



I Fired God: My Life Inside—and Escape from—the Secret World of the Independent Fundamental Baptist Cult

Jocelyn R. Zichterman

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A compelling memoir and investigation into the Independent Fundamental Baptist church and its shocking history of religious abuse

Jocelyn Zichter 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, IFB members 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 Zichter blows the lid off the IFB's disturbing history, exposing a cult-like atmosphere of corruption, greed, and abuse. Having been initiated into its innermost circles, Zichter 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, Zichter 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 worthless degrees 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

I Fired God: My Life Inside—and Escape from—the Secret World of the Independent Fundamental Baptist Cult Details

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**Download and Read Free Online I Fired God: My Life Inside—and Escape from—the Secret World of
the Independent Fundamental Baptist Cult Jocelyn R. Zichterman**

From Reader Review *I Fired God: My Life Inside—and Escape from—the Secret World of the Independent Fundamental Baptist Cult* for online ebook

Jacob Ferguson says

As somebody who survived the Independent Fundamental Baptist (IFB) cult, this book resonated with me. Some of the stories in this book brought me to tears because of their similarity to my childhood. Jocelyn Zichterman expresses many of the same problems that I have with the IFB and can expound on the treatment of women and children better than me. *I Fired God* is a good tool for individuals unfamiliar with the IFB to begin understanding that way of life. I hope many of the people close to me read this book because they can understand what I and my siblings went through.

I do have one minor issue with this book. The author probably should have gone into a little more detail on the theological issues that the IFB takes to heart. Zichterman accurately describes many of these beliefs. She touches on modesty, the KJV only movement, Quiverfull, and submission of women. However, some understanding of the theological justification or rationale these churches use to justify their beliefs might be helpful to some readers. I know a lot of the justification employed by IFB leaders to legitimize these beliefs, and I understand the level of brainwashing that Zichterman and her family endured. As a result, I'm able to appreciate her story and work. Someone else without the same background of myself and Zichterman would probably not fully appreciate the magnitude of the situation.

In conclusion, I would definitely recommend this book if you are interested in learning more about someone's struggle to get out of the IFB cult. But, if you approach this book in an effort to understand the IFB's justification for their beliefs, you will probably be a bit disappointed.

Rena Sherwood says

Just to let you know, I'm an atheist, but I'm going to somehow avoid quibbling about religion in this review. Religion was not what the book was about. It was about surviving a really shitty life.

That being said, this is the best "I fled the cult" book I've read (so far.)

Zichterman gives people who have never suffered abuse a good picture of what it's like. (I am a domestic abuse survivor, so sadly I speak from experience.) She also gives a wider perspective of the IFB cult and recent abuse cases in the cult.

However, Zichterman seems to have fallen off the face of the earth since this book was published. The Facebook cult survivors' page has been inactive for over a year. There is no news of her online. Has she been whacked? I usually don't care what's happened to the authors I read, but in this case I actually give a damn.

WARNING: Nightmarish violence to cats and a puppy that would make Stephen King gasp.

Emily says

This book resonated with me because I also escaped from the world of Independent Fundamental Baptist cults (although I call them Christian extremists). My own experience wasn't as horrific at the authors, but I could identify with so much that she went through in her childhood. Luckily, I never bought into any of the religious bullshit I was being taught and as soon as I could get away from home I did. I started thinking for myself and became an atheist (unlike the author that just moved into a more mainstream type of Christianity). I recommend this book to anyone that thinks that Christianity or religion is harmless or if you think that Islam is the only "bad" religion in the world. The truth is many religions have extremists, and in my opinion there is no good religion. I suspect that the people that need to hear that message the most are the least likely to actually read this book and absorb the message.

Rachel Powell says

Zichterman's book does not portray both sides of the story. Here are a few of my thoughts after reading her book (although definitely not all of them!):

I agree that abuse is horrible and should be reported to the proper authorities. However, Zichterman makes it sound as if all independent Baptist churches are full of abusive, horrible parents who always cover up abuse. I grew up in a great church with wonderful, caring teachers and pastors. I know my church is committed to reporting abuse whenever they are aware of it. My parents spanked me, but it was never "brutal," nor done out of anger, as Jocelyn describes her experiences.

I was home schooled and had an excellent education, received a degree from Bob Jones University, and had no trouble receiving a state teaching license in Arizona. Zichterman makes it sound as if all degrees from Bob Jones are worthless. I know BJU grads who received jobs with public school systems, the Mayo Clinic, and prestigious accounting firms right after graduation.

