

Alone In Fundiville

Tonight DW and I had some great discussion around...

7Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. He who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. 8He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. 9No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God. 10This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; ~ I John 3
and...

8If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. 9If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 10If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives. ~ I John 1
Touching on the edge of stuff. I was careful, ever so careful.

I won't go into detail as it is late and I'm tired but, there was a bit of a cognitive breakthrough. She now sees I am searching, reading the Bible more than ever (somehow I even managed to get by with saying "skeptically, analytically, and intensely with expectation of answers"), asking God for questions, and that I am frustrated.

We also had some other good conversation and I also believe I successfully reaffirmed how important she is to me. Somehow interwoven into the conversation, I told her as I go for my morning run every morning, I am most thankful for two things - another sunrise, another day that I get to live and just to be alive, and having her in my life.

I am so thankful for her in my life.

Tonight was a baby step. But a successful baby step at that.

Had a few more good conversations with my wife.

She now knows that I'm having a spiritual crisis and I believe she believes me to be sincere.

I don't really feel like replaying conversation as it is too personal and private but I have put my feelings out there.

I also have come to accept myself for how hard this is.

I am accepting the loss as grief. And it is truly grief. God was close and it is hard to say goodbye.

The other morning on my morning run, I thought...

This is like saying goodbye to a loved one when they die.

But isn't, wasn't, God more important than I person.

Yeah, I think I did believe that. At least at many times.

Yeah, it takes some people years to get over the loss of a significant other.

Wow. There's no way I can handling losing my God and my wife.

Careful. Careful. Be very careful. Don't blow it. You know how important your wife is.

Yeah, it takes some years to grieve the loss of a loved one.

Yeah, that's what I'm doing. Grieving. Grieving the loss of someone I love/loved. God.

That he was imaginary doesn't make this grief any less real does it.

No, not really.

Wow, imagine if you lost your best friend and nobody knew and you couldn't tell anyone.

No wonder this has been eating at me and has been so hard.

Just accept it. It's OK to grieve. Take your time.

And figure out who you can talk to. You need to talk to someone.

Yes, I do.

And so went the conversation in my head the other morning on my run. I can't imagine how people manage stress in life any more without running.

Lord, we thank you for this meal and we pray that you would bless this food to our bodies. Specifically, I ask that you would lower the glycemic index of the flour and sugar in these waffles so as to keep our blood sugar stable and put at bay the risk of diabetes. I also ask that you would reduce, even eliminate, the cholesterol in the butter of these waffles as well to protect our hearts. Thank you for this food and we ask that you bless it to our bodies. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.



I was stuck in a situation where I had to pray. And that's what just came out of my mouth. [It was taken w]ith silence.

Just trying to make people **think**. Thinking is good.

Perhaps they'll start thinking a bit more. Perhaps they'll stop asking me to pray a bit more. Perhaps they'll initiate a "confrontational" conversation with me. If they do that, they will have *thought* about what they were going to say. And perhaps even wrestled with a few scriptures and perhaps even tried to reconcile with modern

understanding of health, disease, nutrition, and healing.

These are all good outcomes.

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Of this list I've read Finding Darwin's God. I've also read Francis S. Collins' *The Language of God* which is similar in many regards, but coming at it more from a genetic perspective. I personally found the science interesting but the integrity of the apologetics much, much less than what I was really hoping for at the time.

I looked the others up on Amazon. Barr looks interesting but I would hope it to be much more than more God-of-the-gaps and mystification of the anthropic principle. Plus there's a long ways from the physicist's "God" to any specific religion, set of doctrines, or canons.

Traveling Mercies looks to be testimony based upon **somebody else's** personal experiences and anecdotal evidence. This is exactly what I am suspecting leads to false belief, false doctrine, etc. Either God's gonna need to start showing some real evidence or start showing me some personal first-hand, convincing-it's-not-my-own-imagination, personal experience. I will follow God when and if he presents himself. I am not going to follow or fear man. Neither one from the present era (with both Ted Haggard and Carlton Pearson being former pastors) nor from the unevidenced-as-other-than-myth writers and men of faith from other eras.

Norris looks interesting. Amazon.com says, "Norris is a feminist, a theological conservative, a sophisticate, and a country bumpkin. And she's one of the few living Christian writers who can be described as truly great." That sounds like an intriguing person. Like someone you'd want to have dinner with. I'll make note of this.

I'm not at all familiar with Chesterton and I think that might be a good read. But as I posted here back, I need to re-read *Mere Christianity* soon first.

