

My Journey into Christianity

Richard W. Kelly

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Christianity*

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THANK YOU

I would like to thank my loving wife Kara Kelly for keeping me motivated to keep writing throughout this project.

Embarking on a Spiritual Journey

I have been saying for a few years now that I need to re-examine my spiritual beliefs. I can't say that I am a practicing, believing Christian. Do I believe in God? In a way. Do I believe in Jesus? In a way.

I grew up going to church on an inconsistent basis, but still had a generally Christian upbringing. I was more than fine to believe it up through elementary school. Then in Junior High I decided to "explore". I tested the waters with mostly naturist religions, but none of them really made sense. I went back to blind Christian faith and just accepted things. Then a bit later in college I really questioned everything. And over lots of self-reflection I decided it didn't make any sense.

I sat with logic and experience as my religion. I rejected the idea in general that God could exist. I rejected the idea that there could be a resurrection. I rejected the thought of an afterlife. I thought I had come to some logical conclusions that others just hadn't reached yet. In short I truly thought that at twenty some odd years old, I had progressed spiritually more than the millions of people throughout the world who have religious beliefs.

As I clung to this idea I continued to mature. And through this process I became more open to larger ideas. Through certain experiences that I could not explain through logic and beliefs I had that my mind could not fully grasp I found that there was room for more than just what I could see and feel. It was this time I realized, that I was not smarter and more developed than nearly every person in the world. No, if there are millions of people who believe in God, I am missing something. There is a conclusion I have not come to, something I haven't realized yet.

So, I started to look, started to question all over again. It probably has a lot to do with my upbringing and the community I live in, but I tended to go back to Christianity. Sure, I looked into some eastern religions, and pagan religions, but Christianity is what keeps drawing me.

In the last few years, I have been asking people why. Why do you believe? What makes you keep that faith and not sway? And the question that has been really intriguing me, why the Bible?

This last one is something that I tend to not find answers to. There seems to be a lot of “just because” answers. What is it about the Bible that they believe is Divine? Or is it just that is what is taught. Is it just the trust in the priests who canonized it or do most people feel their faith as they read? And what about the Apocrypha? Could there be anything not canonized that is just as divine?

After a while I started to realize that although I keep asking, and truly listening to what others had to say, the one thing I hadn’t done was take the leap. I had not decided to go to church and read the bible and see if it speaks to me.

Now, I am not a jump in head first type of person. My first foray into this attempt was to try to put trust in God. I tried to thank God and do what I felt I should to praise God.

This was not the smartest thing to do first. With a lack of real belief, I felt like I was playing make believe, but everything in my life got better, quickly. Got a new job, met some great new friends, finally could pay our bills again, and even were able to give our kids a good Christmas. Then, as usual, I started to forget to focus on God and things started to slide back to not as good.

The new plan is to try again from a deeper perspective. My family and I have started going to church and I am going to start reading the Bible. I will use this as a medium to share my experience, my discoveries, my confusions...

But before I jump off I think it is important to define where I am starting from.

My belief in God... I believe in an all-powerful being. But, I do not believe that being is sentient. I see this being as energy. All the energy in the universe is what I think of as God. I see this energy as having a purpose, but not a self-awareness.

My belief in the Bible... I always saw the Bible as a collection of stories passed down from person to person in an attempt to make sense out of the world. More or less I felt they were fairy tales.

My belief in time... I feel that time is not necessarily linear. I always found it hard to explain, but I will give it a go. I picture existence as a flip book. You know, when you draw a picture on a bunch of pages

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and can create animation through flipping those pages? Imagine that in three dimensions. Where every possible outcome for every decision ever made is already pre-existent. It is a massive three dimensional flip book that from a stand still just looks like a jumble of mass. But if you could fly through this clog of confusion, or flip the pages, you would see motion and life as we see it. This was always my way of explaining the idea that a divine plan exists, which always made sense to me, while at the same time we all have free will, which I also believe.

My belief in Jesus... Yes, I believe he lived. Yes, I believe he was crucified. Yes, I believe his followers believed he was the son of God. No, I do not think he was the son of God.

Well, that felt blasphemous. I better get started before I'm stuck by lightning.

Bible Read: Haven't started yet

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The Old Testament

Genesis

Genesis 1 – Courage....

I started! Go me! Now, truthfully, I only read the first chapter of Genesis and there was no ah ha moment. There were no questions that arose leaving me wanting more guidance. There was nothing more than the same old same old on the first day stuff that I have read a thousand times.