Zichterman states that "a woman's life in the IFB is one of subservience. At the age of three or four, many girls receive their first aprons and start learning to cook, sew, clean, and manage the home to perfection . . . From the time we could speak, my sisters and I learned that our place was below the boys' - and we accepted it." This is ludicrous! I can't think of one person who gave their three-year-old cooking lessons! While the women in my church do respect and honor their husbands, they are well-respected, many of them have great jobs, and I wouldn't describe any of them as living in "subservience." The men in the Baptist churches I have attended treated their wives wonderfully, and never belittled them or treated them in the way Jocelyn describes "IFB" women are treated.

When speaking of marriage, Zichterman claims "a woman has no real free will in the cult. She might be desperately in love with a man who proposes to her, but unless her father and the other men in her family consent to the union, she normally can't accept him." She talks about how women are practically forced into marriages with men they don't love because it's "God's will." I cannot think of one friend of mine who was pressured into marrying someone she did not love.

In speaking of the Home School Legal Defense Association, Zichterman writes that "HSLDA is diametrically opposed to the idea of oversight and the group seems to bend over backward to accommodate abusers." HSLDA exists to "defend and advance the constitutional right of parents to direct the education of

their children and to protect family freedoms." They do not promote abuse!

The church I am apart of would be considered "independent" and "fundamental" However, it would not support Bill Gothard, Jack Hyles, or Westboro Baptist Church. Unfortunately, Zichterman lumps all these groups together as one-in-the-same.

Often, Zichterman refers tritely to people being "born-again" or "asking Jesus into their heart." She never mentions what the Gospel really is - the good news that Christ died for our sins and took the penalty of our sins upon Himself, and that we can have a personal relationship with Him through faith in Christ. At the end of the book, she says, "I know for sure that She/He/Energy/Source/The Divine is good, loving, kind, and compassionate."

Later, when speaking of her change to liberal politics and her work on the Obama campaign, Zichterman says, "I took a pro-choice and pro-gay marriage position and have never faltered in my political positions on either." These views are obviously anti-biblical. It is clear that Jocelyn does not have a problem with just "fundamentalism," but with Christianity as a whole.

Jeri Massi says

Much to my surprise, I was contacted by George Witte, Editor-in-Chief at St Martin's Press and asked to review Jocelyn Zichterman's new book, I FIRED GOD. After I picked myself up off the floor, I agreed to the request and soon received a review copy.

Anybody familiar with me and the work I have been doing for over a decade will appreciate that there is a certain dilemma that I face in evaluating anything by Jocelyn. I am the victim, unjustly, of a tremendous character assassination campaign that she launched against me in 2011 (<http://www.jeriwho.net/jocelyn/>). Readers will also know that Jocelyn's false accusations against me and others, her trickery in getting Facebook group moderators to share passwords with her, her multiple personal accounts under fake names, and her financial mismanagement of the Tina Anderson Foundation fund finally culminated in her former allies and groupies publicly destroying her reputation in a short-lived Facebook Group called "Jocelyn Zichterman Exposed" that was so cruel that even Facebook could not permit it. It was closed down hours after it was started, and I hasten to say I had no part in it.

So there remains a tremendous problem of credibility with Jocelyn. I was aware of that as I read the book, and my review will reflect the doubts I have about anything she says. All the same, St. Martin's Press is an extremely reputable publisher, and they employ fact checkers, and anybody who would dismiss Jocelyn's book out of hand because of bad experiences with her should remember that St. Martin's Press is going to do a great job of verifying as much as can be verified before they let a book go to press. Trust her or not, Jocelyn is an expert on the corruption and scandals of the Independent Fundamental Baptists (IFB). When she's motivated to stick to the facts, she is compelling and enlightening.

The book is very readable, very direct in tone, very easy to read, and a bit of a page turner, for the most part. The structure is a story arc of Jocelyn's exit from Fundamentalism, populated with anecdotes and

commentary from her past.

People who have emerged or are emerging from the IFB will certainly identify with the experiences that she narrates, whether or not the narrative of her personal life is accurate.

