to be endured by any who would dare to make a similar journey. I loved this book! Tony Campolo, Professor Emeritus of Sociology, Eastern University "This is a story of finding faith and almost losing it, of struggling with spirituality but sticking with it. It's David's story, but it is also mine. And perhaps it is yours, too. In these pages, one of our wisest voices has spoken. I strongly suggest you listen." Jonathan Merritt, contributing writer for *The Atlantic* and author of *Learning to Speak God from Scratch* Like examining the rings on a tree, David Gushee's life tells a story of the last half-century of Christianity in America. He's been a part of church battles and political battles. He's been the darling of conservatives and progressives. In the end, he is a Christian ethicist who's valiantly followed his conscience. Now that he's quitting the culture wars, we all have a lot to learn from him. These have been tumultuous years for the church in America, and Gushee's autobiography stands as a memorial to all we've gained and lost. Tony Jones, author of *Did God Kill Jesus?* Like David, I spent most of my life hanging onto Jesus in the midst of that relentless storm of anti-intellectual sexism, homophobia, and climate change denial better known as American evangelicalism, until all I had left was my devotion to loving relationships and social justice and my overwhelming sense of wonder. Unlike me, however, David has come through with both faith and intellect intact, deeply and wisely committed to making the Church more worthy of its founder. As much as I wish he d come help me pursue goodness in secular ways, this book joyfully testifies to the fact that he s right where he belongs. You Christians are lucky to have him! Bart Campolo, humanist chaplain at the University of Southern California and coauthor (with Tony Campolo) of *Why I Left, Why I Stayed: Conversations on Christianity between an Evangelical Father and His Humanist Son* Testimonies remain an important component of the Christian worship experience, for they reveal how less than perfect humans wrestle with God. Still Christian is the testimony of an influential Christian ethicist which enfleshes what it means to remain faithful. One can learn more about Christian ethics reading Gushee's testimony then academic theses on the subject. --Miguel A. De La Torre, Professor of Social Ethics and Latino/a Studies, Iliff School of TheologyDavid Gushee has written a gripping memoir. His is a life that reveals an amazing journey of faith and startling encounters with the idols that may challenge it. Every chapter brims with the power of his witness: from the moment he gave his life to Jesus, to navigating the inner circles of

white American evangelicalism, to finding courage in his faith to speak his truth to power, and now to experience sheer joy with his family and grandchild. This is a must read for anyone trying to walk in faith...for anyone trying to live life fully and with purpose. Eddie S. Glaude, Jr. Bearing witness from intersection of religion, culture, and politics, Gushee tells an insider's tale of the lost battle for the soul of Evangelicalism. His writing is by turns searingly honest, elegiac, fascinating, and inspiring. But what does it matter? It matters because many of us, insiders and outsiders to this larger story, know so little about the essentially religious family feud that threatens now to undo our indivisible union. It's time to tune in. Ken Wilson, Copastor of Blue Ocean Faith, Ann Arbor, and author of *A Letter to My Congregation* and, with Emily Swan, *Solus Jesus* David Gushee is one of the most thoughtful Christian thinkers writing today. *Still Christian* gives an astute and troubling account of the turbulent changes in American evangelical Christianity in recent decades and how these changes continue to shape the broader religious landscape. It is also a brave, honest, and deeply personal account of what it means to remain Christian in the early twenty-first century.

Victoria J. Barnett, General Editor, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works English Edition "David Gushee contains multitudes. He's a progressive Evangelical Christian who left Catholicism because of weak post-Vatican II catechesis. He seeks justice both for LGBT persons and prenatal children. He's been president of the most important scholarly societies in our field, but is also a die-hard political activist and dedicated pastor. Now identifying as "Batholic", he has returned to his Catholic faith, but without leaving Evangelical Christianity. If you suspect the story of how someone became such an interestingly-complex Christ-follower might be worth reading about, you are correct. Christians of all kinds should pick up this readable book but only if they are ready to be challenged, moved, and inspired. Charles C. Camosy is Associate Professor of Theological and Social Ethics at Fordham University After reading the book, I think you'll feel as I do: that his wise, kind, and honest voice is needed now more than ever. If you're conflicted about the term Evangelical in the Trump years, you especially need this book. It might help you stay Christian. -- Brian D. McLaren, author of *The Great Spiritual Migration* *Still Christian* is an excellent book, both a lover's quarrel and a cautionary tale. Randall Balmer John Phillips Professor in Religion, Dartmouth College Author of *Evangelicalism in America* David Gushee articulates beautifully and personally the journey many Christians today are facing: finding a way to remain still Christian in a complex and challenging world where the black-and-white biblicistic Evangelical/Fundamentalist faith of one's youth has lost much of its explanatory value. David has lived it, and his courage, conviction, and honesty will certainly resonate with many, as they do with me. --Peter Enns, Abram S. Clemens professor of biblical studies at Eastern University and author of *The Sin of Certainty* David Gushee has written a