BUT!

I did want to talk about courage. Just deciding to write this has given me a new respect for people wearing their faith on their sleeve. Whether you believe or not, there is a lot of hate out there.

I am not saying I have any negative responses or reactions to what I am doing, but I was wary about writing it in the first place. I have a lot of family and a few friends that are Christian. Seeing as how I grew up in a somewhat of a backsliding Christian household, I felt I was risking a lot by bringing light to the idea that faith hasn't resonated with me. Not so much worried about being disowned or anything like that, but worried about people looking at me different.

On the other side, I also know a lot of people who are generally anti-religion. I know people who are very confident in their lives and opinions who feel that religion is nothing but fairy tales and wishful thinking. And for those people I was nervous to let them know. I was nervous to have them think I was endeavoring into non-sense. I was nervous that I would kill my credibility with them.

In the end I said, I am doing it as it matters to me. I want my children to grow up with a confident father who can speak on his faith. I want to be at one with my own faith. And I want to be able to speak to others about my own beliefs and help them through anything I can.

But as I was trying to decide if I should take the plunge publicly, it made me realize that Christians are ridiculed a lot more often than I had thought. It seems popular media, movies, news, celebrities, and countless other venues like to use Christianity specifically as a whipping post for their jokes and mockery. Not something that really bothers me, as I tend to like sharp humor, but again it made me build more respect

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for those who are open about their faith with any and every one. And especially respect those who will proselytize with strangers.

Bible Read: Genesis 1

Adam, Eve, Just Little Kids?

I figured out today that if you read 4 or so chapters a day, you can get through the Bible in less than a year. WOOT! So I am off and running.

I've read the first 4 chapters of Genesis, see a theme here?

Something I thought was confusing; in Genesis it says that God created the sky to separate the water. I understand the water in the oceans, but what about the water above the sky? I remember one of my priests growing up believed that before the great flood there was a sphere of water that surrounded the earth. He had a PHD in some sort of science, biology or physics which he got before he went to seminary. But he tried to explain how it would have extended life spans and lowered UV... I don't really remember what all he said and it was way over my head at ten years old, but the passage reminded me.

Now, I know that a lot of people are strict believers that the Bible is 100% literal and others feel it is metaphoric and seeing as how I don't know a ton about it, I can't say either way or if I even believe what it says. BUT I was reading the story of Adam and Eve...

It struck me as a metaphor for growing up. With being carefree as a child and then when you grow up you understand the difference between right and wrong, you see your own sins, and are banished from the carefree world of childhood.

I don't know exactly what eating the apple represents in my metaphor, maybe sex, which is what came to mind. But I feel funny thinking of the Bible being that suggestive with symbolism as crude as a serpent convincing Eve to eat the apple would be.

I find that to be a comforting idea though. It makes it feel as though the land of Eden wasn't really torn from humanity as much as it was something that had to go away, something that is grown out of when we become more aware. And in that way it makes sense that Eden is viewed as something lost as childhood is something that is always missed once you lose it.

Hermitness

Last week in church the pastor was speaking about belonging or the importance of being involved in a supportive, religious community.

One of the reasons I continue to get drawn into religion is because each time I give it a chance I receive messages that are actually useful to me personally. Remembering this idea, I believe this was a good and important sermon for me to hear.

My wife is big on friendships and getting involved. I, on the other hand, am not very fond of knowing or hanging out with large groups of people. I consider myself a homebody and prefer to have a small number of friends. If I could choose to go to a party with twenty people I know or having a nice conversation with one or two people I know, I will pick the one or two people 99% of the time.

So, when it comes to church I have always disliked the idea of socializing at church. In my own head, I thought it was somewhat disrespectful to God throwing in your personal social time into the time set aside to worship him!

The sermon last Sunday was largely about the importance of community and how having supportive and likeminded people around you as you take this spiritual journey can aid in your discoveries. On top of that, he expounded with the benefits of having people in your life that care. He talked about how it can help in your life when other issues come up. He talked about how it can help in a financial crisis or to help your children make friends.

After we left and throughout this week while I have been contemplating the lessons from the sermon, I realized how it can also help you to grasp onto one of those common Christian principles.... Love thy neighbor. Building a large group of friends and getting to know them and help them would most likely increase my opinion of humanity. And why would you not want to form your own circle of people with those who aspire to be as loving and good as they can. (I am not saying

they all will achieve this or even understand it fully, but it is the thought that counts, right?)