I do believe, by the way, that Bart Janz, Jocelyn's father, abused his kids, as Jocelyn alleges in the book. I do think Jocelyn was abused over a long period of time. I have no doubt of that. The individual details of her life that she provides, for me, fall under that umbrella of “This is Jocelyn talking, so be advised it may not be entirely accurate.” But if I look at the account from a long view, I believe it. Bart’s sermons, taken on their own, would show most normal people that he is a brute, at the very least. The book provides excerpts of some of his ranting.

The greatest value of the book, in my opinion, is that Chapters Four and Five walk the reader through most of the extremes and fads of the IFB. All of the following are chronicled in the book, most of them somewhere in Chapters Four and Five:

- Absolute authority of the male
- Female submission (absolute)
- Breaking the will of a child as a goal of parenting
- Corporal punishment as a Biblical directive for raising children
- Bill Gothard’s teachings
- Radical patriotism and right wing politics brought into the church
- The church and its private school as a Christian necessity
- Homeschooling
- No television
- Evils of contemporary music
- Soul winning as a culture
- Apocalyptic teachings/expectations
- The Quiverfull movement
- Women not working outside the home
- Culottes and extreme dress codes
- Purity Balls

Anybody who questions the stability and Biblical fidelity of Christian Fundamentalism ought to be able to look at that list, recognize that all of it has played a role in the IFB, and see that the IFB is a mishmash of radical ideas, rather than a disciplined, dedicated system of following Scripture. So I find these chapters to be very effective and inarguable as evidence of the spiritual bankruptcy of the IFB.

Jocelyn also provides an overview of the depraved culture of IFB high school Silver State Christian School (where she was a student for several years). Having chronicled the stream of lies that came from Les Heinze, pastor of Red Rocks Baptist Church, which runs the school, when the Daniel Brock case became public, I believe Jocelyn’s account entirely. Others that were quoted in the local newspapers during the Daniel Brock case also spoke of grossly overbearing and improper sexual content in language and behavior among the students at Silver State.

Finally, Jocelyn’s historical accounts of Who’s Who in Fundamentalism, and her narratives of the abuse cases: Matthew Murray (spree shooter who came from a Homeschool/Gothard background), Zach Scadden (victim), Tina Anderson (victim) and Jack Schaap (perpetrator), are all accurate, in my opinion, at least as far as they go.

Again, where I am unsure is in the details of Jocelyn’s own life. But there is enough in the book that I think is credible, so that it provides a good explanation on why you should leave the IFB and go elsewhere,

whatever your beliefs are.

At the end of the book, on pages 248-250, Jocelyn narrates her Facebook history, and she definitely gives the narrative on her terms. She puts herself in the best possible light. Still, readers with a critical eye will recognize that Jocelyn is simply calling anybody who was unsure of following her way of thinking a phony. Jocelyn is her father's daughter. She dismisses all people who disagreed with her for any reason as a plant, a saboteur, etc. It's clear that Jocelyn has discovered tolerance, and she is not going to put up with anybody who does not share her view of tolerance. Not only does she not put up with people who disagree with her view of tolerance, she calls them enemies. She sees no irony or contradiction in calling herself tolerant.

As for her character assassination of others who posed no threat to her and were also working on behalf of victims, her trickery to get passwords, her callous use and then rejection of some of her ardent and emotionally needy followers, the Tina Anderson Foundation debacle, her claims to be working with the FBI, Jocelyn does not give these a mention. I would have been surprised if she had.

So is this book worth the price? That depends on the reader. Yes it is informative. Yes there are many credible sections in it. While disagreeing on a few minor conclusions, I think she nails the character of the IFB. So the book could well assist people in departing the IFB and could warn newcomers away to safer churches. But if you already know all of these things, and if you have already read (or experienced) enough abuse accounts so that one more cannot raise your awareness further, you may want to give it a pass. People who have been hurt by Jocelyn will either read the book or ignore it. I doubt my opinion would hold any weight either way for them. This book is going to make a lot of people who have never dealt with Jocelyn trust her, and I feel some concern about that, but if Jocelyn stays true to form, she will ruin her credibility over time. So far, she always has. I hope that nobody gets hurt along the way.

People who have never heard of the IFB may find the book a little confusing at some points, but the tight and vivid narrative of her own life will keep them reading.

Will the book work as means to deter or shrink down the IFB? I don't know. I hope so.

Jenni Frencham says

This memoir details Zichterman's childhood in an abusive IFB home, her marriage to an IFM man, and their eventual escape from the cult, along with details of Zichterman's mission to help rescue those who have been abused within the IFB.

