

WHAT IF
I'M
WRONG?

A deconstruction memoir

BY ERIC J. GRUBER

“What If I’m Wrong?”

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Table of Contents

Table of Contents3

Thanks4

Preface5

Why Is This Happening?9

Growing Up Christian14

The Next Generation.....19

Tests of Faith21

Searching for God25

Questions, Questions, and More Questions.....30

Streaming Consciousness34

Stolen Works37

Anguish.....45

Uncomfortable Conversations.....50

What I Believe Now54

Epilogue60

Resources65

About the Author69

Thanks

To Mom and Dad: I miss you every day.

To Amy and the kids: thank you for being understanding as I have traveled this journey.

To Scotty: for listening to my rants. I'm still not sure what to think about those pyramids.

To Jeff: thanks for being an excellent friend and proofreader.

To John: thanks for listening and pushing me to ship.

To Alex, Allyn, and Grant: who could have known our spirited religious debates would end up like this?

To Heather: I'm forever in your debt for your excellent care of Dad. You deserve more.

And lastly, for the believer, the seeker, the questioning, the doubter, and the skeptic: Ask more questions.

Preface

Hello! I am so glad you are here. Thank you for reading.

This memoir is about my upbringing in the Christian faith, the life that came with it, and the discovery that rocked my world and my beliefs.

If you've never been a person with religious beliefs, I want to warn you that I occasionally use "Christian speak" in this book. I have tried to write this in a way that is easily digestible, but there might be things that are foreign to the reader. In those cases, I apologize. One could write an entire dictionary of religious slang and I didn't want to have this thing drag out with endless explanations. If you need further explanation of a topic or phrase, the best encouragement I can give you is the instruction my parents gave me when I was growing up and had two-shelves of encyclopedias – "*Go look it up.*"

I used to think my parents were offloading the responsibility of explaining something to me by telling me that. As I got older, I realized that telling someone to research a trusted, authoritative source can lead to the discovery of other truths. In addition, sometimes our own understanding is incorrect; it's good to seek the truth that is and not the truth that we *believe* it is.

If you are a person with religious belief, if you are questioning some long-held beliefs, or if you are just wondering, “*What the hell happened to him?*” Well, this book is for you.

I am no one special. I am a meat sack living on a spinning ball that is suspended in a hostile universe.

Aside from that, I’m a husband, a dad, a guardian of animals, a brother, and a friend. I am curious about the world. I am fascinated by discovery and learning. When I am newly interested in something, I typically and naturally do a deep dive into the topic. Undoubtedly, the word *obsession* is a fine description of how I tackle new information that piques my curiosity. I research, I look at the quality of sources where I get my information, and eventually come to a conclusion until new evidence is presented that requires me to re-examine my position.

It is my hope that you read this with an open mind, and reserve judgement until the end. If you are currently a religious person, that might be difficult. There have been many times in life that I completely discounted something because of long established beliefs. I’m not asking you to throw all of those out, but I am asking that you try to set personal feelings aside. Be objective as you read.

I say this without hyperbole, writing this comes after a painful, anguishing period in my life. It’s not easy to re-examine what you believe, especially when it permeates every aspect of your life. The process I went through is called *deconstruction*, where one critically examines and re-evaluates religious beliefs. For some people of faith, after a

period of deconstruction they abandon some aspects of their doctrines, practices, and traditions but still hold on to their religious beliefs in general. For others, deconstruction can lead to *deconversion*, where the believer turns to disbelief, and faith is abandoned entirely.

Deconstruction is not only for the Christian faith. Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Catholics, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, and the practitioners of other religions can participate. And yes, some keep their faith, while others walk away.

The French mathematician, philosopher, physicist, and theologian Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) presented a philosophical argument known as *Pascal's Wager*, that contends it is rational to believe in the existence of God. If you are wrong and don't believe, the consequences are dire. If you are right and God doesn't exist, then your losses are minimal.

Of course, there is the possibility that you spend your life devoted to the wrong belief. [In an episode of South Park](#), believers of all religions end up in hell, confused as to why they are there.

"Hey, wait a minute. I shouldn't be here! I was a totally strict and devout Protestant! I thought we went to heaven!" one person exclaims.

"Yes, well I'm afraid you were wrong," says Hell Director, clipboard in hand.

"I was a practicing Jehovah's Witness," another cries out.

“You picked the wrong religion as well,” says Hell Director.

“Who was right? Who gets into heaven?” a sufferer of eternal torment asks.

“I’m afraid it was the Mormons. Yes, the Mormons were the correct answer,” was the reply from Hell Director.

The damned crowd groans in disbelief.

This book is in no way an exhaustive recollection of my experiences in the Christian faith. There is so much more I could say, and certainly more that I would like to share, but for the sake of time and shortened attention spans, this will do for now.

I can’t tell you what to believe. But I am asking you to be really critical – deeply analyzing the merits and faults – of what you believe and why you believe it. In the end, I hope you hear my story, look at yourself, and ask a very simple question:


“What if I’m wrong?”

Eric J Gruber
June 2025

1

Why Is This Happening?

*I am a world before I am a man.
I was a creature before I could stand.
I will remember before I forget.*
– from the Slipknot song, “**Before I Forget**”

 ut of the corner of my eye I noticed my phone’s screen light up and then fade to the darkness of a black mirror display. It was 8:50 p.m. on April 1, 2024 and I had just returned home from picking up one of my teenage kids from the youth group at the church we attended.

Despite it being April Fool’s Day, the text was no joke. It was yet another message from my sister, chronicling Dad’s downward spiral.

“Dad just fell again and has an abrasion on his face and a goose egg on his head,” the text from my sister read. *“He’s not doing well tonight!”*

This wasn’t the first text I had received from my sister telling me about how dad wasn’t doing well. It wasn’t even the first time that day. Earlier, the staff at the facility dad

lives at found him on the floor. He was confused but his vitals were good.

I checked in with sis the next day to see how dad was doing. She filled me in on what his medical team had said about his recent injuries. Then she sent me a picture of how he was looking after his fall.

There was no way to prepare me for the image that came next. In between blue bubbles with white text was a profile picture of dad. One of his eyes was bruised and swollen. There was a palm-sized rug burn across his forehead and a contusion the size of a golf ball underneath it. And smack dab in the middle of the top of his nose was a red wound the size of a marble.

He looked awful.

“He lost the boxing match,” wrote my sister. *“The swelling has gone down a lot since last night.”*

My heart completely broke after seeing that picture; my eyes welled with tears. The only thought I had was the same one I had been tossing around in my head for the past couple of years: *“How could God allow this to happen to dad, a man who had faithfully served Him for so long?”*

A little backstory is likely warranted here.

In the summer of 2020, my sister had noticed things about dad that didn’t seem normal. Granted, dad hadn’t been the same since mom died in 2018, but something was *really* off. My family lived in Kansas City, three hours away from my

hometown of Baxter Springs, Kansas. Sis lived much closer – about 20 minutes away – in Joplin, Missouri. Because of geography, she ended up with a front row seat to dad's decline. His slow, downward trend continued through 2021. It wasn't a dramatic decline, but it was noticeable.

After a series of tests, it was determined dad had cognitive impairment. Or put more horrifically, he was likely experiencing symptoms of Alzheimer's disease.