Morris looks interesting too.

I think of the list you gave me, I'll put Morris toward the top.

Anyhow, right now I'm reading:

- Michael Crichton's [Next](#). Though I don't read too much fiction.
- Danny Dreyer's [Chi Running](#). Hey, this morning's run was 5 km at a 6:51 min/mi pace and that's with a head cold and with running 10 miles yesterday.
- John Bevere's [Driven by Eternity](#). A evangelical fundamentalist evangelist's allegory on eternal life.

Plus I'm busy making my own personalized annotated Bible!

Anyhow, I'll probably wrap those up and move on to a *Mere Christianity* re-read next.

Reading Lewis 20 years ago in college is what first put holes in my faith. I'll probably annotate up every page of it reading it again. I am so curious about what I will question, observe, think, and ponder this time around...

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Von Rick, thanks for stopping by.

This multi-year pursuit of Truth has been a part-time job.

Gotta balance it with everything else in life. Sheesh, it would all be so much easier if I we're so inquisitive.

I'm looking forward to this week's bible study.

Last week's was quite interesting. I even got a "with your questions, could you write them down in advance so that we can..."

Man, I just popped right back with a "these are very good questions, in fact, how can you not have a doctrinal discussion about 'the church' without discussing these things." The topic was "the church." The week's leader was off on some obscure, mystical verses out of Hebrews. I kept asking questions about "who the 'church' is" in the context of Protestantism vs. Catholicism vs. Orthodoxy vs. Restorationism, the Great Schism, the significance of sharing communion, the significance of baptism, ...

I gotta be careful to not cross the line too far. Plus force myself to do most everything in the form of questions, nothing in the form of "I" believe, or even "I" think, statements.

This week is "divine healing."

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Yesterday I had the most interesting discussion with my kids.

I had to take them both to the doctor.

On the way we were talking about something biblical. I was only half paying attention but they were asking some questions and my responses included information such as "synoptic gospels," "Q," etc.

I asked, "do they ever teach you this at church?"

Finding the discussion interesting, my daughter replies, "No, all they ever do is say it's all true and that you have to believe it all."

I was shocked.

I'm not out. I do not want to come out to my kids first. I will not lie to them. I'm on thin ice.

So I continue with the *thinking questions*...

"Which of the gospels is more different from the others? Which three seem to repeat many of the same stories?"

I'm just trying to have a good conversation with them about the Bible, neither laddened with devotional syrup nor with antagonistic spew. I want them to *think*.

"What do you mean, Dad?"

I figure it out. They're confused between "gospel" as in good news and "gospel" as in first four books of the NT.

I explain that. They appreciate getting a factual explanation.

My son asks. Point blank. "Well, dad, do you believe it all?"

Grrr. I don't want to go there. Not yet. I've been focused on my wife first.

I get out a, "Well I really want to know the truth and sometimes I do have questions. I think questions are good and by asking questions and getting answers to them, one can really learn."

My scripture-memory-ace son goes down a line of thinking. "Well in the Middle Ages they had to figure out what the books of the Bible would be. I bet they had different versions of some of the books and had to figure out what's what. Like the book of Revelation."

Bingo!

I have never talked to my kids about canonization.

I wonder how nervous he was mentioning such a thing to his Christian dad. I know I've been dropping hints, but I was shocked.

There were a number of different ways I could have gone with this. In the moment, I though the most important things were 1) to encourage questioning, critical thinking, and discussion 2) to let them know it's OK to talk to Dad, and 3) that the facts are the facts.

So what I do is say, "Well actually it wasn't in the Middle Ages, it was more around the year 300 or so. There were actually several times early church leaders got together to figure this kind of stuff out and to agree on what the doctrines of Christianity should be." Eventually I do want to take them through the basics of church history - canonization, the church councils, exposure to the beliefs of different denominations, etc.

My son says, "I bet that was hard."

I reply, "I can't imagine how hard that would be."

Meanwhile, my daughter is still *thinking* about the gospels. She interrepts my son and I, "Yeah, like in John it seems like they just made things up. Like they weren't quite sure and just wrote down what they *hoped* and *believed* instead of what they **knew**."

I was surprised she said it. Maybe she was too.

I think she feared what Dad might say or do.

I asked, "Do you *think* about these things a lot?" Kids are so in tune and so

receptive. I have been cognizant that my soft hint-dropping would be more visible to them than my adult wife. I knew this scenario could happen. Even so, I need to take it slow and be careful. So rather than react to her statement of critical thinking, I simply ask a considerate question, "Do you *think* about these things a lot?"

