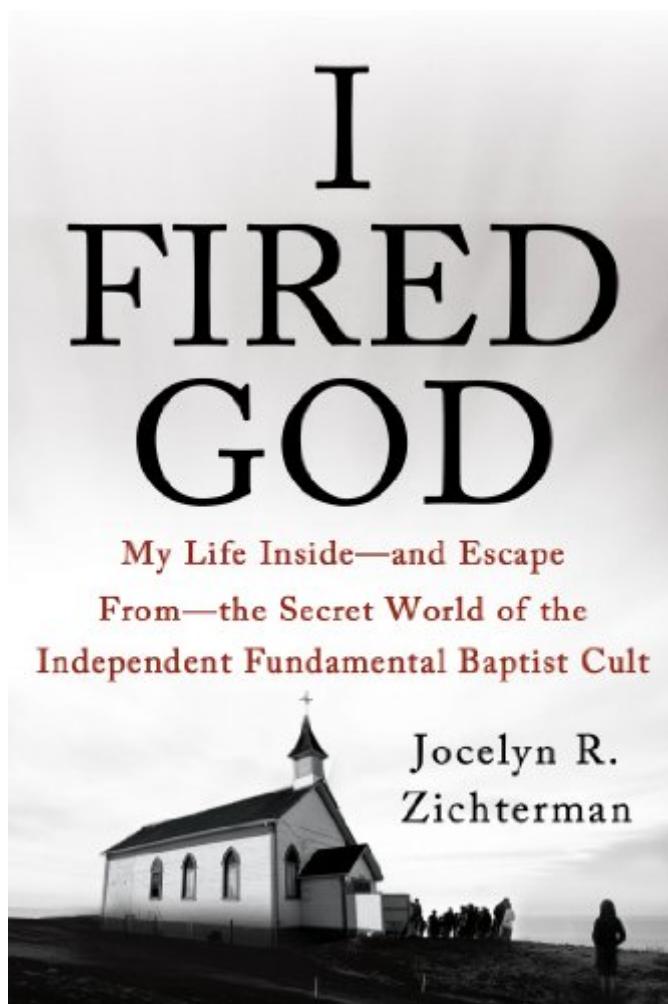


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# I Fired God: My Life Inside---and Escape From---the Secret World Of The Independent Fundamental Baptist Cult



## **Synopsis**

A compelling memoir and account of the Independent Fundamental Baptist church and its shocking history of religious abuse. Jocelyn Zichterman was born, raised, married into, and finally, with her family, fled the Independent Fundamental Baptist church. Founded by the fiery preacher Bob Jones, with several hundred thousand members, IFB congregants are told they must not associate with members of other Baptist denominations and evangelicals, with an emphasis on secrecy, insular marriages within the church, a subservience for women, and unusual child raising practices. In I Fired God, Jocelyn Zichterman systematically details the IFB's disturbing history, exposing a cult-like atmosphere of corruption, greed, and abuse. Having been initiated into its innermost circles, Zichterman knows that the gentle demeanor America sees in the form of the Duggar clan on 19 Kids and Counting disguises the truth about the darker side of the church. With written documentation and sources so thorough that law enforcement has used her work as a foundation for criminal prosecutions, Zichterman exposes the IFB with revelations including: - The disturbing world of abuse within the IFB and doctors and teachers who cater exclusively to church members and fail to report physical and sexual abuse- The IFB-controlled Bob Jones University, which issues degrees of questionable value while making vast sums of money for its founders- The way the IFB influences politics on the local, state, and national level, and protects its abusive culture under the constitutional guarantee of freedom of religion

