

Deeply theological and pastorally sensitive, this collection of sermons opens the reader to the heart of one who continues to seek after the truth of God. Forthright and searching, Russ Dean encourages us to “put away childish things” in our belief system that we might journey further into the mystery of finding our lives bound up with the graceful cadence of the Triune God. This is the kind of disciplined thinking that can attract others to an examined and therefore richer faith.

Molly T. Marshall, Ph.D.

President and Professor of Theology and Spiritual Formation (Retired)  
Central Baptist Theological Seminary

In this perceptive memoir, Russ Dean details his personal, spiritual and intellectual pilgrimage inside, outside, and alongside Christian community and concepts, much of it exemplified in his own sermons included throughout the book. Dean’s journey of spiritual formation becomes an insightful guide for the rest of us.

Bill J. Leonard, Professor of Baptist Studies Emeritus  
Wake Forest University

Russ Dean has written a book for all of us who feel like we lost our church home—like it slipped away from us, or was taken away from us, or just stopped feeling like home. Without a single trace of cynicism, Russ re-envisioned Scripture, faith tradition and faith affirmations, hymnody and theology, finding in them truth, relevance, beauty, energy, and joy anew in a way that makes reading his book feel like we might find our way back home too. In these careful reflections on his own life, we are invited to consider this book as a treasure map that issues us our own invitation into a quest for a faith we can live with and into.

John Ballenger  
Woodbrook Baptist Church, Baltimore, MD

In many ways, Russ Dean's memoir is an answer to the question: 'How did a nice, conservative kid like you become such an outspoken liberal?' But Russ answers the question as if he had asked it himself, digging down through the strata of his life like an archaeologist, uncovering one brilliant turning point after another and interspersing them with sermons that reveal the way his mind was changing and questions that invite us to change our own. Finding a New Way Home is a fascinating history of personal transformation, and I like the Russ Dean who emerges even more than the nice, conservative kid he used to be.

Jim Somerville  
First Baptist Church, Richmond, VA

This fine collection of sermons by Russ Dean, Pastor of Park Road Baptist Church in Charlotte, is a model for other contemporary pastors struggling to proclaim a challenging and faithful Word from the pulpit. The sermons reflect the hard work of careful scholarship and demonstrate Dean's courage in allowing the biblical tradition to speak in honest and often creative ways. Remarkably, he is also committed to keeping abreast of current events and literature and to recovering (or perhaps even discovering for the first time) insights from his college and seminary studies. Dean understands the power of language in the pulpit and fully embraces his multiple roles as priest, sage, and prophet. A great resource for pastors and laypersons wrestling with faith and proclamation in these uncertain times.

John C. Shelley  
Professor of Religion, Emeritus  
Furman University

I find people, pastors especially, who embrace faith without struggle to be highly suspect. With raw honesty, Russ Dean invites us into his own experience, a window into "working out faith with fear and trembling." Grappling with essential questions about how God works in our lives and in the world, Russ Dean shows us how to embrace the questions and deepen our faith as we do.

Amy Butler  
former Senior Minister, The Riverside Church in the City of New York

# FINDING A NEW WAY HOME

*The Unlikely Path of a  
Reluctant Baptist Renegade*

RUSS DEAN

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for  
Russell and Helen Dean,  
whose house  
and  
whose hearts  
will always be  
my home

Russ Dean, April 2018

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## Suggested Reading

Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity After Religion*

Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity for the Rest of Us*

Rob Bell, *Love Wins*

Marcus Borg, *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time*

R. Kirby Godsey, *When We Talk about God...Let's Be Honest*

Peter Gomes, *The Good Book*

Philip Gulley, *If the Church Were Christian*

Tony Jones, *The New Christians*

Anne Lamott, *Traveling Mercies*

Robin Meyers, *Saving Jesus from the Church*

Brian McLaren, *A New Kind of Christian*

Kathleen Norris, *Dakota*

Richard Rohr, *Falling Upward*

## Foreword

This book is a memoir of my journey in faith. That journey began in the home of my childhood, but the chapters cover experiences extending from some of my earliest memories until just a few years ago. I had already begun reflecting on these experiences, theologically, as the later ones were occurring, but it was not until a friend invited me to speak to his congregation that I connected them. “You’re not what most of our people think of when they hear the word Baptist,” the priest of a local Episcopal church said. “Come talk to us about how you got where you are from where you started.”