By November 2021, sis encouraged me to come down for Christmas. Since society was still navigating through the Covid-19 pandemic, we took some safety precautions leading up to Christmas. My wife and three kids stayed at his house. Sis came over with her husband and my nephew. Presents were opened, food was enjoyed, memories were made. Overall, dad seemed to be holding things together pretty well.

It would be the last Christmas we would enjoy together in the house and setting I had known all my life.

In January 2022, dad caught Covid-19 for the first time, which exacerbated – or more accurately accelerated – the effects of his Alzheimer's. On March 1, 2022, we moved dad into an assisted living facility. Before the end of summer, he moved again to memory care because his decline continued at an alarming rate. His house and possessions were sold to pay for his ongoing care.

The life we knew had changed to a point of no return. Not only had the family dynamic changed, but bubbling

underneath the surface of my psyche was a change in how I saw the world and my own life.

I had no idea what was coming next, but it would turn my world upside down. But I'll get to that later.

To slowly have your memories and functionality taken away from you is a terrible way to die. I wouldn't wish it on anyone. It's prolonged, frustrating, confusing, and heartbreaking.

For 2023 and 2024, dad's condition declined steadily, but more slowly. My family would make the occasional trip to see him, where we would spend time chatting with him in the room. He didn't contribute much to the conversation, but he seemed to enjoy being surrounded by his kids and grandkids. His room had a few mementos from his past life – pictures of mom who died in 2018, arrowheads he found while walking a Kansas field after a good rain exposed them, and knick knacks from his days as a nurse and an ice cream man.

And then, there was his bible. So many times I had seen dad faithfully read from that book. He would have quiet time at the dinner table, the pages flayed open and highlighted with his yellow marker. Sometimes I found him reading it at his desk, or even while he "did his business" in the bathroom.

And now, a different bible with a larger print was in his room at the memory care facility. I don't think he read it much after moving out of his home. Rather, many of his days were filled with a combo of napping, eating, and

watching reruns of old westerns he had seen a million times before.

While dad seemed to settle into his new reality, I was never comfortable. I absolutely hated seeing my father, once a strong and stoic man, wither away. And though it all, the nagging question wouldn't go away: *"How could God allow this to happen to dad, a man who had faithfully served Him for so long?"*

I wanted some answers to this philosophical question about God, so I went looking for answers. What I discovered shook me to my core.

2

Growing Up Christian

Jesus hates your high school dances.

– from the Josh Ritter song, “***Getting Ready to Get Down***”



lthough I don’t know a whole lot about how dad ultimately came to embrace Christianity in full, I know a little of his past.

He had family who were Pentecostal, a form of Christianity that focuses more on spiritual gifts like speaking in tongues and having spiritual experiences. His parents went to church, but I never felt like they were *overly* religious. His mom was certainly a believer in Jesus, though.

After high school, dad served in the Vietnam War, came home, went to nursing school, and that’s where he met mom. He moved to the small Kansas town of Baxter Springs, started a job at the local hospital, got married, and had two children.

Dad once told me the story of a man named Bill Martins from a church in town who was going door-to-door evangelizing for Jesus. Dad was working outside when

Martins approached him and started a conversation. At one point, he asked dad, *“If you were to die today, do you think you would go to heaven or hell?”*

Dad said, *“Well, probably hell.”*

Martins listened, drew a clipboard to his chest, made a checkmark on paper, and then wrapped up the conversation.

What happened after that, I don’t know. But mom was pretty religious and came from a family that was very faithful to following Jesus. But for some reason, dad became a believer as well and never looked back.

At age eight, I became a Christian of my own volition. I had been in church for as long as I could remember, but my decision to “let Jesus into my heart” wasn’t prompted by anyone or anything. One day, I realized I believed and that was that. After saying a prayer to ask God to forgive me of my sins, after meeting with my pastor to make sure that I was ready to make that leap of faith, everything checked out.

I was a Christian.

Growing up, I don’t remember thinking my parents were excessively strict. I knew people whose parents were pretty strict because of their faith, but mom and dad seemed to be less strict than others. That’s not to say there wasn’t a huge influence on how to interact in society based upon Christian teachings and values. Being kind and helpful to others was of high importance. Having high moral

standards was paramount. But there were culture war issues that crept into every American Christian household, rejecting things such as movies that were considered “inappropriate,” music with guitar tone heavier than Creedence Clearwater Revival, drinking, smoking, and of course, clothing.

We attended church faithfully and regularly. Every night at bedtime, we would read our way through the bible. Sunday morning service, Sunday evening service, Wednesday service, and the occasional extra event had us in church a lot. A fan of graphic t-shirts, I wore a lot of Christian apparel that had bible verses or other faith-forward designs. I was serious about my faith; I carried a New Testament in my back pocket, and would talk to others about Jesus. There were even mission trips where us youth would get our sea legs by being trained on how to evangelize, then go into neighborhoods, shopping malls, and other spaces to tell others the good news that Jesus Christ had saved them from their sins.

“If you were to die today, would you go to heaven or hell?”

My faith stayed with me through college, but after graduation I was a little burned out of the same old discussions, and stepped away from attending church. I was really just kind of living: working, eating, sleeping, and repeating. I had moved to a new city far away from home, the much more liberal college town of Lawrence, Kansas.

I didn’t know anyone, and tired of being alone I resumed going to church. My bible in hand, I looked around at a few places until I found one I liked. It was a “non-

denominational” church, which felt different from my Southern Baptist upbringings. They held to the same doctrine, but were more laid back. I liked it.

Eventually I met my wife, we were married in that same church and attended there a few years. One of the things I really enjoyed was a staff pastor, Paul, who would teach classes on Sunday nights, and his class was different. It dove deeper into theological issues that were never touched on in a typical Sunday service, and I was all over it. Paul’s classes inspired me to learn more. I purchased a biblical encyclopedia, read numerous books about faith, and kept reading my bible.

We gave money regularly to the church, were involved in teaching bible school classes, helped out with summer programs for kids, and I even played in church bands that provided music for the services. My prayers were usually said many times when I commuted long distances for work, and my wife and I would volunteer to help out at homeless shelters and other volunteer events for the communities we lived in.

All of this is not to say “*Oh, look at me.*” But I am saying that I walked the walk, talked the talk, and was absolutely steeped in faith. I *actually* believed in God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and worked hard to learn about and act out my faith to others.


There are those who like to say people like me never believed in the first place, a logical fallacy called “No True Scotsman.” Those who say that are wrong. But, I could give you plenty of names of people who were accepted

outwardly as Christians, but they were certainly not living as followers of Jesus. Recently my son noted that even our wedding vows had several references to God in them. And for those who want to say that I wasn't a "real" Christian, they can think what they want.

3

The Next Generation

*Well, I've been 'fraid of changing
'cause I've built my life around you.
But time makes you bolder, even children get older,
and I'm getting older too.*
– from the Fleetwood Mac song, “**Landslide**”

 hen kids came along, it was important to me to ensure they were raised *properly*. We attended church almost every Sunday. Although the brand of Christianity I subscribed to didn't perform infant baptisms, we dedicated all of our children to be brought up in the faith, to instruct them to follow in the path of Jesus as *The Right Thing To Do*.

Sunday schools, bible readings, prayer time, group events with other churches and other Christians, and simply trying to model living a Christian life were all important. The worst thing imaginable for a dedicated Christian parent is the thought of your child dying and not being a Christian. After all, to die without Christ meant your soul would spend eternity in hell.