This all hit me pretty hard. I know it is a normal thing for most people to want to have a large circle of friends, but my introvertedness pushes me in the opposite direction. And, my hardheadedness has in the past convinced me that it is better for me to foster this seclusion because it is just who I am. I have a history of discouraging my own growth.

It is a simple positive of focusing on religion in my life that I focus on growing as a person in more than just one way. It helps me keep my eye on the ball and become a better and well-rounded person.

Bible Read: Genesis 14

I Guess No One is Perfect

When I was younger and I would read parts of the Old Testament, I would always come away with the comment of “God is mean!” As I’ve gotten older I can see more into these scriptures and although some of the time God seems a bit insecure with the “testing” of his faithful, he does seem to be a forgiving and giving God. But, now as an adult, the question that keeps popping up in my head is how can these fathers be so mean to their children?

I am sure this is somewhat of a generational gap, but I could never do half the things to my children that the men in Genesis do to theirs.

I am afraid I am having an issue with reading the Bible, in which I am only reading it from one person’s perspective as opposed to seeing it through the eyes of everyone involved. I appear to have a tendency to only see things through the eyes of who I see as the victim.

Like in Genesis 27 where Jacob pretends to be Esau to steal his blessing, I as a reader feel complete contempt for Abraham for not loving both his sons equally, for Rebekah for making her son Jacob deceive his father, for Jacob for going through with it, but not for Jacob. I feel nothing but sympathy for Jacob.

This is one of those things that confuse me with the Bible in general. I tend to have a lot of negative emotions while reading these stories, when I assumed I would be feeling more love towards all the characters.

Bible Read: Genesis 31

God Personified

*A*t church yesterday, the sermon was about making changes on the inside.

He said that just going to church more does not make you a better person, a better Christian. But that it is change in your mind and heart that actually affects the person you are. He said that quitting drinking or going to church weekly or not cheating on your spouse are just outward changes and if there is no change within your mindset you are not growing spiritually.

He used the metaphor of a corporation. If a corporation that is run terribly, bad to their employees and customer decides to remake their brand, only changing their logo and remodeling their stores, they are still a terribly run corporation. They did not change who they were just how they appeared.

He said to change from within it needs to begin with an abounding love for God. You should ask and pray to God to help you learn of him and change for him. And that would be the way to have true spiritual change.

I like the message. It speaks to me as I want to truly understand. But, I am having some slight issues with the passages I have recently read.

It seems as though a love for God is not enough. I am quickly falling under the impression that to follow the messages of the Bible you need to vocalize your views on God. You need to speak, literally, to God and walk your faith as much as you believe it in your head.

I have been moving this way because of a few specific stories. Adam and Eve eat the fruit from the tree of knowledge and then hide themselves as they become aware of their nakedness. It is the hiding of their nakedness that tips off God. He asks Adam why he is hiding before he says what Adam has done. Then in Genesis 22 when Abraham goes to sacrifice Isaac, God lets him nearly kill his son in order to test his obedience or devotion to him.

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These passages seem to speak against a long held belief I have in Christianity. The idea is that God hears your prayers. God hears your thoughts. And that God knows what is going on with you. I am not sure where this idea came from, but it seems apparent in Genesis that the people were not heard by God in their thoughts. They had to speak out loud to talk to god. They had to prove things through their actions as opposed to God knowing their intentions.

A simple idea such as this moves God to a more realistic venue in my mind. As an actual being who needs the affirmation and relies on direct communication makes sense to me. It also morphs what I thought I would find in the Bible. I was hoping to bring the God that I trusted in as a child back to the forefront. I wanted to lie in bed and pray, in my mind, to God and feel the comfort that I am handing over my problems that I can't handle to someone who could help.

I am not saying the Bible has hurt all those aspects of this vision, but it seems as though things are changing in ways I didn't expect.

Bible Read: Genesis 38

There is Something to be Said for Tradition

*T*he church we have been attending is non-denominational. I think I may have said before that it is largely music, Christian Rock, and a sermon.

I appreciate this to a degree as it doesn't feel monotonous and repetitive. It always feels like a different day. The music is different from week to week, sometimes with different musicians on stage. The sermon of course changes from week to week and still gives you a glimpse into the scriptures.

