



Q & A



Struggling with Evangelicalism *Why I Want to Leave and What It Takes to Stay*

October 26, 2021 | \$17, 192 pages, paperback | 978-0-8308-4766-2

As a lifelong evangelical who happens to be a biracial Asian/White millennial, Dan Stringer has felt both included and alienated by the evangelical community and has wrestled with whether to stay or go. Stringer argues that we need four postures to grapple realistically and redemptively with evangelicalism. Without awareness, we don't know our identity. Without appreciation, we risk succumbing to cynicism. Without repentance, we capitulate to idolatry. And without renewal, future generations will find this space even less inhabitable.

The Good, the Bad, and the Future of Evangelicalism

What is the story behind *Struggling with Evangelicalism*?

Dan Stringer: Growing up abroad as the child of evangelical missionaries in DR Congo, Nepal, and the Philippines, I spent formative years (from ages seven to eighteen) finding my place at the crossroads of internationally diverse yet distinctly evangelical expressions of Christianity. Moving back and forth between five countries on three continents, I repeated the cycle of searching for home, finding home, and losing home—only to restart the process every few years.

My geographically nomadic childhood not only heightened a desire to be anchored, but it also helped me reengage American evangelicalism as an adult in both appreciative and critical ways. Starting in college, my Christian faith was indelibly marked by evangelical institutions: graduating from Wheaton College and Fuller Seminary, serving on staff with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, and becoming an ordained minister in the Evangelical Covenant Church.

I care deeply about evangelicalism because it has been my home through every life change. This vital thread holds together the complexities of my story. Having wrestled extensively with my own mixed feelings about evangelicalism's brokenness and beauty, I'm ready to help others do the same.

What sparked the idea for this book?

Dan: This book is the fruit of working through my own struggle with mixed feelings about evangelicalism. I wrote it to help others grapple with that ambivalence in a way that is both realistic and redemptive. Sometimes I'm cynical about whether evangelicalism can ever break free of its patterns of perpetuating injustice and spiritual abuse. At other times, I experience a longing to see it become a healthier space for future generations, which motivates me to invest in that possibility. Even today, I'm still torn between leaving and staying. I hope the lessons of my struggle will help others in their struggle.

What do you hope this book provides for evangelicalism?

Dan: The path of struggling with evangelicalism in a healthy way involves four active postures: awareness, appreciation, repentance, and renewal. This approach resists the idealistic pull to sanitize evangelicalism's problems, as well as the cynical urge to minimize its strengths. Other evangelicalism-themed books primarily focus on the challenges of defining/describing evangelicalism, discerning one's personal identification with it, or addressing its problems. By offering a coherent framework of four interconnected postures, this book synthesizes evangelicalism's personal and collective dimensions with the vision to make evangelicalism a healthier, less toxic space to inhabit.



Tara Burns, print and online publicity
800.843.4587 ext. 4059 or tburns@ivpress.com

Krista Clayton, author interviews
800.843.4587 ext. 4013 or kclayton@ivpress.com



ivpress.com/media



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Dan Stringer grew up as a third culture kid in five countries on three continents. He is a graduate of Wheaton College and Fuller Theological Seminary, ordained in the Evangelical Covenant Church, and serves as team leader for InterVarsity's Graduate and Faculty Ministries in Hawai'i. He is pastor of theological formation at Wellspring Covenant Church in Aiea, Hawaii. He previously was a social worker helping people obtain housing and employment. He has written for Missio Alliance, *Inheritance*, and Level Ground, and is a contributor to *Father Factor*.

What do you hope readers take away from *Struggling with Evangelicalism*?

Dan:

- Evangelicalism is not just a brand to identify with but a space to inhabit. You can reject the brand while still inhabiting the space. The brand glosses over the fact that global Christianity is far bigger and more diverse than White American evangelicalism. Less than 3 percent of the world's Christians are White American evangelicals. One-third of American evangelicals are people of color, including nearly half of evangelicals under age thirty.
- Rejecting evangelicalism doesn't have to mean rejecting Jesus. Leaving evangelicalism doesn't have to mean leaving Christianity behind. Evangelicalism is one type/stream/expression of Christianity but not the whole thing. Therefore, don't reject more than you intend to reject.
- It's totally understandable to struggle with mixed emotions about evangelicalism because it's a space that is both deeply broken and diversely beautiful at the same time. Instead of minimizing the good, bad, or ugly, let's approach it with enough honesty to acknowledge the full range of what we find.
- If you choose to remain with evangelicalism, my book's four postures (awareness, appreciation, repentance, renewal) will help you take better care of this space, making it a healthier locale for other inhabitants (present and future) who make their spiritual home here.
- For racially and economically privileged evangelical readers, cultivating a healthier evangelicalism will require not only personal repentance but also a collective turning from our collective sins as a movement. That's why it's so important to deepen our awareness from individual to communal faith identity. Without this kind of repentance, we won't reduce the patterns that repel people from evangelicalism—sometimes even pushing out those who desire to stay.



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