As a person who also grew up in the IFB, attending camp at the Wilds of the Rockies, at Northland Baptist Bible College (now the defunct Northland International University); spending six years earning two "degrees" from Bob Jones University, and leaving the world of the IFB behind after six additional years teaching at an IFB school, I can attest that Zichterman details accurately the life within the IFB. To be sure, her home life was more extremely abusive than may be typical, but the church politics, the breaking of a child's will, the focus on women staying home to serve their men - all of this is seen throughout various sub-cultures of the overall IFB culture as a whole.

I myself have interacted with many of the people Zichterman mentions in her book and was not remotely surprised at the character abuse she endured upon her escape, along with multiple pleas to return to "the truth that she knew." I myself was chastised for not tithing exactly ten percent of my paycheck, which was easily discoverable at my church since one of the deacons was also the school principal. I, too, was chastised for

being female and wanting to think or learn or have opinions. I, too, experience flashbacks to childhood abuse and was told the most important thing was to forgive my abuser and ask for forgiveness for any sin I may have committed while having the flashbacks to being raped as a 6-year old child. I also left the IFB behind, discovered my "degrees" from Bob Jones University were worthless, and was forced to start over again, working multiple jobs while I put myself through an accredited university education so I could get a new position outside of fundamentalism.

This book isn't an easy one to read, and I'm certain it wasn't an easy story for Zichterman to tell. But it is the truth, and it behooves us to remember that there are many of these churches scattered throughout the country where children are growing up uneducated, abused, and virtually trapped because they cannot imagine a way out and have no support system in place should they choose to leave. Recommended

Recommended for: adults, those who wish to learn more about the IFB or Bob Jones University, etc.

Red Flags: lots of descriptions of abuse, language

Overall Rating: 4/5 stars

Lindsey says

This book has quite the audacious title. How do you fire God? Or, as my boyfriend quipped, “Does she have the authority to do that?” Given the author’s experience with religion, I can definitely appreciate her position. This book is part autobiography and part memoir and part political call to action. Jocelyn Zichterman (née Janz) recounts her abusive childhood, her attempt to find her place in the world as an adult in the Independent Fundamental Baptist (IFB) church/cult, her subsequent liberation from the IFB, and career as an activist. As someone who just can’t get enough of reading about cults, the people in cults, and people managing their post-cult existence, when I saw this book on the new shelf at the library, I had to check it out.

The opening part of the book deals with Zichterman’s abuse at the hands of her father and, later on, brothers. It is inherently hard to read about abuse for me, especially when it goes into detail about the unpredictable nature of their father, Bart, an IFB pastor and expert misogynist, and the times he tortured animals and beat his children bloody with a dowel. However, I appreciate the impact of these events and how they establish a context for the author’s actions later on. They also make it clear that Zichterman has a real, tangible reason to fear her father, and other people in the IFB who enable his behavior.

I had a hard time getting into the narrative at first because it started out feeling really clunky. The chapters were organized into vignettes and each one had a subheading. It felt more like reading blog posts or journal entries than a cohesive story. But as the narrative progressed, I found my irritation waning. I think that it seemed so difficult to read at the outset because the author was describing events from a time when she didn’t have a full understanding of herself, but the narrative became more confident and mature as the author did. I think it can be difficult to recount events from a time when the mind isn’t fully mature, fully settled. Trying to get into a prior mindset (from childhood, or before a major life change—like leaving your religion-based worldview) makes for awkward tellings, no matter how skilled you are. For comparison, I find that when I try to discuss how I used to feel when I was growing up Mormon, I can’t really articulate myself fully, likely because I have my brain engaged on more levels than I did then.

Zichterman recounts an absurd amount of incidences that indicate that women in the IFB have zero standing. The men who run this cult view women on the same level as children. They also describe the need to keep women under men’s “umbrella of protection,” which means that fathers are responsible for girl-children until they marry, at which point husbands are responsible. The whole cult (I will take Zichterman at her word that

it is a cult) seems to be based on giving misogynistic, sociopathic men an outlet for dominating and totally gaslighting women.

