

Changing Faith: Questions, Doubts and Choices About an Unchanging God

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"If you inherited a rigid, confining faith that doesn't leave you room to breathe, Michael Hidalgo's new book will help you. . . . Changing Faith shows how true faith stretches and grows with us, helping us discover God in bigger and deeper ways through life's unexpected and challenging experiences."

— Brian D. McLaren, author of *Naked Spirituality*

Everything You Know Is (Not) Wrong

My friend Ryan grew up on a farm in rural Indiana. The world he grew up in was the same picture of the Midwest that caused me such consternation. In his senior class there were no African Americans, no one was openly gay and no one affiliated with any religion but Christianity. His life in Indiana was comfortable. Ryan was surrounded by people just like him.

In his world, different ideas about religion, sexual orientation and even politics were distant realities he heard about only on television. He saw the world through the lenses of Christian Middle America. Here he sensed an invitation to follow God into ministry, which initially meant becoming a pastor in a local church.

He moved to Denver to go to seminary. Not too long after he started classes, his years of faithful church attendance, participation in the church and reading the Bible felt dull. On top of this, he met many who saw the world through different lenses.

Many of his coworkers had no affiliation with any particular faith group. They believed Christians to be irrelevant, judgmental and shaming. After many conversations with them, Ryan had questions about his faith, which led to moving out of his comfort zone. He wasn't sure what he would find, but he knew the lenses he had grown up with were not the only one worth looking through. Ryan saw his was a changing faith.

In his desire to expand his viewpoint on the world, Ryan found himself in places he had never been, surrounded by people who were nothing like him. He started spending one night each week working with the chronically homeless in Denver. He had no idea what lay ahead, but this experience pulled him down a rabbit hole that in some ways shattered his original lenses and in other ways expanded them.

Ryan met men and women from different cultures, became friends with those of different religions and spent time with people of different sexual orientation. He discovered how tightly he held to stereotypes and assumptions about people. In his connection with others who were not like him, Ryan was continually challenged to confront his anxiety and fear. For the first time he awoke to the depths of God's love and grace among men and women considered by some to be beyond the loving reach of God.

Ryan met God through men and women who live on the ragged edges of society, and this led to a new conversion. Ryan's viewpoint was not just born again once but again and again and again. This renewed way of seeing things broadened his understanding of how "wide and long and high and deep" the love of God is (Ephesians 3:18).

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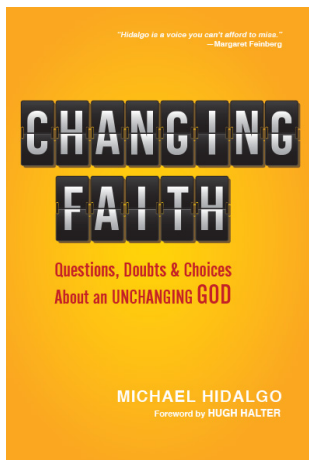
Michael Hidalgo is the lead pastor of Denver Community Church, which under his leadership has grown from forty people to over two thousand. With the ONE Campaign and Malaria No More, Michael has addressed thousands nationally. He is the author of *Unlost: Being Found by the One We Are Looking For* and writes regularly for *Relevant* magazine. Michael, his wife and three children live in Denver, Colorado.

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But there was something Ryan did not do. Rather than throw away the lenses he was given in Indiana, he held on to them. This set of lenses, when added to the new sets he found on the streets of Denver, has allowed him to see the world more broadly than ever before. Ryan has eyes to see the love, grace and mercy of God in ways few can, whether that be on a rural farm in Indiana or in an alley in urban Denver. He moved from one set of lenses to multiple sets, and in the process he didn't throw out his old lenses.

Experiences like Ryan's are a gift. They allow us to see the world through new lenses. When we come together with others who do not think, look, talk, or believe like us, and sit, listen, and share, we have an opportunity to see the heart of God in new ways, and allow his grace to continually transform us. In those moments, we are able to see through many lenses.

– Taken from chapter one, "From Closed to Open"



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While “Jesus is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow . . . yesterday, today and tomorrow are not the same at all.” *Changing Faith* acts as a guide as it charts a course from where the Christian faith has been, and points toward where the Christian faith is going.

Have you ever had a change of faith?

What sparked the idea to write *Changing Faith*?

Michael Hidalgo: What motivated me to write *Changing Faith* were a number of conversations I had with men and women who were dissatisfied with all the answers they had heard about God, life and faith that – in their opinion – didn’t work anymore. The problem was not necessarily with the answers, but more with the fact that they were asking new and different questions. *Changing Faith* is a book that responds to these new questions about how we can strengthen our faith in God in a world that is changing. It serves as a guide to give the reader direction in the midst of their confusion, questions, doubts and choices.

Who did you have in mind as you were writing this book?

Michael: Men and women who are comfortable asking difficult questions about God, life and their faith. They do this because they believe there is more to all of it, and have wrestled with doubt. Some may think of them as skeptics, but their larger struggle is not with God or Jesus but with the church and religion. They are tired of answers and recognize many of them never have really worked. What they want is to be heard and to be able to speak about their faith – in all of its glory and struggle.

What is unique about *Changing Faith* as it pertains to the doubts many people face?

Michael: The approach of the book is to create a conversation among readers and encourage them to wrestle with their faith. Rather than tell them what to believe, it asks them what they believe and offers guidance as they contemplate their faith. There are many questions raised in the book, and rather than attempt to answer all of them, the reader is asked to interact with them. This will engage the reader in a deeper way. It’s not something you can read through and then put down – you have to make a choice, but you don’t have a choice about making a choice.

What do you hope readers take from *Changing Faith*?

Michael:

- To recognize the Christian faith is always growing, expanding and changing. Rather than be nervous about this, we can have confidence because our faith is in an unchanging God.
- That living a faithful life before God is far more important than having all the answers.
- It’s okay (and even good) to voice our doubt and struggles with the Christian faith because there is a God who can handle any question we ask.