“If you were to die today, would you go to heaven or hell?” carries over to the next generation, just as mine carried over from the one before it, and so on.

Raising children in the faith led to a lot of confusing contradictions. For instance, we chose to be honest about Santa Claus and the Tooth Fairy because we didn’t want to be untruthful to our children about fairy tales and make believe. How does one reconcile that there isn’t much difference to a child between the Tooth Fairy and God? You can’t see, hear, or feel either one, but the Tooth Fairy is *obviously* not real and God is *obviously absolutely* real, right?

There’s a mindset in evangelistic Christianity that includes the “four to 14 window,” which is the period of time in a child’s life that is most important to be instructed in Christian teachings. To have the greatest chance of success in having your children stick to the faith, it’s important to teach them at this age. It’s an amazing tool to help “plant the seed” of faith with the hope that seed will take root.


And when that child decides to *ask Jesus into their heart*, what a joy it is! The child is saved! The child has the right tool to get through life and spend eternity with God after death. Hell has been defeated, and heaven awaits! It’s a great comfort to the Christian parent when this happens, because it means your most precious persons are free from eternal damnation.

What a relief.

4

Tests of Faith

*I'll worship like a dog at the shrine of your lies.
I'll tell you my sins so you can sharpen your knife.
Offer me that deathless death.
Oh, good God, let me give you my life.*
– from the Hozier song, “**Take Me To Church**”

 n October 2018, my mom died suddenly after a brief illness. To say that I was devastated would be a gross understatement.

I am such a mama's boy. Her death sent me into a severe depression. Fortunately for me, I had my faith to lean on. I had wonderful support from my church family, both where we were attending then, and where we had attended prior. We had moved to Kansas City in 2016, and my old pastor, Brandon, and his wife, Wendi, drove three hours just to attend the funeral. My Kansas City church family was also supportive, bringing comfort and saying prayers for me as I navigated living with loss.

We would see her again, someday, when our time on God's Earth was done.

After a dark period filled with the support of friends, therapy, and a decent amount of time spent in prayer and bible reading, I got better. I doubled down on my faith, because I knew mom was watching how I would spend the rest of my days and I didn't want to disappoint her.

Although the doctrine of "*Can people in heaven see us*" is fuzzy, I believed that she likely could, and I wanted her to see that I was keeping the faith.

I would see her again, and it would be a joyful reunion when that day came. Until then, I just needed to draw close to God, and have Him guide me as I healed from the grief of her loss.

A little more than a year later, the world would be plunged into a global pandemic. There were plenty of tests of faith to come. As a family that homeschools children (not for religious reasons, I should note), staying home to work and school wasn't a terrible change to embrace. Our Christian values clearly instructed us to care for the elderly and the sick, and Covid-19 was a clear threat to vulnerable populations. Wearing a mask, social distancing, and staying home was clearly the thing to do to help contribute positively in this situation.

Thanks to technological advances, we were able to continue gathering with other believers through church services that were streamed from our church, including streamed Sunday classes for the kids. My wife and I would join our small group through video conferencing with our friends. As the pandemic conditions improved, the group eased back into in-person meetings.

But not every Christian shared the same outlook. Mainly coming from fundamental evangelical Christians (like the church I was raised in), a schism developed. Christians were mad they were being asked to stop meeting in person, or even outright banned from normal services while the pandemic spread. Although the data showed that in-person, close-quarter communications helped spread the virus, and also that singing was especially potent at making the contaminants airborne, I watched as some Christians got fed up with public guidelines on how to keep the virus from spreading.

It was seen by them as religious persecution. Overall, I viewed these people as temporarily misguided, and after the pandemic passed things would return to normal. However, during this time religion and politics began to become intertwined, which makes for the absolute worst of bedfellows. Division, anger, and discontent followed. It was an ugly sight, and far from the Christianity I believed in. It didn't dissuade me from my faith, but it certainly tested my love for my fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. I thought they were being selfish, and not at all "Christlike."

Eventually the pandemic drew to a close more or less, but there was plenty of damage done to the Christian community. But, I held firm. Sure, I was bruised by what I saw in others, but I didn't think it was a systemic problem.

That said, I was getting more concerned with the deepening marriage of Christianity and American politics. I found it to be a troubling combination that went against everything I thought true. Jesus wasn't into politics. Why are these Christians embracing – if not outright loving –

politicians? A few years later that melding of ideologies would be given a label: Christian Nationalism.

Alas, even Christian Nationalism didn't shake my faith. Those people were simply frustrated and misguided. They just needed to get closer to how Jesus would want them to live and love others.

In the end, it wasn't death, a pandemic, politics, or even the church that caused my faith to wither. Rather, it was the one thing that isn't taught in church: critical thinking.

5


Searching for God

I have run. I have crawled.

*I have scaled these city walls – these city walls – only to be
with you.*

But I still haven't found what I'm looking for.

– from the U2 song, ***“I Still Haven't Found What I'm
Looking For”***

 any religious practitioners have questions about their faith, about the sacred texts they read, about how God uses life experiences to shape them, and much more.

All religions start with the conclusion first: our God exists, and we'll find ways to explain the world based on that presupposition. But true discovery doesn't have a conclusion in mind, and is open to being wrong. Being wrong is part of the human experience. It leads us to ask, “*Why is it wrong?*” and we keep moving forward.

Much of what people believe comes from an accident of geography. If you're born in the U.S., your likelihood of being a Christian is much higher than someone born in Saudi Arabia, for example. There are anomalies, of course:

about half of Jews are atheist or agnostic; it seems they figured out the game long before many others have.

Personal struggles can play a huge part as well. We have all probably known someone who was a raging alcoholic, drug abuser, murderer, or struggled with another issue, but overcame it seemingly through a personal belief in a deity. But plenty of people have overcome adversity without using religion: community, structure, and personal determination ultimately brings success.

When pressed for proof about how Christians know their God is real, it's not uncommon to hear their testimonies of deeply personal experiences as evidence that God supernaturally intervened in their lives.

Many personal experiences – seeing visions, hearing voices, smells, and odd coincidences – can be explained with naturalistic explanations. Once you learn a little more about human psychology, you see that humans are capable of manifesting many things in our minds that aren't real, even if they seem like they are.

If you were born into a religious family as I was, there is a very high chance that you will also become religious. At the very least, you will have influences, good and bad, that come from religious belief that influence the decisions you make in life. With that can also come a lot of dogma, unwritten rules, bigotry, and hatred for those who are different from you.

The lynchpin for belief relies on one simple thing: **trust**.

We are all born as atheists until someone starts feeding us information. Typically that is by someone we trust, be it a relative, pastor, rehab leader, life coach, and so on.

Someone who we have given trust gives back to us a reason to believe, and we accept it as truth. When indoctrination sets in, it's hard to be objective. But if you are able to take a step back and examine the evidence without the baggage of dogma, then you have an opportunity to start thinking for yourself. That process starts by allowing yourself to ask hard questions, maybe questions you have never even asked before.

I wish I could say that questioning isn't discouraged, because in many ways it's not. Asking questions can lead to spiritual growth, as it causes a person to dive deeper into their faith, and for Christians, that means prayer and diving deep into what the Holy Bible has to say.

However, religious belief comes with some pretty gigantic presuppositions. For Christianity, those presupposition include:

- God exists.
- Jesus died and was resurrected as a supernatural payment for our sins, which separate us from God.
- The Holy Bible points to the truth of God.