She replies, "Yeah, I do."

I state, "I bet Mom would get mad if you asked these questions."

In a huffy voice, she replies, "Yeah, all she says is, it's in the Bible and you have to believe it."

I ask, "Would you like to be able to talk to Dad about this kind of stuff?"

Both kids reply affirmatively.

I tell them I may not have all the answers but I too want to *know*.

My daughter says, "Yeah, you're reading all the time and always looking stuff up on Google."

I smiled. She knows the sincerity of my pursuit of truth.

My son leans over and says, "I love you Dad."

We arrive at the doctor's office and that's the end of the conversation.

Her concern was not *sola scriptura* vs. prima scriptura.

How does that address her concern of bible authors just making stuff up? [...] This is the hardest, most painful, thing I've ever done.

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[When it comes to the existence of hell] I'll probably lay out the verses and put the ball in their court. After reading those verses, I'll ask...

- based upon these verses, which *do you think* would give **me** hope that I'm saved?
- based upon these verses, which *do you think* would give **me** despair that I'm not saved?
- based upon these verses, which *do you think* would give **you** hope that you're saved?
- based upon these verses, which *do you think* would give **you** despair that you're not saved?
- based upon these verses, which *do you think* would give **some** hope that God might pick them to be saved?
- based upon these verses, which *do you think* would give **all** hope that everybody already is saved?
- based upon these verses, which *do you think* would give **all** hope that anybody could be saved?
- based upon these verses, which *do you think* would give **all** despair that there is no way they can be saved?

And finally, given that I can't make myself more-so-believe something I'm not 100% certain, certain-as-I-am-certain-you-are-sitting-in-that-chair, of, what should I do?

How do you *know* these things with the same level of certainty as you *know* I'm sitting here in this chair?

Such a discussion might be months away.

I'm familiar with [the Skeptics Annotated Bible] and use it from time to time. It's a bit academically "loose" IMHO.

However, I am in the process of making my very own Annotated Bible. Five books down. Sixty one to go. You would believe how easy it is to read the bible now. It is a joy. Albeit also very bittersweet. However, now that I can write the margins what I really **think**, it is a whole lot of fun. Mostly I'm just filling the margins with questions after questions and a good number of "???" cross references. Of the first five books it is so easy to fill every margin of every page

[...]

I'm not really planning on "telling" anybody anything.

My working formula is...

1. Ask *thinking questions* in the context of real life.
2. Maybe, or maybe not, this will cause individuals to *think*.
3. If they *think* enough, they will have *cognitive dissonance*.
4. If they have enough cognitive dissonance, they will search for answers. Some will be reconciling the Bible and/or church doctrine and/or personal belief with each other. Some will be reconciling those things with science and/or secular knowledge and/or personal experience. Even if I get a few people in my life to look a **few things** up, I'm making real progress.
5. With their new information, it will either confirm their beliefs (somehow) or increase the cognitive dissonance. If it increases the cognitive dissonance, they will say nothing. If it confirms their beliefs, they may actually approach me.
6. Then if they approach me, they will be initiating the conversation.

Then based upon what they say, I will ask more *thinking questions*.

The cycle repeats.

I think I'm gonna try some experiments with this for a while.

Imagine what a Muslim in the Middle East would need to do to convert to Christianity yet try to keep his family relationships intact? Imagine what a Hindu in India would need to do to convert to Islam yet try to keep his family relationships intact. Those seem impossible. Fortunately, I do not believe I would have it nearly as rough.

The principle challenge I have is the cohesive in-group defining glue that religion provides. Others may have no empathy for me as an ex-fundie, but to not understand the role that religion plays in defining in-groups - cultures, extended families, etc. is to miss out on understanding an aspect of the human story.

[...]

Yes, my wife may take longer, much longer. And you may have read too much into my kids responses. I may have as well. Kids are kids. They say the darndest things.

What I can say at this point is that my kids have some, at least, very small degree of cognitive dissodance and that they'll remember that dad didn't flip out about that. I really can't stretch it further from there.

Anyhow, I'm not "bring it up again." I will focus on *thinking questions*.

[We've seen stories here who have had their families destroyed when a husband deconverts, and then have one or more children likewise announce they don't believe. For some women, there is no worse news that they can imagine! Such women may violently reject their husbands, accusing them of being instruments of the devil, because in the woman's eyes he has led her children to damnation.]