heartfelt, accessible, deeply personal memoir. *Still Christian* is a moving account of his journey through four decades of asking difficult questions about how Christian faith ought to inform one's positions on the thorniest ethical and political issues of our time. Jim Wallis, New York Times bestselling author of *America's Original Sin: Racism, White Privilege, and the Bridge to a New America*, president of Sojourners, and editor-in-chief of Sojourners magazine David Gushee is one of our finest public theologians, in a moment when global life needs public theology reimagined and resurrected. In laying bare his deepest questions and confusions alongside his deepest clarity and fidelity, David Gushee shows us how this way of being Christian might also be a redemptive force for our time. Krista Tippett, Executive Producer/Host, *On Being* + Curator, The Civil Conversations Project The spiritual journey is far more difficult and painful than most of us like to admit. In *Still Christian*, David Gushee speaks with a candor and clarity that is both rare and refreshing about the meandering nature of faith. Like a conversation with an old friend over coffee, he shares a story that so many of us who claim Christ or engaged organized religion can find ourselves in and process our own story from. John Pavlovitz, author of *A Bigger Table: Building Messy, Authentic, and Hopeful Spiritual Community* As a thinking person of faith in a world where the church and academy are viewed at odds with one another, David Gushee's memoir reveals a vulnerability bound to a firm belief that the lives of those who follow Jesus need to be spent saving souls without losing minds, especially their own. Any scholar wondering why they're still Christian will find solace in his testimony. --Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas, Associate Professor of Ethics and Society, Vanderbilt University Divinity School David Gushee has been in almost every room where it happens in American Christianity. From Post Vatican II Catholic, to right-wing Evangelical, to radical Liberationist, Gushee's surprising spiritual sojourn offers a singular insight into Christianity in America that is both disturbing and beautiful. *Still Christian* is one part anthropology, one part political history, and one part vocational struggle; yet taken as a whole it is about one man's search for the best way to love Jesus in a complex and conflicted world. Paul Brandeis Raushenbush, Senior Vice President at Auburn Seminary, and Editor of *Voices*. Open, honest, and informed, Christian ethicist David Gushee's *Still Christian* invites readers behind the scenes of the evangelical movement as Gushee interrogates his own evangelical faith roots, journey, and eventual ouster from the movement. *Still Christian* is mandatory reading for such a time as this. Lisa Sharon Harper, speaker, activist and author of *The Very Good Gospel: How Everything Wrong Can Be Made Right* David Gushee's fascinating memoir will appeal to anyone seeking to understand the complex religious forces shaping American politics and society today. From his conservative Southern Baptist beginnings all the way to his advocacy for LGBT Christians in recent years,

Gushee's life and career make for an engrossing account from the front lines of the culture wars. Still Christian is essential reading for discovering where the church has come from, where we're headed, and what faithfulness to Jesus looks like when it requires prophetic dissent. --Matthew Vines, executive director of The Reformation Project and author of God and the Gay Christian

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David P. Gushee is Distinguished University Professor of Christian Ethics and Director of the Center for Theology and Public Life at Mercer University. One of the leading voices in American Christianity today, he is the author or editor of more than twenty books, including *A Letter to My Anxious Christian Friends: From Fear to Faith in Unsettled Times*. An award-winning blogger for Religion News Service, he is the President-Elect of the American Academy of Religion and President of the Society of Christian Ethics.

I love it when I get to review books which I can recommend without hesitation or caveats and am glad to say that David Gushee's *Still Christian: Following Jesus out of American Evangelicalism* is one of them. This is a book which should be of interest to quite a few different people for different, if compatible, reasons. Before I get to that though, let me start by describing the book a little. *Still Christian* is in the format of a memoir, Gushee isn't trying to persuade his audience(s) to do much of anything other than maybe to be more aware of what Evangelicalism is, and how it has come to be what that. It is a fairly short memoir because it focuses with pretty laser-like intensity on the single story of the role of Evangelicalism within Gushee's life. Thus it isn't the sort of full-orbed analysis of Evangelicalism as a historical, social, theological phenomenon of the sort that we are all probably waiting for Mark Noll to write. Instead, this book is important because it will provide you with a narrative (and if you spent any part of the 80's, 90's, 00's or 10's as an Evangelical it will likely be a decidedly relate-able narrative) through which many of the beauties, thorns, and ultimately rot of evangelicalism can be more easily recognized. In terms of style and readability, Gushee has a warm and winsome style and the book is tremendously easy to read. I blew through it in less than 48 hours (probably 4-5 hours of reading time over two evenings). So who will benefit from and enjoy reading this book and why? Ex-Evangelicals: For those of us who grew up or spent significant time as evangelicals this book is incredibly easy to relate to and will almost certainly give you that "you are not alone" encouragement. It's particularly given Gushee's status as a Christian Ethicist and president of the Society of Christian Ethics and of the American Academy of Religion.