As I watched my father deteriorate, I didn't understand why. Was there some grandiose lesson to be learned from the prolonged suffering of a believer? What lessons can someone possibly learn when they are slowly losing their cognitive abilities? Is healing not possible? If not, or if so,

then why? Maybe dad's suffering was the result of a supernatural game to test a human's religious dedication, like when God allowed Job to be afflicted with chaos by the devil.

Perhaps the lesson wasn't meant for dad. Maybe it was meant for me. But, what is the lesson to be learned? Am I to draw closer to God like I did after mom died? Was I being punished for something? Maybe this is the consequence of a "fallen world," that, even if you are a believer in God and Jesus, that you'll still have to endure the punishment for original sin?

I brought these questions to God. I wanted Him to show me answers. I wanted to learn. I still had one big question for God that I needed something to help me understand: *"How could God allow this to happen to dad, a man who had faithfully served Him for so long?"*

By this time we were, in essence, attending two different churches. Church One we had attended for years but didn't have a good program for middle- and high school-aged youth. Church Two had an excellent program for youth, so on Sunday mornings we would attend there for our kids continued Christian edification.

However, my wife and I kept going to the small group with members from Church One – a gathering of about 10 adults in someone's home – because, well, they were friends. We had shared much together. I didn't want to lose those connections. That group of people meant a lot to me.

I was getting frustrated.

There were no answers. Every church service, every bible study, every path I took led me to dead ends. Everyone around me was supportive, and encouraged me. Both churches were pretty great. The people at both were also overall pretty awesome. But God? I was getting angry with Him. He's at the center of all of this, and He seemed silent.

One Sunday evening, driving home from the small group, I had a thought that I turned into a prayer: *"God, I need to hear from You. I need help. You are going to have to show me something, anything, because I need to know You are there."*

That was the last prayer I said to God. After that, I searched for an answer to a much bigger question: *"How do I know God actually exists?"*

6

Questions, Questions, and More Questions

I have questions for you.

Number one: Tell me who you think you are.

You got some nerve trying to tear my faith apart.

– from the Camila Cabello song, “***I Have Questions***”

It was time to get back to basics, and nothing is more basic than an input field on a search engine.

The more I thought about it, the more I realized I didn’t know what the “official” answer was. So, how *do* we know that God actually exists?

There’s the Holy Bible, but how did it come to be? How do we know it is true? Who decided what books needed to be included and what to be excluded? I knew the Catholic bible included additional books called the deuterocanonical (second cannon) books, but why weren’t they accepted as scripture by Protestant churches? Growing up as a Protestant, I was told those books were important and good for background and “historical” reasons, yet we never once talked about them in church.

What about the disciples of Jesus? What do we know about them? How did they die? How do we know what we think we know about their deaths? I had always heard most of them were martyrs; is that true? How do we know that is true? In the New Testament, most of the disciples kind of fade away in the background aside from Peter and the later convert, Paul. How come we don't hear more about the others?

But Jesus was real, right? It's undeniable the story of Jesus had an impact on humanity. But how do we know the story of Jesus is, you know, true? Did Jesus really fulfill prophecies? If so, which ones specifically? How does one determine what a prophecy is and how does one verify its truthiness?

I took the Holy Bible at face value all my life, but now I had questions that weren't being talked about in a standard Sunday service. Why is that? How come churches don't typically talk about how the bible came to be, why we believe the way we do, and why there are so many different denominations with typically minute differences. Why is that, and is that good or bad?

And the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible/Tanakh – that's true, right? Who wrote them? When? What are the Dead Sea Scrolls? What do they say about my faith?

So. Many. Questions.

The internet is a wild place, and I knew that if I went searching online, I would have to be very diligent in curating who I paid attention to and who to avoid.

Christianity seems to have taken over the internet so much that I found it difficult to find opposing voices; you gotta love search engine optimization. I wanted to hear the other side. If I was going to get to the bottom of this, I needed to hear more than what I have heard all my life.

Unfortunately, there are just *so many articles* written about Christianity that have a pro-Christian bias, I struggled to find many non-religious writings through my online searches.

And that's how I ended up on YouTube. Granted, YouTube is just a search engine for video, and there's a LOT of content there on any topic you can imagine. But, YouTube videos have helped me replace a car alternator, fix a furnace, redo some plumbing, learn songs on guitar, fix electrical issues, and much more so I thought, "*What the hell; let's see what it has to offer.*"

It started with debate videos between prominent Christian scholars and apologists going head-to-head against atheists and agnostics. My faith taught me that atheists were evil and immoral, so at first it felt icky to even poke around this area. Christopher Hitchens was the devil incarnate, right?

Yeah, about that ... the more I watched these debates, the more I saw people like Hitchens absolutely destroy Christian apologists in debates. Hitchens led me to watch debates by Sam Harris, Alex O'Conner, Richard Dawkins, and others. They were fascinating. Their arguments were logical and sound. I was entranced by how they debated, how they came to their conclusions, and how much more

often than not, they dominated whatever debate they were in.

Going further down the rabbit hole, I found Matt Dillahunty, a grumpy atheist and former Christian that was raised in my current city of residence. I discovered Seth Andrews, a laid back, former Christian radio DJ who is now an atheist activist. Dan Barker, a former pastor and president of the Freedom From Religion Foundation had eloquent, soft-spoken speeches online about why he left faith.

I thought these guys were the bad guys. Why do they make so much sense?

7

Streaming Consciousness

*Are you on the square? Are you on the level?
Are you ready to swear right here, right now,
before the devil?*

– from the Ghost song, “**Square Hammer**”

On June 20, 2024, I stumbled upon a video called “[Satan’s Guide to the Bible](#).” It’s a well done, well researched critique of the bible by using ... the bible. It’s 90 minutes of hard-to-swallow thinking if you’ve been a Christian most of your life.

That led me to discover the channel of [Paulogia](#), run by Paul Ens, whose tagline is “*A former Christian takes a look at the claims of Christians.*”

Well, that sounded interesting.

Then I found [NonStampCollector](#), whose videos about Noah’s Ark ([Part 1](#), [Part 2](#)) were so funny, and so thought-provoking, that I couldn’t stop laughing at the ridiculousness of the claims. Those videos were the first time I had heard anyone do the math and science on the feasibility of the story of Noah’s Ark, and it’s undeniably implausible.

The previously-mentioned Matt Dillahunty had an [amazing debate with Jordan Peterson](#), and I wanted to know more about his technique. I have long found Peterson to be an annoying speaker. Dillahunty, who sometimes is a little too brash for many, had so many strong points that I couldn't ignore him. He promotes *critical thinking*, which is the ability to analyze claims objectively, and then form decisions and solve problems using that reasoning. It's really a big, giant exercise in asking, "So, *how do you know that is true?*" over and over to find answers.

This line of reasoning goes all the way back to Socrates, and his *Socratic method*. Poke, poke, poke, dig, dig, dig. I was more hungry for learning than I had been in a long time.

In the literary world, I found [“All That’s Wrong With The Bible”](#) by Jonah David Conner. Self-published and written by an ex-fundamentalist graduate from Liberty University, it was chock full of contradictions, oddities, and other oddball things that required examination.

