

DON EVERTS  
AND DOUG SCHAUPP

# I ONCE WAS LOST

What Postmodern Skeptics Taught Us  
About Their Path to Jesus



  
IVP Books

An imprint of InterVarsity Press  
Downers Grove, Illinois

## CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS . . . . .	9
INTRODUCTION: <i>Meet the Authors (All 2000 of Them!)</i> . . . . .	11
THE POSTMODERN PATH TO FAITH. . . . .	17
THRESHOLD ONE: <i>Trusting a Christian</i> . . . . .	29
THRESHOLD TWO: <i>Becoming Curious</i> . . . . .	49
THRESHOLD THREE: <i>Opening Up to Change.</i> . . . . .	66
THRESHOLD FOUR: <i>Seeking After God</i> . . . . .	84
THRESHOLD FIVE: <i>Entering the Kingdom</i> . . . . .	103
BEYOND THE THRESHOLDS: <i>Living in the Kingdom.</i> . . . . .	119
CONCLUSION: <i>Servant Evangelism</i> . . . . .	131

## INTRODUCTION

### MEET THE AUTHORS (ALL 2000 OF THEM!)

If you are a bit leery of anyone that claims to know anything conclusive about anything postmodern, then you are in good company. So are we.

The two of us have been ministering on the front lines of these confusing, mysterious cultural shifts since they became unmistakable in the early 1990s. And anytime someone has tried to define or clarify or label all these changes it has always seemed a bit cartoonish and naively overconfident to us.

The more sure the conclusions are about so-called postmodernity, the more incredulous we tend to become. If Microsoft Word still draws a red squiggly line underneath “postmodernity” we’ve figured it’s still a bit too early to go jumping to conclusions. So we’ve just kept on ministering daily among college students, those who are riding the front waves of these inexorable, invisible shifts.<sup>1</sup>

Yet here we are, more than ten years later, attempting to say some-

---

<sup>1</sup>How do we define postmodernity? On the one hand, we know that we no longer live in the modern era of enlightenment confidence in human reason. On the other hand, we also know that the new emerging era is not yet clearly defined. So how do we define postmodernity? It’s how things are right now. It’s the in between times. We are more experiential than propositional in our connection to truth. We are more communal than individualistic. We value authenticity over theory. We understand struggle more than naive certainty. We are in process, and we will be different in ten or twenty years.

thing clear about postmodernity. Well, let's be specific: we are attempting to say something clear about postmodern conversions. And we don't feel that what we have to say is cartoonish or even naively conclusive. Find this hard to believe? We empathize. So before you toss this book aside as another misguided attempt to describe the indescribable, please allow us to explain ourselves.

## **OUR STORIES**

Don Everts and Doug Schaupp here. We are both missionaries to the college campus in the United States. We labor inside a campus movement called InterVarsity Christian Fellowship that's been around these parts since the 1940s.

As members of this InterVarsity movement we walk alongside college students as they consider the world of faith in general and the revelation of Jesus in particular. Don has been at this since 1994 and is currently working with students and campus staff in Colorado. Doug has been at it even longer, laboring among students and staff in Los Angeles and various other cities in Southern California.

*Doug:* When the campus first entered the twilight zone of postmodernity, we knew we were in for a ride. In the early 1990s we could feel the tectonic plates shifting underneath us on campus. The students we worked with increasingly viewed the world around them in entirely different ways from what we were accustomed to. Though the tremors of change had been around for decades, the big "postmodern" shift became unavoidable in the 1990s. Students weren't responding in the same ways they had before. Sharing the truth of Jesus' gospel no longer moved people.

Our evangelistic labors resonated less, and had less fruit.

We were confronted with the tension of tough questions. How do we find our footing on this shifting terrain? How can we offer Jesus in this new milieu? How much are we willing to embrace and be changed by this seismic upheaval?

Tentatively at first, then with greater courage and resolve, we entered the new postmodern world. The 1990s became a decade of great experimentation and risk-taking as we learned to offer Jesus to the next generation. By 1995, we had jumped into the postmodern world with everything we had, no holds barred, no looking back. And what a ride it has been!

Within the campus ministry ranks of InterVarsity across the country many people began wrestling with these shifts on campus and how to respond to them. What do discipleship, evangelism, missions, Scripture study look like for these new students? As a movement we all experimented and prayed and failed and succeeded. It was the beginning of an exhilarating season.