But, seeing as how I grew up in the Episcopal Church, I am used to thinking of "church" as a full mass every week. Full mass in the Episcopal Church being a reading from both the Old and New Testaments, plenty of hymns, a sermon, communion, and some standard prayers, found in the Book of Common Prayer. Now going through the Holy Eucharist every single week takes a toll on you, especially as a child. Church seems boring, to say the least.

Now, I find myself missing the full mass. We have been going to church for about a month now and the lack of standardized prayer, communion, the reading of psalms, the sitting, the standing, the kneeling, well, I kind of miss it. Now don't get me wrong I do not want to do this every single Sunday, but I think it is a good experience every so often.

It could be my curiosity of history and how I love seeing how things were done way back in the day. It could also be my need for some kind of structure. Either way I think there is a lot to gain from a congregation led in prayer. I think there are great experiences that can be had singing a hymn along with a choir. I think kneeling before a cross and taking communion can be as eye opening as anything else in religion.

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I need to start finding one day to go to traditional mass. Maybe on Wednesdays, I know there are churches that do that on Wednesdays. I don't want to go every week, maybe once a month, but not on holidays. I never understood the holiday only church goers.

I think I need some of the tradition to feel more connected to God and the Bible. Otherwise it almost feels as if the God I am reading about is not the God I am going to church to worship.

Bible Read: Genesis 42

To Love Your Child

I read my first Bible story that really spoke to me. I believe I had said I don't know a lot of Bible stories and I wasn't kidding.

The story of Joseph was absolutely amazing. The reason it was so moving was because of the emotions that I went through in reading it. Having his brothers, his own family, sell him off and claim him as dead was heart wrenching. I cannot imagine family turning on me.

Then he goes to Egypt and makes his way out of prison to rise to power as the interpreter of dreams. I really felt the redemption for his life. But, when his brothers came as he foretold I was ready for the vengeance. I had got used to the stories of the Bible being full of Karma and revenge, but Joseph was different. He brought his family back and reunited them and overlooked their faults because he could see his greater purpose. He understood that it had to happen and he saved thousands instead of having an easy life. Finally, an amazing tale with forgiveness.

The thing is, it was more than that. There was so much respect for talent in the story with the Pharaoh trusting in Joseph. There was love between families and for those who had wronged each other. And, most of all the interaction between Jacob and Joseph and his sons really cemented the reality of the story.

It was so invigorating to read Jacob bless Joseph's sons. Although I earlier felt that the men of the Bible were mean and harsh to their children, I see the difference now. The respect from son to father AND father to son was so great in this book that the harsh punishments were reactions to a disrespect to the most deeply rooted love for one another. It seems these were done as man who is hurt by betrayal.

I don't feel today there is such an expectation of children that there was in Genesis. And in the same, I don't think there is as much of an expectation of parents either. The idea that a blessing from the father meant the world to these people really says something.

Bible Read: Genesis 50

Status Report Day 7

I am seven days into reading the Bible and I have finished the Book of Genesis. I always thought the Book of Genesis was about the beginnings. Specifically, the beginning of man and the world, but it is truly about the ancestry of Moses and the origin of the Israelites.

The stories are all over the span the interest. There are boring ones, sad ones, scary ones, and a great one. The book ends well and, as much as I didn't expect it, it is very inspirational. It is one of those books that make you glad to be a human. Probably even more glad to be an Israelite.

The first five books of the Bible are supposed to be written by Moses. I always thought that was just speculation, but in reading, it makes sense. The Book of Genesis is a family tree of sorts. I have personally enjoyed making a family tree and collecting stories of my own ancestors and that is what this is. Moses has recorded the stories of his family. All the "begat"s make sense because he is recording the tree.

My views have not changed drastically. I have not had a bad day since I started reading though. I still question if God exists. I still feel there is a great possibility that the earlier stories in the Bible are old word of mouth myths. But I'm starting to think that only is true of the first half of Genesis.

Adam and Eve seem to me to be the Big Bang Theory or the Theory of Evolution of its time. I am currently thinking it is a theory that was generally accepted over a large period of time over a large consensus of people. The stories of Noah probably refer to real events that were manipulated incidentally by the story coming down over years and years. But as you get closer to the years of the author himself, the stories are closer to first and have had less time to skew from memory.

I am enjoying the journey and hope that it continues to surprise me. I also hope there is a little more explanation about a couple things.

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1. Why God seems to refer to himself as we at times?
2. Who are the Nephilim?

Bible Read: Genesis