I began to notice a pattern: Matt Dillahunty, Jonah David Conner, Paul Ens, Seth Andrews, Dan Barker ... these were all *former Christians* and often *former evangelical fundamentalists* like I was raised. Not wanting to exclude others, I read Kate Cohen's, [“We Of Little Faith,”](#) written by a former Jew.

I kept finding atheists who had *deconstructed*, and ended up leaving the faith they once held onto to dearly.

Although interesting, it still wasn't enough to fully shake my faith. Even though I was disillusioned with God, and found this new education compelling, I still hadn't lost faith in the belief that God was real.

8

Stolen Works

Hey, alright, if I get by, it's mine, mine, mine, all mine.
– from the Jane's Addiction song, “***Been Caught Stealing***”

My higher education background was in journalism, and after college I spent a few years in the industry before moving to what I do now, technology.

One of the duties of a journalism major is to write, and I was on the college newspaper, *The Chart*, while I pursued my studies.

One semester, there was a series of essays written by other students and was published in another college publication. However, I received a tip about one essay that had a teeny-tiny problem with it – it was plagiarized. A student had copied, practically verbatim, from the novel “[*Ishmael*](#)” by Daniel Quinn and it was published as his own original work.

The student had moved to another college, but I tracked him down, got his phone number, and rang him up. He admitted to me on the record that he had plagiarized the book for his essay. I honestly think he didn't understand that what he did was wrong; but hey, it made a great story. I

may have even won an award for the story I wrote about that incident, but I don't fully remember.

Although my journalism days are pretty far behind me now, my search for truth knows no bounds. I kept digging for the answer to my question: *"How do I know God actually exists?"*

Little did I know my experience in college would help me find the answer to the question.

By late June 2024, I was leaning more toward identifying as *agnostic*. As defined, an agnostic is someone who doesn't necessarily commit to the idea that there is no God, but rather leaves open the possibility. Since I was running short of *good* evidence, that's where I was leaning. I wasn't at all comfortable with it, but it was hard to deny it as well.

One evening, I watched a video on Paulogia's channel titled ["Archaeological Finds For The Old Testament"](#) featuring Dr. Josh Bowen. Bowen, like me, is a former fundamentalist evangelical Christian. We have similar backgrounds, as he has talked about things like carrying a bible everywhere he went, and having to go up cold to a stranger to ask questions like, *"If you were to die today, would you go to heaven or hell?"*

Unlike me, Dr. Bowen went on to study more, graduating from Johns Hopkins University in 2017 with a degree in [Assyriology](#). It's a study of the culture and writings of Ancient Near East studies, and he can read the earliest known writing system known as [cuneiform](#).

The video I watched was a reaction video that Paul and Dr. Bowen did about Christian apologist Sean McDowell and Dr. Titus Kennedy, a Christian archaeologist, discussing the historicity of the Holy Bible according to archeological findings. The [discussion from minute 3:38 to 10:12 in the video](#) was the answer I had been seeking.

In that video, Dr. Bowen discussed the Flood Myth story found in ancient texts of [Atra-Hasis](#) and in the [Epic of Gilgamesh](#), which predates the Hebrew Bible by at least 1,000 years but likely more because oral traditions were likely passed down before they were written in cuneiform.

Transcript from the video “[Archaeological Finds For The Old Testament](#)”

McDowell: *“Let's start with number one: Atra-Hasis. What is that find?”*

Dr. Kennedy: *“Atra-Hasis is an ancient story, an epic or a myth it might be called, from Mesopotamia and in particular this was recorded on clay tablets. Now the Atra-Hasis story mostly contains a flood story with a little bit of a creation time prelude but fairly recently the oldest tablet of Atra-Hasis was rediscovered so to speak by the British Museum.*

“It was brought in by a private collection and when the curator was reading it he noticed some lines from it that had not appeared on some of the other Atra-Hasis tablets. And in particular there was one talking about bringing the animals on to the boat two-by-two and so he saw the immense importance of this and he asked the owner if he could hold on to the tablet and translate it.

“So he went through and he made the translation of this new tablet and found out it was actually from about 1,900 BCE. It was older than all the other Atra-Hasis tablets. And it was also the closest of any of the other flood stories to the Noah account in Genesis, and so what this shows us at the very least is that people way back in the time of Abraham knew about the flood story and had essentially the same details in their story as what was recorded about Noah in the book of Genesis. Just showing us the antiquity of the account of the flood and that people from various parts of the ancient world agreed that there was some kind of flood event with a man in a boat who was saved.”

Dr. Bowen: *“What we have is the Mesopotamian accounts of the flood myth preserved in different forms in different literary texts in both Sumerian and Acadian that date back to the beginning of the 2nd millennium BCE. Now there is intertextuality – which is just a fancy word for how two texts interact with or influence each other – between stories like Atra-Hasis and the Epic of Gilgamesh, Tablet 11, and this flood story was used by the later writers of Genesis 6-9.*

“So for example we see in Genesis 6:14: “Make yourself an ark of gopher wood. Make the ark into compartments and cover it inside and out with pitch.

*“Now, the Hebrew word for pitch that appears in this verse is **highly suggestive** of dependence of the biblical flood story on the Mesopotamian accounts. This word appears only here in Genesis 6:14. It shows up nowhere else in the bible.*

“Conversely it's Akkadian cognate kupru (pronounced “coo pru”) is very common and shows up in a wide variety of contexts, including – as you might guess – the flood stories in both Atra-Hasis and the Epic of Gilgamesh.

“So in other words, in both Atra-Hasis and the Epic of Gilgamesh in the sections describing the building of the ark, this very common word kupru – for pitch or bitumen – is used to describe how the ark is supposed to be sealed.

“But in Genesis 6:14 we see the same semitic word in the exact same context. But more than that, this is the only place where the word appears in the Old Testament.

*“In fact there's another word for pitch that appears elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, a different word. This means that the Hebrew language **already had a perfectly suitable word** that referred to a substance that was used to seal the outside of something to make it watertight, and yet the author of this story **opted for an entirely foreign cognate** in its place.*

“Now examples like this show us that the Mesopotamian flood traditions were used in the formation of the story of Noah in Genesis, not that there is some independent flood that is actually being preserved in literary form.”

Dr. Kennedy: *“The writings of Moses and Genesis are very very criticized – especially the patriarchal period – as being a late late invention and really anachronistic not based on historical reality. But this is something that tells us the very least people knew about this flood story: this one man who built a boat and was saved from it. It wasn't just a creation or even a copy of the Israelites from much later.”*

Paulogia: *“Why should we prefer a literary dependence conclusion over the notion of independent recordings of an actual event?”*

Dr. Bowen: *“Well there are any number of reasons but outside of the example from the flood story that I just said there are two that stand out and are pretty easy to explain.*

“The first is the supposed timing of the flood according to the bible and the other is the evidence that we have for literary dependence. So with the first, if we go by the Old Testament we should have a worldwide flood sweeping over the land in the middle of the 3rd millennium BCE. Well, we know an awful lot about that time and there is uninterrupted culture during that period. We also have absolutely no hint that a massive flood swept over from the written documents which is fairly extensive from this period.

“Perhaps more damning though is the fact that we don't see the flood traditions forming in Mesopotamia until around the beginning of the 2nd millennium, half a millennium after the purported time of the flood event.