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

I almost didn't buy this book because of some of the reviews insinuating the author's rejection of God and truth but, I'm so glad I did. From the first chapter I was drawn in. I have read many blogs and one other book recounting a woman and her family leaving fundamentalism, but never before have I read the account of someone who was raised in the exact same circles as I. My fundamental experience (from 1987 to 2012) includes everything from Pearl, Doug Phillips, Doug Wilson, Gothard, and that side of things - as well as strong ties with BJ, Northland, the Wilds, Patch the Pirate, and others. (My family of origin went from one extreme to the other, but in the reverse order of Jocelyn's). Her name was familiar, but after Googling my jaw dropped as I pulled out my Majesty hymnal and Wilds songbook and realized I had grown up loving and singing the songs written by her husband. I was practically weaned on them. The "name dropping" that she apparently is so guilty of was incredibly helpful to me - in a very surreal and chilling way - having heard the vast majority of the men mentioned speak on one occasion or another at camps, Bible conferences, colleges, etc. Her recounting of the lyrics of songs I grew up singing cast a far different light than I have ever considered them in - which was eye opening and chilling. While I did not experience the physical or sexual abuse that she did, as graphic as the accounts were, I wasn't surprised to find out that this stuff went on. The older I get the more I realize that this stuff was rampant. Her accounts of meetings with "superior" fundamentalists at Northland and the way they accused her on more than one occasion reminded me of spiritual abuse I endured in a meeting at a smaller Bible college when I became a "discipline problem" for a minor infraction. Her explanation of the politics within the greater IFB movement was spot on, although not entirely complete, hence the 4 stars. I believe that the author is accurate in her claims as far as her experience goes, but my experience was more far-reaching than hers and I was exposed to even more sub-sects within the greater IFB movement, having attended other colleges (Ambassador Baptist College, Maranatha Baptist Bible College, New England Baptist College) and having been exposed to others like Crown College, Heartland Baptist Bible College, West Coast Baptist College, and more over the course of my fundamental experience. To suggest that, invariably, "all roads lead to BJU" is accurate in the sense that BJ is by

far the oldest IFB college and the spearhead of the movement; yet it is inaccurate in that by now, there are so many spin-off factions within the IFB movement that have little to no association with BJU. (I grew up in several BJU churches but after my family was spiritually abused and accused, we left and jumped shipped to another faction of IFB that actually mocked, ridiculed, and even called heretical the teachings of BJU, opting for even more conservative ideals like Gothard, SM Davis, and patriarchy). The way she describes her family's move from one camp to another like switching mob families was both genius and a fairly accurate representation of the greater movement. Other than the graphic physical and sexual abuse, I found nearly every word of this book to be relatable, as though I was looking back over my past with fresh eyes. Nearly everything she describes as far as dogma, "standards," "convictions," etc, I was either exposed to, taught, and/or personally believed at one point or another during my experience with fundamentalism. (Although definitely not all at the same time. As I mentioned above, different sub-sects within the greater IFB movement subscribe to different delineations of dogma - hence some of the other reviewers saying that their experience didn't include much of what Jocelyn says she was taught. In that sense, yes, there is some over-generalization in this book.) Jocelyn's accounts of leaving the church and her own personal recovery (including experimenting with drinking, smoking, and swearing) were painfully honest and relatable. While I may not have made the same kind of choices, I found myself thinking that had I endured the kind of abuse that she did, I would probably be in that place right along with her. So, no judgment from me, even though those portions were hard to read. I am not sure that I completely agree with her desires to see more government intervention in schools, her beliefs about pro-choice and pro gay-marriage, but her words seriously made me think and I understand where she is coming from. Honestly, a lot of what she said made sense, even though I would have never dared to say such things until very recently (not even a year ago). I wished I could have heard more of her personal story since coming out of IFB - not just her stances on big issues (which she covers well), but how she personally feels about God and the kind of relationship she has with him now. I never got the feeling that she has rejected God (so don't let the reviewers capitalizing on her last sentence deter you from reading), but rather that she just wasn't quite ready to talk that personally about it - and I get that. This journey is difficult and full of ups and downs and doubts and so much more than can be put into a book. All in all, I am beyond grateful that Jocelyn wrote this book. I find her bravery and vulnerability not just admirable but...heroic. The way she has championed the cause to expose abuse within the IFB movement is something that someone needed to do. I still haven't gotten to the point that I could be so brave. I blogged much of my own experience last year (see [beautifulinhistime.com](http://beautifulinhistime.com)) but nearly lost the relationship that I had with my parents over it and

have remained silent since. This review is my first time speaking out since then, and I don't dare put it on my blog for fear of someone finding it. I think that everyone, especially those either on their way out of IFB or having recently left IFB, should read this book. In fact, I think everyone within IFB should read it, but the very title is damning enough that it would never be aloud on IFB shelves. This book made me cry, gave me nausea, gave me an anxiety attack, disgusted me, gave me chills, made me feel like my own past was a nightmare - and yet comforted and encouraged me and made me feel so much more okay and totally not alone in my journey - all at the same time. So Jocelyn, if you can stand reading your reviews - I hope you read this one. If I ever get to meet you, I just want to hug you. Because you are one of my newest heroes and I will never forget reading your book. So thanks.

