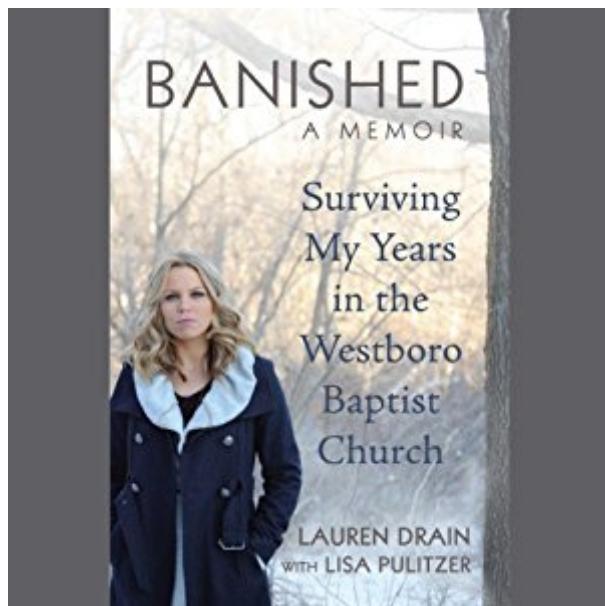


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# Banished: Surviving My Years In The Westboro Baptist Church



## Synopsis

You've likely heard of the Westboro Baptist Church. Perhaps you've seen their pickets on the news, the members holding signs with messages that are too offensive to copy here, protesting at events such as the funerals of soldiers, the 9-year-old victim of the recent Tucson shooting, and Elizabeth Edwards, all in front of their grieving families. The WBC is fervently anti-gay, anti-Semitic, and anti-practically everything and everyone. And they aren't going anywhere: In March, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of the WBC's right to protest funerals. Since no organized religion will claim affiliation with the WBC, it's perhaps more accurate to think of them as a cult. Lauren Drain was thrust into that cult at the age of 15, and then spat back out again seven years later. *Banished* is the first look inside the organization, as well as a fascinating story of adaptation and perseverance. Lauren spent her early years enjoying a normal life with her family in Florida. But when her formerly liberal and secular father set out to produce a documentary about the WBC, his detached interest gradually evolved into fascination, and he moved the entire family to Kansas to join the church and live on their compound. Over the next seven years, Lauren fully assimilated their extreme beliefs, and became a member of the church and an active and vocal picketer. But as she matured and began to challenge some of the church's tenets, she was unceremoniously cast out from the church and permanently cut off from her family and from everyone else she knew and loved. *Banished* is the story of Lauren's fight to find herself amidst dramatic changes in a world of extremists and a life in exile.

## Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 8 hours and 5 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Hachette Audio

Audible.com Release Date: March 5, 2013

Whispersync for Voice: Ready

Language: English

ASIN: B00BJ5VUW2

Best Sellers Rank: #179 in Books > Religion & Spirituality > Other Religions, Practices & Sacred Texts > Cults #1330 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Biographies & Memoirs > Personal Memoirs #2042 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Leaders & Notable People >

## Customer Reviews

I have to admit, this was tough for me to read--not because of grammatical errors or writing style--but because of all the hardships Lauren went through as a child, as a teenager, and as a young adult. I wanted to cry so many times. Most of the book deals with Lauren's life with the Westboro Baptist Church (WBC) and definitely gives an insider's perspective. She is a person a lot of us would be able to relate to: a girl who seeks parental approval, a teenager who's confused about what the world teaches and what her parents teach her, an adult trying to make her mark in the world. I would recommend this book to anyone who 1. is curious about the WBC, 2. needs a little motivation/inspiration in their life, and/or 3. feels that the mistakes of their past overshadow their present and future. A word of advice for those in the second category (or anyone for that matter): finish the book to the end, including the epilogue and the acknowledgements. I think this is the first time I have ever read the acknowledgements portion of a book. All that being said, I wish all the best to Lauren Drain and I pray that God will bless her in the years to come.

Don't get me wrong, this was a good book but I wish she has spent more time telling about her years after getting banished. I didn't think I'd ever get to the part where she left and then, only a few pages about her present life. I always like to hear about how these kinds of people (survivors of a cult) fare in the 'real world', more than Lauren wrote. She had a tough life to lead but they are always late in leaving and Lauren only left because she was kicked out by her own parents. I've never understood parents that can do this. But even after getting kicked out, she wanted to go back, simply because that was the only life she knew. She did say that she no longer viewed religion or 'different' people the same and was totally ashamed of the things she did while in it and yet, still found herself 'back there', thinking the same old sick thinking that her parents and others in the group 'trained' her to think. And all in the name of religion. Just a sickening thing to do to such a vulnerable child, all the while wanting to please a father and mother that she could not ever please. There's a special place for parents like that. I do hope she's happily married by now. This cult is no different than the FLDS or Amish - in that if you leave, you are shunned for the rest of your life. Heartbreaking to someone who wants to please her family.

This is not an exposé, it is Lauren's memoir. This is not an in-depth account with interviews and researched second-hand information, it is her experiences and observations. That doesn't

necessarily make it any less informational, it just wasn't what I initially expected. A few random thoughts... - It is a bit slow at times, though other parts I couldn't put it down. - I did get frustrated at her insecurities at times, though at least she was up front and admitted them. She didn't try to rationalize them. - I do believe that if she had never been banished, or would have been allowed back in shortly thereafter, she'd be in now and this book would never have been written. However, at this point, I do not believe she would ever go back now if the chance were presented. - Her father... where do I start? I almost felt like he was the bigger villain than Fred Phelps himself. Her father fancied himself a lion, but was in reality nothing but a sheep subconsciously willing to latch onto any person with a stronger personality than his. He really set himself up to be a 'tool' of the church, in every intent of the term. - Fred Phelps actually doesn't play prominently in the book, as she didn't have much direct interaction with him. She did, however, have a great deal of interaction with his daughter Shirley who pretty much runs the church anyway. - I have to admit that I was grudgingly impressed by the church's attention to detail and internal self-discipline. - On the flip side, it was repugnant how controlling and paranoid and hypocritical the inner circle family members are. Then again, that really shouldn't come as a surprise. All in all, a good read, very informative, worthwhile, but not quite 5-star worthy. I give it 4 stars.

This was an absolutely fascinating book to read - it is wonderful that Lauren Drain has shared her story. This book is well-written, and enjoyable to read. It also gives unique, intriguing insight into an infamous extremist political group, its inner workings, and belief systems. Absolutely fascinating to read. I originally purchased this for a class I was taking, and have since re-read it for fun. It's a book I'm quite happy to own a hard copy of vs. just on my Kindle. It's a conversation starter, and also one that you may find yourself loaning out!

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