I've recently become more away of the "wrecking their lives" issue. Not through something happening but more in my awareness.

My wife asked me to read a book. She at least knows I'm struggling and even went as far as using the phrase, "shipwreck your faith."

She asked me to read a book. (And I even read a "shipwreck one's faith" turn of phrase in it.)

It's an allegory about eternity written by an evangelical fundamentalist evangelist. I'm to chapter 5. For 75 pages I have circled, underlined, cross referenced and nearly completely filled the margins with questions, with logical fallacies, with counter points within the book, with counter points with the bible, with counter points with science, with counter points with my real world experience, as well as a bit of literary critique.

Not too different my personal bible which now has five books fully annotated (*by me*).

As I actively and critically read this book, I think of my wife, and how she might react if I gave her opportunity to read my commentary (!!!). I think she would be shocked, I think she would fear for my salvation, but I also think she would call into question *some* of her own beliefs and assumptions. It's this last point that hit me the hardest. ☹

I know this is hard for me. But. What if. What if she deconverted? What if she didn't deconvert but still wrestled sincerely with these issues? ☹

It would be hard for her.

Where would she go?

I would think there would be opportunity for me to be there for her.

And it hit me hard. So hard. That in the midst of my struggle I need some degree of strength. So I can help others.

My goal can not just be to "convince" somebody of something or to have somebody to "accept" me for what I am.

There's much, much more. A much higher standard. I would want to not just do that but also be a friend to those whose own faith I could, it pains me to say, **will**, at least passively, threaten.

How I will do all this, I don't yet know. But I'm gonna keep working on it

After watching [One Night with the King](#), my daughter read Esther (inquisitive girl that she is!).

She came out and proudly announced she did it. 🙏

She wanted to know why the movie mentioned Xerxes as the king and then he was referred to as Ahasuerus in the Bible. 🤔

Her brother, the incredible history buff, filled in details I didn't even know about Babylon.

She said, "I wonder if 'Arta' means son-of or something."

I thought, she's *thinking*.

I said some bible scholars *think* it was Xerxes, some Artaxerxes and some even that it might possibly be a legend.

She gave an inquisitive look.

Changing directions, I added, "Did you noticed that the book of Esther doesn't even mention God?"

Her jaw dropped. I thought, I bet she'll go back and check.

I continued, "But I'm not sure, I bet you could Google it. There's a lot of stuff I just don't know."

"Oh, yes you do Dad. You know *a lot*."

Slow down. Slow down. That's enough. Just let it simmer for a while.

Anyhow, a few days ago, **with the whole family**, we went and saw [Amazing Grace](#). It was billed as a movie "every Christian must seen."

I thought, err, uh, why would Christians want to be bringing up slavery as a topic?

Anyhow, I did a bit of research before the movie, and knew some key conversations would be coming up.

Before the movie, in the popcorn line, I leaned over to my wife and said, "I sure

hope the movie is factually accurate."

She snapped back, "Well you sure do know how to ruin a movie for everybody sometimes. I think that's what sometimes makes you enjoy it."

Grr. She did have a point. She watches on TV and I point out something like, "well I think they might want to get some counselling and try to get their lives in order and do such self-destructive behavior." I sometimes actually "life coach" the characters to the TV. Admittedly, it kind ruins the story.

After the movie we're all having a conversation in the car, the whole family.

My son says, "what do the Bible say about slavery?"

I explain OT and NT views.

"But isn't it wrong?" he asks.

"I think it's horrible," I reply. "In fact I think the only thing worse than it is murder. Murder ends another person's life permanently. Slavery takes another person's freedom."

My wife says something absurd straight out of the 18th or maybe 19th century about the breaking up of families.

I ask her if she thinks that makes it right. I remind of very strong distinction between slavery and servanthood where one actually involves the ownership of another human being as property. She goes quite and makes some sort of meekish comment about how this is another thing we'll just have to ask God about [in heaven].

Then I make a small, but obvious assertion to my family.

"I know that the Bible condones slavery but I think it is horrible and that it is immoral and fundamentally wrong for one person to have ownership of another human being."

It is simple and obvious and something I think most moderns would find completely uncontroversial.

But...

It is a morality that is not based upon a Biblical foundation, perhaps even in conflict with a Biblical foundation and I simply proclaimed it.

How I handled the conversation was so-so. I'd give myself a B-. Means I need to slow down for quite a while.

But it was a **fissure** and a carefully picked one at that.

[...]

Dude, slavery's WRONG!