“We would have to believe that no one said anything about this massive flood for 500 years only to write about it in several different forms 500 years later. The other reason that literary dependence is certain is the amount of dependence that we see in the Old Testament outside of the flood story. The Old Testament draws from Ugaritic, Egyptian, and of course Mesopotamian texts in many different places so it is absolutely unsurprising to see it here.”

Excuse me, what did he say?

I skipped back to the beginning and watched the video again, and one more time after that. There is no other way to describe it. I was stunned. Mouth agape, remote in my hand, I stared at my TV.

The ancient texts, from the oldest, first known written language that predated the Hebrew Bible, had a singular word in its flood story that was used much later in the story of Noah. Like the student whose essay “borrowed” from the novel *Ishmael*, the writers of the Noah flood story borrowed much the much older story from Atra-Hasis and the Epic of Gilgamesh.

The proof for me was in a singular word – *kupru*
– borrowed from a language that was 1,000 years older.

For someone who was raised with the belief that the Holy Bible was true, this was a smoking gun. Aside from the mathematical and scientific reasons why the story of Noah’s Ark is an implausible story, thanks to [George Smith](#) and his translation more than 150 years ago, we know the truth.

The Noah story is fiction.

And if one story of the bible believed to be true is actually false, then there’s no reason to believe any of it is true. The more I learned, the more I found that to be the case. Even in the New Testament, Jesus talks about Noah. If the Son of God didn’t know Noah’s story was a remix of an older story, then the conclusion seemed very clear: all the Abrahamic

religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and all their derivatives) were total bullshit.

9

Anguish

And we are exhausted by all this pretending ...
– from the Sleep Token song, “**Higher**”



Realizing the truth is one thing; to accept it, is another.

I wrestled with this new discovery for a couple of days. It's not just that the flood story wasn't true, it's the implication it had on the rest of the bible. Jesus references the flood in Matthew 24 and Luke 17 as a description of what the world would be like before he returned in his *second coming*.

Since biblical scholars use Jesus' reference to the Noah story as evidence that he would have believed it to be true, I could only conclude that the Jesus story itself was in question.

There are no words to adequately describe the mental anguish that followed. I had been taught from an early age that the Holy Bible was absolutely true. Yes, literally true. A six-day creation (with a rest day, of course). Falling from

grace. Sin. Adversity, and redemption. Damnation. Apocalypse.

Is none of it true? Did humans create stories and along the way we started taking them as truth? Is that why what you believe is largely an accident of geography, your religion typically aligns with where you were raised as I was?

Did man create God?

It was a LOT to process. But I have so many answers and explanations for pro-Christian arguments! I can defend a burning bush and how a man survived in the belly of a big fish! I have answers that make sense to me!

I thumbed through a few more pages of the aforementioned book, [*"All That's Wrong With The Bible"*](#) by Jonah David Conner. I read a few more contradictions and cross referenced them with my copy of the bible. As I was brought up, *"When someone quotes you a scripture, you check it out in the bible to make sure they are telling the truth."*

Yeah, he was. The book was right. I was disgusted. I had believed a lie most of my life.

"I don't know what to call myself anymore. Oh, my ... am I an atheist?"

I had to get out of the house. Two blocks away is a favorite convenience store, so I put in my AirPods and put on some music to walk there to buy a pop (soda). I had been turned on to a new band rising the ranks in the world of heavy

metal, but a co-worker was adamant that this band was not, in fact, metal.

“I’ll give them a listen this weekend,” I told him.

I walked to the store, and on my way back the lyrics to the song *“Higher”* by the band Sleep Token hauntingly played in my ears.

“And we are exhausted by all this pretending ...”

In the darkness, at the top of a small hill that overlooked the modern architecture of a giant Walmart, I stopped. I slumped over, my hands on my knees to prop me up, I burst into tears.

“And we are exhausted by all this pretending ...”

I **was** exhausted.

The past few years of searching had come to a head. I realized my faith in God was nothing more than lying to myself, pretending I could afford the mental gymnastics necessary to justify my faith. It was intellectually dishonest to think any of this made sense. The contradictions, the mistranslations, the inconsistencies, the dogma ... all of it was a lie.

Finishing my walk home, I came in the door and told my wife I needed to talk to her.

“I don’t believe in God anymore,” I told her. *“I think I’m ... an atheist.”*

She agreed to let me take my time in figuring out how I was going to explain this to the kids, and we would work together to decide what this meant for us as a family. Will we still go to church, at least for the kids? I didn't want to disrupt their beliefs or their friendships made at church.

What about attending our small group? Those people were precious to us, but would we still be able to attend? Would we want to? How did my wife feel about all of this? Would it affect our marriage?

Questioning led me to this point, and now there were even more questions.

A few days passed, and I asked my oldest daughter to go on a walk with me to the same convenience store. As we walked, I told her about my journey, my research, and my conclusion that God was not real.

"Wow," she said to me. "That's huge. Your faith has been a big part of your whole life, right?"

"Yep," I said. "It has been."

"This is like coming out," she said.

Huh. My kids are so smart. She was right. This was me, "coming out" to my daughter. A day later, on July 15, 2024, I made a public post on my social media declaring I was an atheist.

When you become a Christian, one of the main ways to show your commitment to God and your belief in Jesus is to get baptized, a symbol showing to the world of your life-changing decision. The least I could do as part of my deconversion was a social media post. It felt right.

One of the best things about losing my faith is that my anger toward God about dad simply evaporated. It's hard to be mad at something that you don't think exists. Unbeknownst to me, the most agonizing aspect of losing my faith was still to come.

10


Uncomfortable Conversations

You say, “It’s in the past,” you drive straight ahead.

You’re thinkin’ that I hate you now.

‘Cause you still don’t know what I never said.

– from the Taylor Swift song, **“I Wish You Would”**

 ne of my longest relationships was with a very religious, very conservative, very fundamental Christian, whom I also consider to be very intelligent. We have shared so much together over the years, I really wanted to be open and honest with him about this major change.

We had that walking on eggshells conversation, which devolved into a mini debate of my positions for no longer believing. It wasn’t a great conversation, but I was hopeful that we could still be friends moving forward.

The small group my wife and I attended were on a summer break, but were meeting the following Sunday after my public declaration of unbelief. I reached out to the husband who helped lead the meeting and whose house we met at, and he encouraged me that it would still be OK to attend,

and that I should come ready for a discussion about my decision. I thought that sounded like a great idea.

Before that Sunday small group, I wrote out a document that had many of my reasons that led to my deconversion. I didn't have all the answers, and I wasn't really ready for any type of Hitchens-esque debate on the topic, but I was ready to have that uncomfortable conversation with the group.

It didn't go how I hoped. I felt like a zoo animal as I told the group of people I loved that the main bond that united us was no longer attached to me.

The conversation was civil, although at one point the discussion of evolution and how it was "just a theory" came up by one of the group members. That discussion felt tense, and I wasn't really prepared to talk about evolution since, with all honesty, I didn't know much about it.

Some Christians have a very difficult time accepting evolution, as many find it incompatible with the theology of God and human existence. I was still learning and couldn't speak on that topic with any deep knowledge, and I especially couldn't talk about something like the Big Bang.

It should be noted there are some more progressive believers who do believe in the Big Bang and evolution, and much of that comes from taking the Holy Bible more metaphorically than as literal truth. I'm sure a lot of this comes from my upbringing in an evangelical church that believed the Holy Bible as the literal truth, but I reject this way of thinking about the bible.

