



Breaking the Rules: Trading Performance for Intimacy with God

Fil Anderson

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After years of living with a set of religious demands that he could never live up to, Fil Anderson found himself spiritually bankrupt and emotionally drained. Following a crash-and-burn in professional ministry, he experienced relief in learning to be with God rather than doing for God. Instead of desperation, he found healing, and a rich new life with God. In *Breaking the Rules*, Fil invites us to explore what happens when good religion turns bad. At such times we are weighed down with expectations of what it takes to be "right with God"--whether it is the expectations of others, holding up under pressure, fixing what's wrong or accomplishing big things for God. When we set aside this false agenda, we find the courage to confess our fears and insecurities. We taste the depths of God's love for us. Here is an opportunity to quit trusting in your own ability to live for God, and simply trust in God instead.

Breaking the Rules: Trading Performance for Intimacy with God Details

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Marc Baldwin says

I wasn't crazy about this book, but only because it could have been about 20 pages long. He expressed the same concept over and over about 150 ways.

This isn't a new idea; you can't do anything to earn God's love. I totally agree and it is a comforting concept to take to heart. The author encourages us to lay it all out, open up our darkest secrets, and embrace the REAL us, because that's who God loves. But the book stops short - like all the other books I've seen on this idea - in that it doesn't address what happens after you do that, and how you deal with the havoc that may play on your personal relationships. It's easy to say, "Yeah, I should do that." It's another thing to actually do it when you begin to consider how the "real" you, embracing the darkness of your past, may irreversibly change personal relationships.

I'm wearing out on books like this, because I'm still waiting for someone to address the "what then?" aspect. This particular book looks exactly like a lot of others that I've read.

Andraea says

This book changed my life! I was SO over trying to fit into the religious mold, when all I really cared about was growing into who God called me to be. This showed me that it really has nothing to do with the practices, but accepting me for me and growing in that manner as I grow in Christ.

Bob says

Summary: Anderson traces his own spiritual journey of moving from rules- and performance-based religion to an intimate relationship with God where he was unafraid of revealing his true self.

It's an occupational hazard of those who take their faith seriously, especially among those of us engaged in Christian ministry. We turn what is meant to be the deepest, most profound relationship in life, into a list of rules and performance metrics. That was the trap Fil Anderson, a former youth worker, found himself in until he discovered that real Christian faith was coming with his true, broken but beloved self to Christ, learning to be vulnerable with others, and to give up measuring his worth by how well he kept the rules and how successful he was as a performer.

Anderson takes us through a series of reflections on his own journey and the different facets of moving from rule-based religion to intimate relationship with Christ. So much of it has to do with what he discusses in an early chapter of laying aside our preconceptions about Jesus and the ways we make him captive to our religious practice to discover him in his unexpected actions in unpredictable places. When we come to Christ in our brokenness, he shines his light through the broken places. We often live fearfully trying to maintain an image that gains approval rather than fully, bravely, and beautifully, allowing Christ to express himself through our personalities. And our relentless quest for religious purity blinds us to a Christ who offers us and

others grace for our brokenness and exchanges our drivenness for joy. Giving up on keeping all the rules for this gracious relationship leads us to a life of "doing what we can" rather than the hubris of trying to change the world.

Toward the end of the book, he discusses the wedding of Cana and explores the question of why Jesus uses the vessels for ceremonial cleansing to transform their water to wine. His insight, I think, captures the essence of the book:

". . . I'm convinced that it was another crucial and illuminative sign. By means of Jesus first miracle, he intentionally desecrates a highly valued religious symbol. He strategically and purposefully chooses these sacred symbols to confront the religious system by converting them from symbols of personal purification into symbols of relational and gracious celebration. Jesus turns the tables and shifts the values from holy water to wedding wine. From legalism to living. From empty religion to deep and full relationship."

One detects in the book the influences of Brennan Manning, the author of *The Ragamuffin Gospel*, and Mike Yaconelli, of whom he writes movingly, and who seemed particularly instrumental in penetrating the religious persona he was so determined to project.

I think people at several places might find Anderson's account helpful. The person who is just fed up with religion and yet longs for God seems to be particularly the person for whom this book is written. The person who has been diligently faithful, and perhaps detects in oneself that the Christian faith has become more about performance than love, and is uneasy with who they are becoming could find great help here. One of Anderson's best chapters is his one on "throwing in the towel on religion" and many will resonate with what he says here.

I've watched people live performance-driven and rule-based religious lives and the outcome isn't pretty. It is either to become critical and judging, or to end one's life in bitter disillusionment when all the attempts to erect "glittering images" (to use Susan Howatch's term that Anderson invokes) come crashing down. Those of us who are most "serious" about our faith perhaps have a greater need for such a narrative, that we might take ourselves more lightly as we bask in the knowledge that we are loved by the God who sees us in all our brokenness and calls us "beloved."

Ian says

This is a tremendous book. Fil shares his spiritual story and how he came to realise that all his striving and service was out of religiosity rather than a deep connection with Jesus. He shares how he came 'to see the light' and through drawing closer to Jesus he has come to discover fresh wonder in the Word and intimacy with His maker.

As some reviewers have said there is repetition and the book could perhaps have been shorter but I liked how Fil used different perspectives to bring us back to the same point: Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. Religion is based on something we must do. I particularly appreciated his perspectives on Mary of Bethany and how her wastefulness has indeed been talked about in the generations since. And the final chapter where Fil demonstrates how Jesus came to turn religion upside down and out of the temple in his reflections on Jesus at the wedding at Cana.

I often read books like this and go okay I get it but how do I get there? How do I get that union, that intimacy with Jesus? I didn't think Fil would give us anything on this but then in the last few pages he does and I like what he had to say. You'll need to read it to find out.

This is a great addition to the "intimacy books" and I recommend it highly.

Diana says

An excellent book about living without the farse of legalism!!! Highly recommend!!!

Steve Henry says

This is another one of those “ Christianity isn’t about religion, it’s about a relationship”. Amen! But why does that so often equate to a ‘let’s then bash the church rant.’ Don’t get me wrong, good principles here but everyone’s experience isn’t the same as the author and thus could be taken in the wrong vein.
