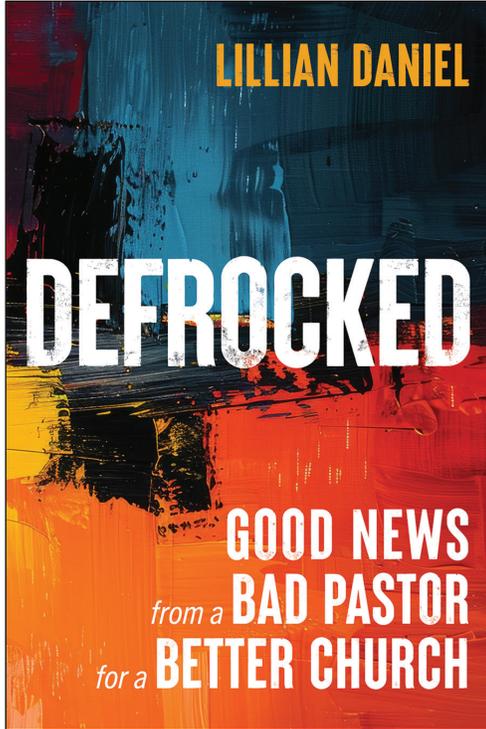


Book Club Questions for Lillian Daniel's *Defrocked*



What aspects of Lillian Daniel's honest and complex story of admitting wrongdoing, living through exile from her church, and eventually being restored to ministry feel familiar in your own experiences? What surprised you or made you think differently about the "behind the scenes" of church or community life?

There has been a lot of discussion in recent years about the concept of "cancel culture"—the idea that those who have caused harm should be removed from their positions or platforms, without the opportunity to return and often without the opportunity for dialogue. How have you seen this play out in church or other spaces—especially when someone in leadership lets a community down? How do the insights from Daniel's story help you think about cancel culture?

Why do you think processes that have been put in place to protect victims and the most vulnerable so often miss the mark or end up causing further harm—whether to victims, to those accused of doing wrong, or to others? What do you think of Daniel's reflection that leaders' fear of getting it wrong and a desire to sanitize sin can so often unintentionally lead to further relational damage?

What kinds of procedures for or approaches to those who have transgressed do you think would yield healthier, more transparent outcomes that reflect God's vision of restorative justice? When have you encountered helpful procedures like this in church communities or elsewhere?

In the chapter "Leave of Silence," Daniel mourns the loss of her community and details the deep pain of isolation during the disciplinary process. In other chapters, she describes experiencing relief in unexpected friendships. Why does isolation seem to be so foundational to the idea of punishment for wrongdoing in our culture—from matters of social morality all the way to our carceral systems? What are the spiritual ramifications of this, and what might be a better way?

In the chapter "Defrocked," Daniel declares that "Our stories are gifts, not ransom. Our stories are gifts, not sacrifices." What do you think about the desire of those in church leadership to learn Daniel's full story or confession, and her desire to maintain agency over her story? Have you ever been compelled to reveal more about your own story than felt comfortable or appropriate? What resonates with you about Daniel's reflections on the nature of confession in the chapter "Suspended Animation"?

More Book Club Questions for Lillian Daniel's *Defrocked*

When Daniel finds herself refrocked and allowed to return to ministry, she knows that she wants to be a different kind of pastor, one whose life you can “shine a light on, . . . which is not the same thing as wanting a life that is pretty.” Reflect on this, for yourself or others you love who have made mistakes. What does it mean to you to bring our full selves into the light in our communities? What could this kind of honesty and grace mean for the life of the church or other communities?

Reflect on the values of hospitality, vulnerable relationship, and taking risks as a church. What could it mean for a church to be “The Church That Does X” instead of “The Church of the Locked Doors”?

Daniel closes her story with a meditation on the Good Samaritan that subverts the traditional reading of the parable by placing the reader in the role of the man in the ditch. How does reframing this story this way and taking on the role of the powerless one, even the “sinful” one, change how you understand your own identity as one called by Jesus and named beloved? What possibilities does this open up for our life together as the body of Christ?

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