It was a fascinating challenge. As I sat down to prepare a one-hour Sunday school lesson for Episcopalian adults, I realized I had a story to tell. My suspicion is that this story, regardless of how eloquently I have or have not told it, will resonate with many people. Too frequently I hear people speak of their “bad experiences” with the church, experiences often occurring in the formative years of childhood or adolescence. Sadly, too many of these folks leave organized religion, if not turn their backs altogether on a God they suspect has turned a blind eye or a judgmental whim against them.

I have managed to stay within the realm of organized religion. In fact, it is my life. I have not felt the need to abandon or reject God. In fact, God has become more important, more real, more central to my story. I understand those who leave, but because I believe so strongly in the church and the value of faith in one’s life, I hope my experience might be an encouragement. One can question, doubt, reject much of what we learned in our childhood, and still remain faithful.

There is a “new way home.” Maybe my experiences will help some of you find it.

Each chapter includes a sermon I have preached over the course of the last eighteen years as co-pastor of the Park Road Baptist Church in Charlotte, North Carolina, with my wife, Amy Jacks Dean. I include these sermons as a testimony to the faith that has been developing and changing. I have enjoyed the privilege of being a “professional proclaimer” of Christianity, and although I did not write the sermons for this book, it should be clear in reading them that the faith which is very real to me continues to be a “work in progress.”

Each chapter also begins with several “Questions to Consider.” Unlike many books that conclude chapters with similar reflection/study questions,

I have included these questions as a prelude to each chapter. I hope they will whet your appetite and get your wheels turning in the right direction for the chapter and sermon that follow.

To get the most out of these questions, you might reflect on them briefly before you read and then come back to them before starting the next chapter. There is room for you to make notes about your own experience and any deepened insight you may have gained by reading my story and relating it to your own faith experience.

*Finding a New Way Home* is not just a book; it really is the experience of my life. I am glad to have this opportunity to share it with you. Especially if you have strayed from the path and have considered leaving it all behind, I welcome you. It's a journey worth taking, because even if you are surprised where you find yourself along the way today, you can be sure that home is where your heart is—and where God is—and there's just no place like it.

Welcome to the journey. Welcome home!

Note: As a means of emphasizing scripture, it has been our consistent practice for nineteen years as the pastors of Park Road Baptist Church to italicize all quotations of scripture. I have maintained that practice in this book, and all biblical quotes are from the New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

## About the Author

Russ Dean is a native of Blackstone, VA, but was raised in Clinton, SC. He is a graduate of Clinton High School ('82), Furman University ('86), the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary ('92), and he earned the Doctor of Ministry degree from the Beeson Divinity School of Samford University ('01).

He is married to his high school sweetheart, Amy Jacks Dean. After seminary, Amy and Russ served in different associate ministry positions on the staff of First Baptist Church, Clemson, SC, and then Russ became the Associate Pastor of Mountain Brook Baptist Church in Birmingham, AL. While in Birmingham, Amy served as the Associate Pastor of Riverchase Baptist Church. They came to Charlotte in October 2000 to become the Pastors of the Park Road Baptist Church, where they continue to share all pastoral responsibilities.

Russ is a regular, contributing editor for *Baptist News Global* and for *The Clinton Chronicle*, and he maintains a blog through his church's website, offering commentary on theological and current issues. In 2015 he was awarded the Richard Furman Baptist Heritage Award which recognizes a Furman graduate who reflects Baptist ideals by thinking critically, living compassionately and making life-changing commitments. Twice Russ has been invited to present a Christian perspective in the annual Comparative Religion Series sponsored by Charlotte's Temple Beth El. The 2013 topic was, "After Life... An End or a Beginning?" and the 2015 subject was "Science and Religion: Can They Coexist?" In 2015 Russ and Amy preached through the book of Mark, submitting the manuscript of those sermons for a biblical commentary series to be published by Smyth and Helyws Publishers.

Russ has been actively involved in ecumenical and interfaith work. He has served on the Governing Board of the North Carolina Council of Churches and served two terms, including two years as the president, of Mecklenburg Ministries. In 2013 he was recognized by Mecklenburg Ministries, sharing the Bridge-Builder Award with Dr. Rodney Sadler for their efforts in race relations. He currently serves as the President of the board of the Counseling Center at Charlotte and as Vice President of the board of the Educational Center. He has served as co-chair of the Racial and Economic Justice sub-committee of Charlotte's Clergy Coalition for Social Justice.

Russ and Amy have two boys, Jackson and Bennett, and their favorite past times involve watching their boys on a baseball field or a concert hall. When he is not with his sons or in the office Russ enjoys slalom and barefoot water skiing, woodworking, camping, and playing and writing music.