We're not talking about exactly how many begotten sons Abraham had or exactly which creatures were exempt from death prior to the fall. (Though I've had similar five sentence conversations about the likes of those with my wife in private.)

Anyhow, in a fundy family things just come up.

My youngest (5) interacted with a deaf person for the first time.

Initially it didn't make any sense to him how a deaf person (issue with the ears) kept him from talking.

I asked, How did you learn how to talk? You probably just learned by listening to us and copying us. It's amazing that you could do that."

Smug in his intelligence he replies, "Yeah."

Our grown-up's conversation starts to head down a different path but meanwhile he has been *thinking* and pulls us back out of the blue...

"But how did Adam and Eve learn how to talk?"

I promptly reply with, "A very good question."

He smiles.

My wife says, "Maybe by talking to God." (I'm actually not sure how much my wife was asserting or how much she was asking herself. For the faithful, these two notions are so deeply intertwined in to a rope that is not easily broken.)

"Regardless, a very good question" I say not even bothering to continue the silliness but only to delight in the critical thinking.

My wife seeing I'm not pushing any further says, "He certainly is a smart little guy."

To which I reply in joint parental pride, "He certainly is."

And that's the whole conversation.

One would wonder how my wife doesn't see it all yet. However, it is amazing how much one believes what one wants to believe.

I'm not taking [annotating my Bible] in order. I thought starting with Genesis would have been cherry picking.

Anyhow, **annotating my Bible is the most bitter-sweet, cathartic experience.**

With each verse as need be, I cross reference, examine personal experience, Google related scientific evidence, cross reference possible interpretations, cross reference possible internal Biblical inconsistencies, and ask God questions (does that count as

prayer?).

It's what I always wanted to ask, always wanted to underline, always wanted to write in the margins. Just that I was afraid, at the time, to do so would have been unforgivable heresy.

I don't know if I'll be able to finish the task. The painful half of the bitter-sweetness is quite intense.

But I am continuing for the time being.

[...]

*I'm struggling for my kids, and for my wife, to accept me as I am and to see the world as I see it is. Without superstition. Because I care about them, and care deeply about the relationships that we share that are so much otherwise better and healthier than what most people get to experience in this world. And care about truth, the honest, perhaps even absolute truth. [...]*Most of my conflict has been internal. I've been terrified that the reaction would be outright hostile. It hasn't been. But there have been a few "zingers" I had to just let go past.

Anyhow Keith I don't know how well I've been taking it. I have puked, I have had many sleepless nights, I even managed to get myself hospitalized from tachycardia.

But...

Things are going... Good enough. And that's good enough for me. I think some folks want to expect the whole world to change their worldviews overnight (when paradoxically it took them months or even years themselves to work through things).

I've had a few decent conversations with my wife.

Example as we're driving home from a church activity...

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Me: That bible study I'm going to just hasn't been what I've been looking for...

DW: Why do you say that.

(long pause)

Me: I don't know.

(long pause)

DW: Is it that it's too "simple."

(long pause)

(thinking I'd like to "go off")

Me: I don't know. It's just that it's...

(long pause)

Me: Maybe "simple" isn't the right word. It's supposed to be on doctrines and hefty stuff.

DW: Well, what is it?

(long pause)

Me: Maybe "simple" is close. But maybe "simplistic" is better. I don't think most other people wrestle with what I wrestle with.

(long pause)

Me: Maybe just that it approaches everything from a single point of view. I can't do that. I have to research and see what brighter minds than my own have thought on a given topic over the centuries. Something is said and I think of a verse that has been used to support a different point of view, or of what an early church father said on the topic, or maybe how it was a topic of debate for a certain church council, or maybe what the Catholic catechism says about it or what the Orthodox church says, or what a modern bible scholar might say. Or even what specifically the evidence might support.

(long pause)

(long pause)

(wanting to give DW opportunity to *think* and to make the next move)

(long pause)

Me: Anyhow I think I'll keep going for now. I also hope the one pastor will find me someone to talk to like he said he would. I hope he really knows his stuff.

DW: (Confidently and hopefully) He will.

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And so it continues.

I now keep having open, patient, paced conversations with my wife.

I now keep annotating my Bible.

I now keep going to church.

I now keep being an on-the-edge troublemaker at my Bible study.

I now keep asking *thinking* questions to my kids.

I now will tell Christian friends who inquire that I'm going through a "crisis of faith" and here's why giving an example or two wrt to scientific evidence or Biblical scholarship or just a point or two of whatever would be already in context for that conversation. Though I don't really like the "crisis of faith" turn-of-phrase, it seems to create the most appropriately accurate empressions and empathetic responses in believers' minds.