Of course much of that has to do with shared experiences (his comfort with Evangelicalism was shaken by the "Women in Ministry" debate and by the Evangelical right's celebration of torture and his final break occurred over his affirmation of the full inclusion of LGBT folks), but it has a lot more to do with his carefully recorded process as he worked and lived through those experiences. Throughout the book he is unwaveringly gracious towards those with whom he has disagreed. Where people come across negatively he nearly always has something positive to say about them as well and even though Al Mohler does not come off especially well, he refuses to engage in any personal denouncement of him. Neo-Calvinism receives his single full-throated denouncement in chapter 7 Finding a Home and Leaving It where, when discussing the various perspectives operating at Evangelical colleges (and specifically Union where he taught) he says: This is my best chance to say that I believe the resurgence of a doctrinaire Calvinism in contemporary evangelicalism is among the most odious developments of the last generation. I abhor its version of God and most of its version of Christian ethics, and I believe it could only have emerged among relatively privileged, hyper-cognitive, compassion-challenged white men, as it has. But I digress. That passage stands out because it is such a total break with the otherwise irenic tone he takes throughout the book. I am not condemning him for including it, but thought the fact was worth pointing out. I think what gave me hope in reading this was not just that I could identify so much with Gushee's experience, but that he seems to have managed to get through it with so little bitterness and so few scars.

**Evangelicals:** I am frankly not quite certain whether evangelicals will enjoy reading this, I do know that those evangelicals who seek to be well informed will appreciate reading this. This is a memoir by someone who was one of you, who experienced the "tent" of Evangelicalism shrinking around him (though his ultimate exit did involve movement to a place you had told him you would not go), and who will describe to you, winsomely and charitably, what it was about you that has caused him to feel relief on leaving. Surely this is something Evangelicals want to know. Successful organizations need to conduct exit interviews. When someone leaves them, if they do not take the time to find out why, they are almost certainly doomed to eventual collapse. This is a charitable and kind voice (though he doesn't pull punches either) who will tell you what is going on and will challenge you to think about your culture as well as your practices. I don't think the goal of this is to convince anyone to leave or stay within evangelicalism, but it is a vital perspective for anyone who wants to understand evangelicalism as it is today.

**non-Evangelical Christians:** If you are not and have never been an Evangelical, you are likely nevertheless well aware of them. As one friend of mine put it: "The thing about Evangelicals is that they do things". For better or worse, Evangelicals have come to "represent" much of Christianity, or at least Protestantism, to the

western world. While there are many great resources out there to help you understand the genesis and theology of evangelicalism (I have mentioned Mark Noll haven't I?) this book will be your best tool to date in understanding the experience of Evangelicalism from the inside. It is rare to get a reflections from someone who was so recently a member of a "tribe", is now excluded from that tribe, and is nonetheless, compassionate, gracious, and fair towards

them.non-Christians:Remember how 81% of Evangelicals (who voted) voted for Trump? If you think that understanding that dynamic is important to navigating the world. Or more broadly if you realize that political Evangelicalism is still a major power player in US politics and in globalizing culture, then you probably already know that it is important to have an accurate understanding of this group of people. This book will provide some stunning insights into what is really going on with that. It is, for you, serendipitous that Gushee is a professional ethicist as his perspective is one you will find particularly enlightening.A Final Addendum on Fortuitous TimingI can't think of it as anything but God-given grace that this book was released the same week as the Nashville Statement. Still Christian provides a lens on what is going on with the so called Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, the Southern Baptist Convention, and so the rest. It is no coincidence in my mind that Al Mohler figures prominently in both works (his is the seventh signature on the Nashville Statement). In Chapter 6 Finding a Voice While Not Losing a Soul Gushee recounts his experience with Mohler at Southern Seminary:Al Mohler, only thirty-three years old when he was named president, turned out to be a relentless implementer of the conservative agenda for Southern Seminary. He was committed to purging any faculty who strayed from conformity to the seminary's doctrinal statement, elevating faculty voices that would take visible conservative stands on key culture-war issues, and moving the school to a traditionalist position on the top question of the moment—namely, whether the Bible permitted women to be ordained or to serve as pastors in local churches.....a new policy came down from the administration, one that would change everything at Southern. At an epic, miserable faculty meeting, the president [Mohler] declared that those who believed that women should serve as pastors would no longer be hired, promoted, or tenured at Southern Seminary. While some details of this policy remained to be addressed, the implications were clear enough. A school that had, over the years, worked its way around to a largely egalitarian understanding of gender roles was now, by decree, overnight, a place that required faculty both to believe and to teach that Holy Scripture clearly bars women from the highest office of church leadership. Dissenting tenured faculty members might survive but probably ought to leave, untenured faculty members who held the now-erroneous belief had no future at the school, and no new faculty members would be hired who were egalitarian.This meant the end for