*Don:* Most of my own labors have been on campuses in the Rocky Mountains. Cultural observers have often noted that new trends and shifts in the wider culture always seem to hit campus first, and I have found this to be true. They also observe that cultural shifts and movements begin on the two coasts and then make their way into the middle of the United States over time. I have found this to be true as well.

So while my staff and I were definitely feeling these cultural shifts in the 1990s, it always seemed that our colleagues on the coasts were being hit harder. And faster. In terms of evangelism, we were

beginning to calmly ask questions, while Doug and his folks were having to experiment or die.

So over the years I decided to become a student of the coasts, to follow their experiments in evangelism and see what they were learning. This was how I ran into Doug and his friends. They were taking risks in evangelism and coming to some interesting conclusions about postmodern conversions. And while many of their attempts were intriguing in and of themselves, it was the fruit itself that held my gaze.

Doug and his staff never claimed to have found the silver bullet, but they were around hundreds of postmodern folks who were investigating the person of Jesus and becoming Christians. From 1996 to 2007, their region had seen more than twenty-two hundred considerably postmodern folks walk the path to faith in Jesus. The numbers caught my eye. But the stories were what caught my heart.

These were real students: Matthew and Abner and Mark and Susan . . . I met some of them and marveled at their stories. These students were becoming powerful believers—many of them becoming missionaries, pastors and evangelists. On more than thirty-six campuses in Southern California, both urban and suburban, the InterVarsity staff were surprised and delighted to begin seeing a higher percentage of conversions than most other regions of the country.

So when Doug and his fellow campus missionaries started telling their stories and writing down what they had been learning from these new believers about the postmodern path to faith, I leaned in. I wanted to hear what they had learned and were learning. And I am glad I did.

## A SURPRISING CONSENSUS

While we encountered many wonderful books about postmodernity and even postmodern evangelism specifically, we became really interested in getting some real-life data about evangelism and conversion directly from the new postmodern context we walked and labored in day after day.

So we began talking with these new Christians about what happened to them. We talked with our own friends. We gathered staff from various campuses and heard their stories of students coming to faith in Jesus. We interviewed new Jesus followers and listened intently as they told us their stories. And during this process of curious (and pretty joyful!) investigation we began to detect some deep, overarching lessons from their collective experience.

To our initial surprise, we noticed certain common experiences among our friends' journeys to faith. As we celebrated all the conversions we had witnessed, the same themes were popping up again and again.

These general themes were so prevalent, in fact, that a group of us came up with what we started calling "the five thresholds" in an in-house working document that sought to give words to what we were seeing. This unpublished article began to circulate a bit. Then the news began to trickle back to us. Our friends around the United States and even in other parts of the world found these five phases to ring true for them in their own context.

We were stunned. Had these particular new believers actually taught us something generally true about the postmodern path to faith? The more confirmation we got as the years went on, the more we realized we were onto something real and true about conversion in this postmodern world.

For those of us who came up with these five thresholds in the first place, it feels a little like the TV commercial of the resilient Energizer bunny. No matter what that silly little bunny goes through, it just keeps on banging that drum. We actually expected the batteries of the five thresholds to die out within a few months. But nearly a decade later, the drum still beats.

In fact, a group of thirty of us gathered a few years ago for a conference to “kill the bunny.” Our task was to poke holes in and dismantle the five thresholds with our latest stories of folks coming to faith in Jesus. After a rigorous day of discussion and debate, the five thresholds shocked us by emerging from the fray largely unscathed. The bunny was still alive and marching.

It would seem that all those new believers have taught us something. These real people had real conversion experiences. And their stories have taught us something real and true about the postmodern path to faith.

And here’s the kicker: the more clearly we see the postmodern path to Jesus, the more natural and relevant and regular our witness becomes and the more fruit we see in evangelism. Understanding the postmodern path to faith is both freeing and empowering for those engaged in the kingdom task of evangelism.

Mark and Abner and the hundreds of others who have walked from the land of the lost into the kingdom of Jesus have steered us right. We take joy in their new lives and are indebted to them for their honest reflections on their spiritual travels. It’s their consensus about that journey that gives us the pluck to write this book.

In reality, they are the true authors here. They once were lost. But now they have been drawn into Jesus—and they have something to teach us all about coming to faith.