Given I was very open with one of my pastors and a long-term friend, given I have revealed to my wife the existence of my doubts, I don't have the pain of a Double Life I have had over the last number of months. There is a bit of a burden that has been lifted. I do though worry about how much of it my wife might now be carrying.

Bit by bit. Day at a time.

I hope the story can play out as much as possible without a "climax." I think coming to this site has helped me think through future scenarios and play things out with a good degree more patience and forethought than I might have otherwise.

[...] I absolutely do miss being a Christian. Much in the same nostalgic way I miss childhood. And I do miss God. Much in the same way I miss my kind-hearted, patient grandfather.

None of the conversations are new. I've had them all with myself in my own head over the last several years. Just that enough evidence accumulated that my faith that could move mountains, couldn't move that mountain of evidence as I said here quite a while back.

It was a tipping point of cognitive dissonance. I would assert *most* every believer as a significant amount of disbelief. That seems to be what so many around here just don't get. Bringing things up that are counter to one's belief system threaten's what is possibly a person's deepest fears.

Given this, empathy and efficacy are not unrelated.

I actually think I have a so-so command of the Bible. Right now, I'm going through annotating every book, every page, every margin. At least I'm on book #8 (not really in any pre-planned order) out of 66. Right now, I'm thinking I may be reasonably able to complete it given the partial progress made to date. Finally, I really enjoy reading the Bible. Writing in the margins what I have always wanted to ask, always wanted to *think*, always feared to do so. I have known the Bible well for quite a number of years. Just that in another year, I think I'm going to know it much better.

Anyhow, it is a bit odd that it was the scientific first and Biblical scholarship a distance second that got me to this state of disbelief.

What's at the core of the proposition is that faith is about my relationship with God and that religion is about man's relationship with God (and most characteristically and often derogatorily about the institutionalization of some ancient men's relationships with God).

So here's the tricky part.

I too am a man.

Given that is so, let's look briefly into the problem here.

Men have an incomplete and often incorrect understanding of who God is and what God has said and commanded.

I am a man.

Therefore, I too have an incomplete and often incorrect...

Simply I am not sufficiently arrogant enough to accept that my faith is correct and others in error.

All in all, religion is simply beginning to appear to be the institutionalized imaginations of men about God.

Given I am a man, do I then run the risk that the faith I have had for decades has been nothing more than my own imaginations about God?

Hence, my pursuit of EVIDENCE. Evidence that demands a verdict.

I refuse to be deceived. Even self-deceived by my own imaginations as much as I can consciously enable myself to do so.

[...]

from the theistic side of the fence, the concept of "arrogance" is a different thing. I now think *most* modern, educated theists struggle, or have struggled to some non-trivial degree, with doubts.

For the moment, assume that they *do* have doubt.

In the theistic worldview, the only perceived alternative to (realistic, ever-present, yet terrifying) doubt is *certainty*. So they're thinking that you, as the disbeliever, are asserting that you have certainty. Given their doubt, they find your certainty "arrogant."

What they don't see though is yet another alternative - the simple acceptance of the lack of certainty. This is the same "logic" that produces the misunderstanding around "denying God's existence."

From the atheistic side, I think we misinterpret the "hope it is so" with the "assertion it is so" as arrogance. When a theist says such-and-such is true, just translate it to that they're simply hoping it and professing it, not actually "believing" it as we might think of the word.

It's simply not too different from an imaginative toddler who can't yet clearly differentiate between that which is so and that which he hopes to be so.

Perhaps the best response would just be a patronizingly paternalistic, "Would that be nice if that were true." Or perhaps not.

Regardless, I doubt an atheist would rarely break through in influencing the thoughts and beliefs of a theist without a degree of empathy for doubts and fears which the theistic actually has.

[Tell my wife I no longer believe]? It's not that simplistic. My whole approach is not based upon a trumpeted announcement. We have had key open conversations. And I suspect will we have more and more over time. I believe her (faith-oriented) assumption is that this is a temporary thing for me.

And it's NOT time to "focus on how to live a fulfilling godless life instead." It is still time for grieving and mourning. I feel as though the most important person in my life died just a few months ago and you are suggesting I get remarried or just get on with my life after but a few months.

Sorry but not so. I spent half a life time as a devout Christian and I am going to take my time working through this. And now is a time for accepting a new world and in grieving the loss of the old. I'm doing anything but lying to myself. I'm being honest to myself in this process.