pretty much all female faculty members. I vividly remember one of my younger female colleagues getting up from the meeting in which the policy was announced, running from the room, and throwing up in the hall. It's not every day that you are professionally executed by public decree. It just might make you physically ill. If that doesn't frame the context for the recently released Nashville Statement I don't know what does.

David Gushee is a professor of Christian ethics, a working pastor, a writer, and a grandfather, yet he is several years away from his sixtieth birthday. His fascinating memoir walks through the cultural and spiritual conflicts of recent history in a deeply personal way. Dr. Gushee writes with candor and clarity about how his life was touched by Jesus and how his conversion as a teenager eventually led him to become a professor of Christian ethics at a time of gut-wrenching conflict in the American church. I was deeply impressed by his personal vulnerability as well as his clear-eyed analysis of the follies and failures of what is known as evangelicalism. At the same time he is forthright in describing his own failures and weaknesses. This is a compelling account the joys and costs of following Jesus in America today. I highly recommend it.

David Gushee's journey is a very detailed and personal account of what a lot of social/ethical oriented Christians' experience of the deteriorating of Evangelical conscious. This book is able to use the author's journal entries, recollection and historical analysis to present a clear pictures of why things happened the way it was. I started my journey as Christian because of the wonderful mission service of American missionaries. After I migrated to this countries, I started feeling unease about the rhetoric and display of the opposite of the humility of Jesus. This book is a reminder for me and for the followers of Jesus, to understand both virtues and vices on the institutions and movements. Reading David Gushee and his books has always helped me to find sanity in the insanity of the entangling of faith and politics in America.

I am a student of Dr. Gushee's, and I sat down and read this book in just one day. In this debut in the realm of storytelling, Gushee tells his own personal story of his journey of Christian discipleship. Starting with his Catholic upbringing to his conversion to Baptist Christianity from an old Buick Skylark, Gushee continues to tell of his journey through 20+ years of public theology. Gushee shares from a very rare and unique position, as a scholar, professor, and activist who has been on both "sides" of the present "culture wars" that tear people apart today. Gushee shares his experiences with different institutions of higher learning as a student and professor from William &

Mary to the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, the famous Union Theological Seminary in New York City, Union University in Jackson, Tennessee, to Mercer University where he teaches today. Gushee tells the story of the split of the Baptist's umbrella denomination, the Southern Baptist Convention, into factions after conservative fundamentalists took the convention and shaped it into what it is today. Gushee tells the first-hand story of this takeover and its devastating effect on women in ministry which included the removal of all women from Southern Seminary leadership position, and the removal of all professors, staff, etc. who did not agree with what the conservative regime saw as a clear biblical prohibition against women in ministry and church leadership roles. Gushee tells the story of his own wrestlings with his decision of rather or not to be complicit with this vision, and ultimately leaving to begin teaching at Union University in Jackson, Tennessee. Here, Gushee began to rise as a prominent Christian voice, and became what he calls, "Every liberal's favorite evangelical." During this time, Gushee did work with did work in the field of nuclear disarmament, the importance of the Creation Care in light of climate change, and opposed the Bush Administration's use of torture in the interrogation of suspected terrorists. This criticism of a Republican president brought Gushee into conflict with the conservative leadership of Union University which led him to Mercer University and its McAfee School of Theology. At Mercer and McAfee, Gushee tells of his initial struggles to overcome the suspicion of the moderate/liberal leaders of its institution because of his ties to the conservatives during the split. Gushee overcame this, however, and had the academic freedom to reconsider his position on the LGBTQ+ community. This reconsideration led him to advocate for the full inclusion of LGBTQ+ individuals in the church. This led him to become what he calls "Every evangelical's least favorite liberal." During this time, Gushee tells the story of being thrown out of the very community that he first found Jesus. I will not tell all as to not spoil it, but if you are interested in the religious culture wars and are interested in how to leave cultural evangelicalism while still following Jesus, this book is for you. Gushee writes with passion, creativity, and even humor to argue that following Jesus to the margins is the best way to follow Him.

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