An excellently written book, especially considering it is an autobiography/expose. The biggest fault with the book, is it really wasn't made clear on the cover, that the book contained very graphic descriptions of animal and child abuse, including physical, sexual, and psychological/spiritual. While this was touched on in the preface, many people skip book prefaces. This is a surprising lapse, since the author talked about her own "triggers." The graphic abuse starts within the first pages of the book, so there isn't even any "warm-up" where a reader could see where the story was going. I probably would have skipped reading this book, if I had been aware of the graphic descriptions of abuse. That said, for those who can wade through the abuse descriptions, this book is a very moving, very informative book. Every part of this book rings true. The author gives a deep description of "independent fundamental baptist cults" (which is a catch-all term the author created to describe churches with very similar beliefs that may use different terms to publicly describe themselves.) The author starts with her own childhood which was marked by horrific physical and psychological abuse, as well as some sexual abuse. Not only was she herself abused, she had to watch her siblings also being abused. The church system encouraged abuse, and turned a blind eye to even extreme abuse perpetrated by its members. As she got older, she was spiritually abused by church leaders. She details how favored members of the church, usually men, would be given a slap on the wrist for such horrific crimes as child rape, but their victims would be ostracized and forced to publicly confess their supposed role in the crime. She discusses how each church claims to be independent, but in reality is covertly part of an unofficial ring helping to hide criminals and victims from the police. She lists many well-known names in the Christian community and discusses how they are part of this system (Doug Phillips, Bill Gothard, etc.--many of whom have sense been publicly disgraced by their sexual immorality and crimes). The author discusses how

herself, her husband, and her children were finally able to break free of cult beliefs and start a new life. Sadly, the cult refused to accept this and harassed them for years (presumably still harassing them), doing everything possible to tear them down psychologically and financially. The author talks discusses several other victims of the church, and what she does to help these victims. One part which I didn't really understand was why she made a point of saying that if she had it to do over, to protect other children she would have turned in one of her brothers for sexually abusing her, but she didn't say that about her other brother. This was strange since the brother she said she would turn in apparently never abused another child and is now deceased, while her other brother is a church leader, in a position to potentially abuse other children. The author also describes the day when she "Fired God", and it was a deeply moving moment, and not at all what I expected it would be. The author spends the last chapter discussing how she thinks government needs to be involved with private schools and home schools, in order to prevent the horrific abuse she and others have endured. I am not sure why she thinks this would work, when throughout the book she detailed how the church purposely has members who were doctors (who did not report abuse or rape--even though mandated by law) and also members who were police officers who refused to investigate abuse cases or arrest perpetrators of abuse. While her detailed solutions may "sound" good, there is no reason to think that the cult wouldn't just simply infiltrate psychologists or any other mandated reporter group dealing with children in these types of churches. And of course, child abuse does happen among non-church members and in public schools. "Sound" good solutions are often worse than no solutions, because they give the public the false impression that the problem has been solved. Undoubtedly, the real solution to the problem of child abuse and cults is far more complex, but the first step must be informing people of the problem, and the author has done a superb job in that regard.

The most frightening thing is the reality of it all. Knowing that a large part of the United States is either whole-heartedly committed, or even "half-assedly" committed to super crazy mega-churches and their dendritic cult "groupie" churches, makes you cringe. It made me cringe. Undoubtedly, we have all been in contact with one of these lunatics, and for the most part many Americans have been exposed through the media, political election coverages. This book makes you feel nauseous when you realize how many cult members are suffering on a daily basis. Large pockets of our nation are rotting under the guise of religion and this book should be shared with anyone who has a conscience. School children all the way up to college students, their sisters and mothers are all being tortured for the benefit of elevating disgusting old white men to a comfortable lifestyle. I could

not put this book down, and for the sake of everyone in the IFB, who is stuck, you should read it.

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