Today was dress rehearsal for the church's passion play. I had to go by church for something else. They're going through their rehearsal.

There are a couple miracle scenes. Lame walk. Blind see. Dead rise. All three. I had been wondering... Why don't they use a real paraplegic? Why don't they use a real blind man? Why don't they bring in a real dead person? That would surely pack 'em in the house.

But more importantly, why am I the only one asking this question. Why is everyone just so comfortable with "faking it?"

Does anyone even wonder if maybe even in the original version they were just doing a good illusion (assuming other than the simpler mythical explanation)?

Anyhow, right there in front of me in the corridor, I see one of the cast members feeding, with a spoon, a physically and mentally disabled teenage child in a wheel chair.

Why not recruit him I think? For a role in the miracle scene.

My heart goes out for the young lad. While the song "I believe in miracles" plays over the loudspeakers.

Sheesh.

OK, so here's a conversation I overheard at church this morning.

A: His diagnosis came in. Good news.

B: What is it?

A: It's arthritis, it wasn't cancer. It was completely benign.

B: Praise God.

C: Hallelujah.

A: Yes, I know. An answer to prayer.

Then at my bible study, it seemed everybody had prayer requests for heart disease, diabetes, and cancer for some friend, family member, or acquaintance. Nobody prayed that they or anybody else would eat right and exercise though. 😊

Anyhow, on the drive home from church (which never ceases to be good), I'm driving and I forget what the conversation was on but my little guy, referring, to the planet says, "Why do they call it 'your anus?'"

To which I reply, "It's named after a Greek God."

Slightly older daughter wanting to inquire about the bit of Greek mythological character, "Which was he?"

I then say, "Well, it wasn't really a 'he,' more just an idea."

(Pause.)

Almost out of the blue my little guy goes, "They put 'In God We Trust' on the coins. They took a vote and most people wanted it on there and that's why it's on there."

OK. At this point, I'm tensing up a bit. *Wanting* to go a number of different ways. *Emotionally*. I also guess my fundie wife is tensing up a bit too wondering where I'm going to go with it. The guy's only six after all. No reason to go into what democracies can do to minorities.

I don't want to just say *nothing* though.

I'm *thinking*.

My mind, in a second, flashes through a number of options.

What comes out of my mouth is, almost before I have it thought out is, "Well, what I really wish is that they would have voted to put the number '25' on quarters, '10' on dimes, '5' on nickels, and '1' on pennies. Plus I wish they would have made them

where the bigger coins were worth more than the smaller coins. I think that would have made it easier for kids to learn their money."

To which my kids all chime in "Yeah!" like they were getting tricked by the adult world.

At that point, my wife, even says, "I even heard it takes one and a half cents to make a penny."

"Yeah, paper dollar bills and one cent coins just don't make that much sense any more with as much as money has inflated," I say.

"No kidding," my wife replies.

And the conversation fragment ends simply with me saying, "Yeah, traditional certainly has a strong influence, certainly more than logic it seems at time."

I communicated to the kids at one level. And my wife at another.

Because as soon as someone is thinking in the prefrontal cortex, in the world of the emotional, in the world of fight-flight-or-freeze, they can't really *think*, they can't really learn.

Doing my best to get my family to *think*.

It is "the old ways" but I am being present and future oriented.

The present has to do with the grief of saying goodbye. Re-reading and re-thinking in a new light. I spent four years reading scientific literature with the old worldview, in saying "hello." If I spend four years reading the Bible and Christian literature with the new worldview, in saying "goodbye," that's OK. I assume it will go faster but, there's no rush. This is for more personal mental health.

Now the future has to do with all of the conversation which are happening and will happen. Evangelicals respect those who know the Bible. At my doctrinally focused **relatively** brainy Bible study of about 20 people, I'd say I know the Bible second or third best. The guy who leads it has good knowledge of the scriptures thinks I have deep insights and knowledge. Many of the other folks don't really like the questions and topics I bring up. Anyhow, this is all about doing my due diligence so I don't unnecessarily toast the relationships with my family. Why the Bible reading, the Bible study, etc.? To surreptitiously *learn* how to incrementally talk to various types of Christians about my disbelief.

I thought I'd post as much of my reading list (at least non-fiction, non-work-related books) of the lasts four or so years that I could remember.

This list includes the primary contributors of my deconversion.