The descriptions of how women in the IFB are treated highlight some awful behavior, but the true purpose of this book, and one of the main themes running through it, is that groups like the IFB cultivate an isolationist stance, distancing themselves from government and regulation. This this is a huge detriment to its members and is prohibitive for anyone who wants to leave. Like many religious groups, the IFB does a deplorable job of educating kids. The IFB preaches isolation—public schools will convert your children to Satanists, the government is just waiting to round up fine, Christian folk for execution, and calling the police is a sure way to make God mad—and as such, almost everyone is homeschooled or goes to a private, religious school. Homeschooled kids in this group use study booklets that blatantly ignore basically everything we know about history and science, and instead focus on the fact that the Bible should be our main source of information. Kids are left to work on these booklets independently, with minimal supervision. Sometimes, they aren't supervised at all, as was the case for Zichterman and her siblings one year.

Another of Zichterman's main issues with the education system is that these home or private schools feed into IFB "colleges" like Bob Jones University or Northland Baptist Bible College, which Zichterman herself attended. These schools do not have accreditation, so their degrees are literally meaningless. When the author and her husband who had graduate-level degrees from these schools were trying to escape the IFB, they found that her husband couldn't get a job anywhere because his degrees were unaccredited and completely useless. This means that anyone who wants to educate themselves and get out has essentially no recourse. The cult leaders are actively keeping people ignorant (and making money) by feeding members into this system.

This steady stream of misinformation is, in fact, state-approved. In Wisconsin, where the author grew up, all parents who wanted to homeschool their children had to do was submit a form. These schools and "colleges" also receive federal funding either through voucher programs, or more directly.

Zichterman makes the case that none of this should be legal. I Fired God highlights the profound unfairness of abuse and how it continues to affect the lives of its victims long after the abuse has supposedly ended. Not educating children properly is abusive. It limits their options. Zichterman argues that freedom of religion should also be freedom from religion and it is impossible to free yourself from such a religion when everything you see or do is controlled by it. Everyone should receive an education that enables them to make it on their own if they so choose. Of course, that is what the leaders of cults like this fear. They know that if people were not kept entirely ignorant, they wouldn't choose to stay in such conditions and live these lives. This book is part of Zichterman's campaign to fight back.

Ultimately, I did enjoy reading this book. I like getting perspective on how other people live and it is insane to hear about such systemic abuse even within my own country. I really support Zichterman's cause; I think that having more regulation and robust education for everyone would solve a lot of problems. I sympathize with people in this situation and I hope that change will soon be enacted. If you like reading about fringe religious movements, people breaking out of oppressive systems, or women overcoming hardship and becoming activists, then you will probably enjoy this book.

One other thing that I want to add: if you don't want to commit to a whole book, this 20/20 episode features Zichterman, her cause, and an expose on the IFB.

What should you read after you've finished I Fired God? Here are some things that I've read or have been meaning to read that play well with this subject:

Quiverfull: Inside the Christian Patriarchy Movement by Kathryn Joyce. I read this book a few years ago and really enjoyed it. It deals with the Quiverfull ideology, which stipulates that parents should have a

“Quiverfull” of children. That means people shouldn’t use birth control and just accept however many children God wants to give them. The IFB subscribe to this mindset and it is another way in which women are subjugated.

Write These Laws on Your Children: Inside the World of Conservative Christian Homeschooling by Robert Kunzman. I’ve had this book on my radar for a while, but have yet to read it. Now I want to read it a lot more. This book deals with exactly what Zichterman is concerned about: people homeschooling children with little or no oversight.

Escape by Carolyn Jessop. Zichterman recounts seeing an interview on television featuring Carolyn Jessop and realizing, for the first time, that the IFB was a cult. Jessop is a former member of the FLDS (fundamentalist, polygamist Mormons) and her story has a lot of parallels with Zichterman’s. I haven’t read this particular FLDS memoir, but I have read *Lost Boy*, *Favorite Wife: Escape from Polygamy*, and *Shattered Dreams*, which are all written by survivors/escapees from the FLDS sect.

To read more reviews or to comment, visit digitalmanticore.com

Jenny (Reading Envy) says

I live ten miles up the road from Bob Jones University, and the many varieties of baptists were never as rampant until we moved to South Carolina. So it was surprising to read this book, about a woman leaving the independent fundamentalist Baptist variety of Christianity tied directly to the far-reaching empire of Bob Jones, which I requested via interlibrary loan *from* the library at Bob Jones. Even though it came with a disclaimer sticker, I'm still shocked they have a copy there. It is very damning of their brand of religion. Indeed, indeed.