For one, there is no method for differentiating literal from metaphorical passages in the bible unless it's explicitly stated in the text. And secondly, if you read the Holy Bible slowly and thoughtfully, it's easy to come to the conclusion that the God of the bible is a narcissistic, bloodthirsty monster who interacts with humans for his own amusement regardless of what happens to them. The God of the bible offers no objective morality: rules for thee and not for me are certainly not objective.

Oh sure, you might think the story of Adam and Eve is a metaphor, but how does one determine that? What metric could lead you to that conclusion by reading the text? Did believers in the past think the texts were metaphorical or literal? I think progressive religious believers are actually made up of humanists who have a hard time accepting the concept of "no gods exist." In general, I like these types of believers better because they have greater levels of empathy for their fellow humans. But, I digress ...

I didn't feel like I needed to have all the answers. But I did think that the answers I had been given throughout the course of my life were insufficient or wrong, and that was a good enough starting point for me. If that conversation were to happen today, I would certainly have better answers.

Not long after that, I realized I couldn't stick around. I tried watching a few sermons, but found they were filled with logical fallacies and the same mental gymnastics used to justify the existence of God that I now saw as completely false. In addition, my attempts to keep a couple of

friendships were in vain. I wanted to be heard. I wanted to show what I had learned, and how I came to my conclusions. Those opportunities didn't happen in a way I needed, and the consequence was the ending of relationships.


A month after my public declaration, the family took a road trip for a mini weekend vacation. We went to a concert, visited a science museum, and ate wonderful food. During one meal, the family talked about whether or not we should keep attending church. I wanted the kids to have a say in that decision since it would impact them the most.

The decision was unanimous: we were done attending church, and we would forge a new path forward. After decades of belief, I was done, and my family was with me.

11

What I Believe Now

*He had a lot to say.
He had a lot of nothing to say.
We'll miss him.*
– from the Tool song, “**Eulogy**”

oday, my beliefs about the world are very different from how I have believed for most of my life.

My beliefs now align with commonly-held rationale by a consensus of experts who have devoted their lives to studying the evidence of our natural world, and for the most part, I agree with those findings.

A few quick definitions from Webster’s Dictionary that many religious believers get absolutely wrong:

- **Hypothesis:** a tentative assumption made in order to draw out and test its logical or empirical consequences.
- **Theory:** a general principle or set of principles that explains facts or events of the natural law.
- **Law:** a statement of an order or relation of phenomena that, so far as is known, is invariable under the given conditions.

How It All Began

The Big Bang theory is overwhelmingly accepted by the scientific community for how the universe began.

It's the leading explanation that suggests the universe began from a very hot, very dense singularity, and then rapidly expanded. It can be explained by a massive, rapid explosion when everything began.

What caused it? I have no idea. What came before it? I have no idea. But I can't accept "*God did it*" because there is no good evidence for that, only stories in an ancient book that I have found to be discredited as true.

Personally, I believe the Big Bang was a continuation of events already in motion. Although it may have been the start to where we are right now, it's possible that something existed before the Big Bang, but we do not yet know what that something looked like.

A syllogism I hang my hat on goes like this:

- Something cannot come from nothing.
- Something exists.
- Therefore, there is no need for a creator deity because something has *always* existed and will always exist.

How We Got Here

The Big Bang led to the eventual formation of everything, including earth. We can date the earth to about 4.5 billion years. We know this because we have lead.

I have a lead bar that I keep not only as a paperweight, but also to remind me of this truth.

Here's some fun science:

- Uranium-238 has a half-life of about 4.5 billion years.
- Uranium-238 decays into Radium-226, which then decays into Radon-222.
- Radon-222 decays into Polonium-218.
- Polonium-218 finally decays into a stable nuclide, lead.
- Because we have lead on Earth, we know it came through a decay chain that spans 4.5 billion years.

Over a very long amount of time, through many subtle changes over the timeline, homo sapiens – an upright walking species – likely began around 315,000 years ago in Africa.

Evolution is true. We are related to animals; we didn't come from monkeys, but they are definitely cousins. I bet that family reunion would be quite a party.

Morality

Secular humanism now shapes my worldview. It rejects religion in exchange for reason. It rejects dogma in exchange for data. It rejects supernaturalism in exchange for naturalistic explanations. It rejects objective morality in exchange for a subjective one.

There are different versions of belief systems that float around in the world, and most of them focus on not harming others. Here's an example of one I found:

1. *One should strive to act with compassion and empathy toward all creatures in accordance with reason.*
2. *The struggle for justice is an ongoing and necessary pursuit that should prevail over laws and institutions.*
3. *One's body is inviolable, subject to one's own will alone.*
4. *The freedoms of others should be respected, including the freedom to offend. To willfully and unjustly encroach upon the freedoms of another is to forgo one's own.*
5. *Beliefs should conform to one's best scientific understanding of the world. One should take care never to distort scientific facts to fit one's beliefs.*
6. *People are fallible. If one makes a mistake, one should do one's best to rectify it and resolve any harm that might have been caused.*
7. *Every tenet is a guiding principle designed to inspire nobility in action and thought. The spirit of compassion, wisdom, and justice should always prevail over the written or spoken word.*

Those are pretty good, right? Plot twist: Those are the Seven Fundamental Tenets of The Satanic Temple, an organization that has zero belief in an actual entity called "Satan" and uses provocative imagery for shock value to help get their message out. On a personal note, I think that approach is too off putting for many and the message gets lost, but I understand the assignment.

In contrast, the Ten Commandments of the Holy Bible have three commandments that center on the biblical God, and none about bodily autonomy, women's rights, or condemning slavery.

Ultimately, I believe suffering is an unwanted action, and I should live my life to minimize suffering for myself and others. I have failures, but I keep trying to improve.

By having empathy for others, by putting myself in their shoes and looking at the world through their eyes, I gain understanding of another person's life experience, and should conduct myself in a manner that doesn't negatively impact another or cause suffering.

What Happens After We Die

One day, my body will expire. My body will decay and revert to a state of nothingness as it was before I was born.

There is no soul, no heaven, no hell, no gods, no devils, and no sin.

Consciousness is a product of our brain's complex neural activity. When those activities cease, so goes consciousness.

This belief is probably the biggest one to me. It helps me to look at every day as a gift. I am here because my parents made me through conception, like their parents, and their parents, and so on.

We have one precious, unique life, and I don't want to waste it.

Life is a collection of experiences, and then the party's over. Enjoy the party, and try not to harm yourself and others while you're at it.

12

Epilogue

“I’ve never been so alone, and I’ve never been so alive.”

– from the Third Eye Blind song, “**Motorcycle Drive By**”

In the year since my deconversion from Christianity, I have experienced a lot of personal growth. It wasn’t without various degrees of pain. Unquestionably, losing my faith has been one of the most difficult but also one of best things to happen to me.

I wish I could say that it was a choice to not be a believer anymore, but that really isn’t accurate. I wanted to believe. I wanted to stay. My friends, routines, and third spaces were all obliterated after I lost my religion. It was not my intention to walk away from it all, but I couldn’t ignore the things I had learned that previously were hidden away from my understanding.

In the end, belief just simply left me, and I was left with a choice: stay and go along with the charade, or leave and see what happens.