Jocelyn Zichterman spent her childhood being emotionally and sexually abused by family members, and then emotionally abused and controlled by church leaders. Control is the name of the game. If "independent fundamentalist Baptist" doesn't immediately ring a bell, it is the author's title for the group of churches with ties to Bob Jones, who claim to be independent but instead bear out a rather cult-like existence where a central man and his friends can make or break your entire existence. The ties started to become too close to comfort when I saw the name of a Christian College my Mom and others in my church had attended, when I saw the same home-school/private-school curriculum used by my sisters (I went to public school), when I realized that all those ways that this seemed close to my upbringing might be for good reason. What if "independent Christian church" is just another name for this same animal? When you claim to be independent, if one church body suffers, the rest don't go down with it. So who holds the power?

In the end, the reason this branch of denominations is labeled a cult by the author comes down to control. How they use belief to isolate their members. I used to sing with a woman, an adult, who grew up on the BJU campus (her parents were professors), attended BJU, and now works at BJU as a professor. Who has to get permission to wear pants in public even if it is part of a musical uniform. It is often a sign of religious fundamentalism when the women start having their clothing choices dictated to them. It isn't always associated with Christianity but it is there. I remember the colleges I looked into applying to, those on the approved list, and how I took half of them off the list immediately when seeing their dress code rules. I did not go to a sanctioned bible college that my church endorsed, and I felt the stigma. I already hadn't gone to their sanctioned private school, and now I was not going to go be trained to be a minister's wife? I was doomed.

For most people, my university, a small evangelical Quaker liberal arts university (heavy on evangelical in

policy making and code of conduct) would have been way too conservative. No dancing, no drinking, no R rated movies. But they taught real biology and earth science, alongside required chapel and bible classes.

Imagine my amazement when I get to the point in this story where the author has to go back to school after her husband and eight children leave the church. They discover that Bob Jones University degrees only mean something if you live in the world of Bob Jones University, and that their tales of moral uprightness that doesn't allow them to be accredited actually means that PhDs from their institution don't allow you to teach anywhere else, and MA in counseling degrees don't allow you to practice counseling outside of their landscape. So the author ends up at the same institution I went to, which apparently is a stepping stone away from fundamentalism. At the writing of the book, 2013, she is in fact still very religious. She has not fired God but she has fired fundamentalism. So the title was the equivalent of bookstore click-bait. But it might be that her journey has just begun.

ETA: Fundamentalism in the news

Candy says

I have to say, the title of this book put me off for the longest time. I was intrigued and really wanted to read the memoir of someone who grew up in a church much like the one I did, so I finally bit the bullet and pushed past the title. I am glad I did, for when she talks of firing God, she isn't speaking of the one true God. Rather she is speaking of a God created by man as a harsh, judgmental entity waiting to crush us for the least infraction. This is the God I was raised to believe. I enjoyed the book, mostly for selfish reasons of seeing that I was not alone, and indeed someone else had it far worse than I did. To this day, I still have problems with the church and religion in general. But I still hold a firm belief in God. I just don't think he is out to punish us for every little thing. And yes, I have been threatened with death and disease for leaving that church, that God would visit it upon me. I live in fear, anxiety, and worry to this day about those threats and teachings there, and I left 17 years ago. I realize that maybe I haven't dealt with that part of my life as I should, as I can't seem to get over my experience. But while I applaud this author for her bravery and her work to bring this cult to our knowledge, I have to wonder if she has dealt with it either. I know she will have many years of grief to deal with because it doesn't happen over night. But it seems like her way of dealing may be to go as far in the opposite direction as she can, making everything acceptable. Anyway, that is neither here nor there. I have arrived at the belief myself that I believe in a loving and forgiving God who sent his only son, Jesus, to die for our sins. I believe that because he did that, he isn't looking for any excuse to smash us. He truly wants us to succeed and be with him. That being said, I also say that you can believe what you wish, I do not believe in forcing my beliefs and opinions on anyone. I also no longer attend church, because I have been hurt and disillusioned with so many of them. Organized religion, in my opinion, just isn't done right. But I didn't set out to talk about all that. I set out to review this book. I appreciate Jocelyn telling her story, and I hope that it opens people's eyes to what goes on in many of these churches. It seems that the reviews of this book are very polarized. Some love it and others hate it, painting Jocelyn as a manipulative monster. I only know that I was raised in such a similar situation that I understand totally where she is coming from. The book itself was well written, and provided documentation for the books and sermons mentioned. All in all I would highly recommend this book.

Jeff says

Over the last couple of days, I read I Fired God. This book is a memoir, an account of the author's life growing up in Wisc & Colorado. She recounts numerous examples of abuse of every sort: physical,

emotional& sexual. In just trying to review the book, it was full of generalizations & over reaching. Was the abuse real? I don't know. To cast every church, pastor & ministry in the same light is unreasonable.

From my experience, which is the same standard that the author has used, I have never seen this sort of abuse. I've heard or read of cases which have come to light. Where the law is broken, people should go to jail. The vast majority of people that I've met are sincere, compassionate & normal people. Flawed yes. Monsters no.

Emily says

I've been reading a lot of books by cult survivors lately: FLDS, Children of God, Scientology, etc. I saw this book, I Fired God, at work (I work at a library) and thought "independent fundamental baptist...I'm not familiar with that one!" Ironically the book about a cult I "wasn't familiar with" is the one that triggered an extreme fight-or-flight adrenaline fueled anxiety. My heart was racing. I could feel my blood pressure rising. When I stopped after the first 4-5 chapters I had a complete breakdown, dissolving into tears. This is hitting a little too close to home. Take away the physical, sexual, and verbal abuse and this is very similar to my childhood. My family was NOT in the IFB but a lot of the ideology put forth by them are things I was raised with. The anti-government mentality, the end of the world beliefs, the homeschooling, the "umbrella of protection," etc. It was very hard reading this book but I felt compelled to finish it. I felt validated that some of the things I felt and thought, deep down, growing up weren't some crazy made-up thought, and that yes, XYZ is wrong. Also, the more I read Jocelyn's story, the more I wondered about people I knew growing up and if they were in fact in the IFB.

Ugh. Just....ugh. I'm glad I read this—even though it stirred up a lot of emotions—because knowledge is power.

Melodie says

I should preface my "review" of this book by saying I have no use for organized religion. My experiences with it have all been bad. While I have a very strong belief in God, I will honor him and talk to him in my own way....not the way a church tells me I should, while taking my money to boot. I have a cousin, who I love dearly, who has slipped away from our family completely all due to a religious cult. Not this one, but one that is even more out there than the IFB. I found this book fascinating, even while cringing at the things Ms. Zichterman was subjected to. If you are born into these "groups" you don't have much choice, until you come of age, and they'll try everything to stop you even then. I have difficulty figuring out why grown people who weren't born into them get drawn in. Some people are like my cousin and are extremely weak willed and need some type of crutch their whole lives. So sad to me that these cults justify what they do in the name of God.

Drelisha Weismann says

Jocelyn Zichterman's experience with her father was traumatic, but most of these abuses occur in a home setting or in group homes that were poorly supervised and committed by selfish individuals. JZ's caricature of the IFB is very atypical of the majority of independent Baptist churches.

There are many Baptists who have sounded the alarm against abuse but those men and churches are never mentioned in critiques against the IFB.

Sadly, Jocelyn's experience has produced a group of atheists and agnostics that have shunned God altogether (see link below) and have even led to Jocelyn abusing other victims and advocate groups that she doesn't agree with (as documented by Jeri Massi, and Gregory Easton of the Hidalgo Grain Company <http://thehidalgo graincompany.wordpress...>)

While the IFB churches can certainly learn from the accusations against them from those who have been hurt, there is a temptation to vilify the entire denomination over the abuses of a small handful of abuse cases when compared to abuses in nursing homes, public colleges, public schools, doctor offices, public group homes, prisons, Boys Scouts, and other church denominations or religions. Jocelyn Zichterterman has taken her story to the most extreme of interpretations of IFB intentions and has offered numerous examples of abuse that are not factual, or are embellished and exaggerated.

The documented cases of abuse should not be ignored or minimized, but to use those few cases to paint with such a broad brush a horrific picture of an entire group of believers that have honest and sincere intentions of serving the Lord and showing love and kindness to others is erroneous.

<http://dorightchristians.wordpress.co...>

Kim says

Being raised as a fundamentalist we were taught that we were the only ones who were right. Those who worshipped God differently, well they were just wrong. ALL of them were wrong and deceived. We were raised (particularly the females) to dress separately from "the world" in order to let our light shine. We were told others would see us and want what we have...strong emphasis on our appearance. Mainly we could only wear skirts or dresses but many pastors and churches would take it much further to restrict short hair on women, preach against logos or writing on your tee shirt if it crossed the breast area (drawing male attention to look at you there!) The list of rules was miles long.