My acquaintances from my days as a believer have, for the most part, gone away. Some of them left me. Some of them, I chose to leave. I have struggled with being frustrated with

them. Why are they not curious? Why won't you have a conversation with me that goes deep into this topic? Why do you stick your head in the ground instead of being curious?

It's frustrating, and it has been lonely.

Now I work to rebuild what I have lost. I would like a community of people who care for each other simply because we exist, not because of a shared belief in a God. I want to be around people who look out for each other not out of duty, but because of empathy.

A common fallacious saying is, "*I don't have enough faith to be an atheist.*"

I don't have enough hate in my heart to be a Christian.

Oddly enough, I find myself now to be more compassionate for others – dare I say more *Christlike* – than when I was a believer. We're all here trying to get through this life on a water-soaked rock that has *at least* 99 ways to die on it.

Now I try to live my life more fully, and by offering more empathy and compassion to others than most Christians give to those who aren't like them.

My education has continued, and keeps going strong. I read books. I continue to watch videos with debates and themes on religious topics. I find religion fascinating, as I see it now as a form of protoscience: a way humanity tried to explain the natural world around them before learning how things work.

I even continue to read the Holy Bible. Nightly, I read a chapter or two with one of my kids. We go slowly. We talk about what we read, read the footnotes in the study bible I read from, and talk about the stories. She will be well prepared when someone tries to shove religion down her throat in the future to say, *"No thanks. I don't believe in fairy tales."*

Although my faith was a part of my upbringing, I don't think negatively about my parents for how I was raised. They were a victim of the same generational mind virus known as religion, and the infection spread until I found the cure: by asking questions and demanding good evidence.

After years of suffering from Alzheimer's, dad died on Jan. 7, 2025. I spoke at his funeral, shifting away from religious platitudes and instead opting to tell about how his life impacted friends, me, my family, and the many people he encountered in his life. It was also notable the people who he used to attend church with who *weren't* there. When I asked why his former pastor wasn't there, someone said, *"Probably because he isn't getting paid to be here."*

Sick burn.

Dad's funeral was both sad and incredibly beautiful. He lived a full life. He did a great job raising my sister and me. He and mom were excellent, loving parents. I never felt unsafe. I always felt cared for. And now, like mom before him, he has returned to the state he was before being born,

and the neural processes which made up consciousness ceased to be.

And with that, I have peace. He came, he saw, and now he rests.

As for faith, I consider myself fortunate to have finally broken free.

Recently I [came across a video](#) by Alex O’Conner, who interviewed Rhett McLaughlin, a former Christian and social media personality. At the beginning of the video, McLaughlin said something that caught my attention, as it mirrors my everyday experience.

“The evangelical Christian part of my brain will never go away,” he said. *“It’s always there.”*

There’s a scar on my leg acquired from a camping trip last year. Although I’ve cut myself many times in my life, a vast majority of those wounds healed without even a trace of visual damage. This was not the case with this injury: the scar is prominent, and I see it every day.

In the same way, the imprint left by my former faith is a constant presence in my mind. I think about it every day, multiple times a day. I daydream about feeling “normal,” where I go through the day like someone who has never believed. I would wake up, get ready for work, and drive and have a rich, full day surrounded by curious, smart humans that “fart around and find out” to see what can be built, what can be discovered, and what can be dreamed up.

Then I would return home, workout, spend time with my family, and enjoy my downtime. I would experience new things, enjoy hobbies old and new, and expand my knowledge of the world. I would create and destroy and create again. I would find ways to help others, and I would be in a community that I could also rely on for help when needed.

In this daydream, my days of faith would never enter my head. I would never have thought something imaginary was real, and I would suck the marrow from the bones of life without even a thought of a God who would send me to eternal hell just because I wasn't convinced of His existence.

Unfortunately, that's just a dream. It never goes away.

It's always there.

Resources

Books

- [All That's Wrong With The Bible](#) by Jonah David Conner
- [Divorcing Religion: A Memoir and Survival Handbook](#) by Janice Selby
- [Why I Am Not a Christian: Four Conclusive Reasons to Reject the Faith](#) by Dr. Richard Carrier
- [Four Disturbing Questions with One Simple Answer: Breaking the Spell of Christian Belief](#) by Tim Sledge
- [We of Little Faith: Why I Stopped Pretending to Believe \(and Maybe You Should Too\)](#) by Kate Cohen
- [The Atheist Handbook to the Old Testament: Volume 1](#) by Dr. Josh Bowen
- [The Atheist Handbook to the Old Testament: Volume 2](#) by Dr. Josh Bowen
- [The Four Horsemen: The Conversation That Sparked an Atheist Revolution](#) by various
- [Outgrowing God: A Beginner's Guide to Atheism](#) by Richard Dawkins
- [Misquoting Jesus](#) by Bart Ehrman
- [Why The Bible Began](#) by Jacob L. Wright

YouTube Channels

- [Paulogia](#)
- [Deconstruction Zone](#)
- [MythVision TV](#)
- [Dan McClellan](#)
- [Alex O'Conner](#)
- [NonStampCollector](#)

- [Mister Deity](#)
- [Darante' LeMar](#)
- [Joe Read Bible](#)
- [Aron Ra](#)
- [Forrest Valkai](#)
- [Seth Andrews](#)
- [Mindshift](#)

Instagram

- [Eve Was Framed](#)
- [Chat Chat With Kellie](#)
- [Jesus Unfollower](#)
- [Cult Life Escaped](#)
- [Brian Recker](#)
- [Deconstruction Girl](#)
- [Sam Harris](#)
- [Christian Nightmares](#)
- [Renegade Science Teacher](#)
- [The Strongwilled Child](#)
- [Memoirs Of A Heretic](#)
- [The Atheist Sasquatch](#)
- [Godless Mom](#)
- [Bart Ehrman](#)
- [Anti_theist_v1.0](#)
- [No Nonsense Spirituality](#)
- [Skeptic Human](#)

Podcasts

- [Heaven Bent](#)
- [The Cult of Christianity](#)
- [Data Over Dogma](#)
- [The Excommunication Station](#)
- [Good Christian Fun](#)
- [I Hate James Dobson](#)
- [I Was A Teenage Fundamentalist](#)
- [Making Sense](#)
- [Heretic Happy Hour](#)
- [Straight White American Jesus](#)
- [The Thinking Atheist](#)
- [Sunday School Dropouts](#)

Organizations

- [The Clergy Project](#)
- [Freedom From Religion Foundation](#)
- [Recovering From Religion](#)
- [American Atheists](#)

Favorites

- [Why I Left Christianity](#)
- [Before Noah: The Truth They Don't Teach You In Church](#)
- [Satan's Guide To The Bible](#)
- [The Absurdity Of Life With Jesus](#)
- [Did Jesus Fulfill Prophecy?](#)
- [The LIED To You About The Psalm 22 Prophecy](#)
- [The Greatest God Debate In History](#)
- [A Discussion About Hell](#)
- [Archaeological Finds for the Old Testament](#)
- [How Archaeology Disproves Noah's Flood](#)

- NonStampCollector: Noah's Ark ([Part 1](#), [Part 2](#))



About the Author

Eric J Gruber is a husband, dad, cat wrangler, concert junkie, technologist, musician, and author. He lives in Kansas City, Missouri, U.S., home of the best damn BBQ you can eat.

If you've found a typo, error, or just want to drop me a line, send me an email at <https://www.ericjgruber.net/contact/>.