At first glance the title of this book might be abrasive to someone if they are a Christian. However, what the author of the book is conveying is that she fired the God of her youth. The God that was ready to pounce and catch you doing something wrong. That God is not the God of love that wants to embrace you. She fired the man-made God that fundamentalism had created with all its contradictions and punishments.

It wasn't until my mid adulthood that I realized for years I had been that Pharisee of the Bible times. I had worn my robes, prayed and done many good deeds, attended church and followed the rules. I was also very judgmental.

I first "met" Jocelyn Zichterterman via the Internet on her support group prior to the 20/20 special that was aired a few years ago. Her leadership in that group was extremely helpful to me in working through painful issues that result from being raised as a fundamentalist. You never are fully disconnected because you have dear family and friends who remain in this culture. But with many others today I can say, yes I AM FREE!!! Happy, well, and thriving.

Sarah R says

So, this is a hard book to review. On one hand, it was interesting reading a book written about the cult I grew up in for the first time. It contained a lot of emotional triggers for me, bringing up some things I thought I had dealt with but that made me realize I hadn't. But on the other hand, it was not very well written. I would probably never recommend it to either someone in the IFB cult who is contemplating getting out or as an informative book to introduce someone to what the cult is about because it fails on both levels. Plus, Jocelyn is just not a likeable person, especially if you know about her shenanigans she conveniently leaves out of the book.

Her story did make me realize that for all of the abuse my family and I went through, other people have had and do have it way worse. It is nothing but a blessing that most of the abuse I experienced was only emotional and spiritual. As much as it may have hurt to be personally ridiculed, falsely accused, or condemned by name (yes, all of which happened to me multiple times) during pulpit rants by my ex-pastor, with no opportunity for me to speak up for myself, at least I wasn't the object of calculated and large-scale attempts to ruin my life. As infuriating as it was that my siblings and I got harshly spanked for even the slightest infraction, and the spankings could go on for hours in an effort to break our "sinful wills" (because a little kid being overcome with shyness when someone says "hi" to them and they don't feel like responding, or a toddler who can't stop crying because he's freezing cold and miserable on a rainy autumn camping trip are obviously calculated attempts at extreme rebellion =P), at least we were never beaten bloody or sexually molested. And as frustrating and crazy as my parents could be, at least they have never been psychopaths who require restraining orders.

But I could still relate to so, so much. The isolation, the paranoia, the obsession with conspiracy theories, the extreme Bible twisting, worship of preachers and other "heroes of the faith" instead of Jesus, the emphasis on attacking and judging any Christian who isn't IFB, the harshness and negativity, the guilt and legalism, etc. etc.

I had serious issues with the book though, as mentioned. The biggest one was her lumping Bill Gothard and ATI, the Pearls, the patriarchy and Quiverfull movements, and Vision Forum in with Fundamental Baptists. That's so far from accurate it made my head spin a little. While those groups and movements are just as dangerous and damaging, they are different fundamentalist camps entirely and have different beliefs in some areas. While there may be some intermingling and admiration for each other among the different camps, they are NOT the same and to lump them in together in this book was misleading and ignorant. For instance, IFB churches will most likely never send their teens to ATI camps. For one thing, ATI doesn't exalt the same "doctrinal" issues as IFBs, and for another, IFB kids go to IFB church camps and keep the funding in the family. She also overgeneralized a lot of other things. I don't believe that every IFB church is rife with physical and/or sexual abuse, for example.

I also didn't feel Mrs. Zichterman did a very thorough and organized job explaining the key beliefs held by the IFB and how they twist the Bible in order to support them. Anyone without personal experience with the IFB would probably be confused and unsure as to how anyone would even be attracted to this movement. I'm guessing part of this is due to her abandonment of the Christian faith--it probably wasn't very important to her to show what is wrong with the way they choose to treat and interpret the Bible.

One last quibble I had: I resented her slight implication that anyone who leaves fundamentalism would naturally flow into becoming a political and/or religious liberal. Because that isn't true. I have no issue with someone believing differently from me on things, but the way she talked about her new worldview just rubbed me the wrong way.

Overall, I'm not sorry I read the book. As a memoir it is harrowing and fascinating. But my impression after

finishing is that her emotions are still riding too high from her experiences to write either an excellent memoir or a withering and thorough expose on the IFB movement. My advice to her would've been to stick to one or the other, and wait a few more years.