Upon enumerating this list, I felt like I have to be the densest, most stubborn person

on the planet!!! Most of this, I read as a Christian, *before* the tipping point. **Sheesh, am I dense.**

Hope somebody bought some stock in Barnes & Noble! 😊

Anyhow, if anybody wants to discussion any, it might be fun!

[A Short History of Nearly Everything](#), Bill Bryson.

[The Fabric of the Cosmos](#), Brian Greene.

[The Elegant Universe](#), Brian Greene.

[A Brief History of Time](#), Stephen Hawking.

[The Universe in a Nutshell](#), Stephen Hawking.

[The Ancestor's Tale](#), Richard Dawkins.

[Before the Dawn](#), Nicolas Wade.

[The Selfish Gene](#), Richard Dawkins.

[Mapping Human History: Genes, Race, and our Common Origins](#), Steve Olson.

[The First Human](#), Ann Gibbons

[Our Inner Ape](#), Frans De Waal

[The Third Chimpanzee](#), Jared Diamond.

[Primates and Philosophers](#), Frans De Waal.

[The Unfolding of Language](#), Guy Deutscher.

[Empires of the Word](#), Nicholas Ostler.

[The Language Instinct](#), Steven Pinker.

[The Origin of Language](#), Merritt Ruhlen.

[The Power of Babel](#), John McWhorter.

[The Gifts of the Jews](#), Thomas Cahill.

[The Confessions of St. Augustine](#), St. Augustine.

[The Imitation of Christ](#), Thomas a Kempis.

[The Adventure of English](#), Melvyn Bragg.

[The Story of English](#), Robert McCrum.

[How the Irish Saved Civilization](#), Thomas Cahill.

[Gods Bestseller: William Tyndale, Thomas More, and the Writing of the English Bible](#), Brian Moynahan.

[The Pilgrim's Progress](#), John Bunyan.

[Guns, Germs, and Steel](#), Jared Diamond.

[1421](#), Gavin Menzies.

[1491](#), Charles C. Mann.

[Over the Edge of the World](#), Laurence Bergreen.

[The Bounty: The True Story of the Mutiny on the Bounty](#), Caroline Alexander.

[Cook: The Extraordinary Voyages of Captain James Cook](#), Nicholas Thomas.

[1776](#), David McCullough.

[Washington's Crossing](#), David Fischer.

[Undaunted Courage](#), Stephen Ambrose.

[The Endurance: Shackleton's Legendary Antarctic Expedition](#), Caroline Alexander.

[Do You Speak American](#), Robert MacNeil.

[Paris 1911](#), Margaret Macmillan.

[My Utmost for His Highest](#), Oswald Chambers.

[Mere Christianity](#), C.S. Lewis.

[Band of Brothers](#), Stephen Ambrose.

[D-Day](#), Stephen Ambrose.

[Citizen Soldiers](#), Stephen Ambrose.

[The Codebreakers](#), David Kahn.

[The Code Book](#), Simon Singh.

[Enigma: The Battle for the Code](#), Hugh Sebag-Montefiore.

[Codebreakers: The Inside Story of Bletchley Park](#), F.H. Hinsley.

[The Greatest Generation](#), Tom Brokaw.

[Failure is not an Option](#), Gene Kranz.

[Evidence that Demands a Verdict](#), Josh McDowell.

[Evidence for Christianity](#), Josh McDowell.

[The Case for Christ](#), Lee Strobel.

[The Case for Faith](#), Lee Strobel.

[Classical Apologetics](#), R.C. Sproul.

[Dutch](#), Edmund Morris.

[What's So Great about America](#), Dinesh D'Souza.

[What's the Matter with Kansas](#), Thomas Frank.

[Letters to a Young Conservative](#), Dinesh D'Souza.

[From Dawn to Decadence](#), Jacques Barzun.

[Misquoting Jesus](#), Bart D. Ehrman.

[Lost Christianities](#), Bart Ehrman.

[The Gospel According to Judas](#), Benjamin Isaac.

[Religious Literacy](#), Stephen Prothero.

[Evolution vs. Creationism](#), Eugenie Scott.

[The Evolution Creation Struggle](#), Michael Ruse.

[Finding Darwin's God](#), Kenneth Miller.

[Darwin's Black Box](#), Michael Behe.

[The Language of God](#), Francis Collins.

[The Clash of Civilizations](#), Samuel Huntington.

[The 9/11 Commission Report](#), National Commission on Terrorist Attacks.

[The Lexus and the Olive Tree](#), Thomas Friedman.

[Longitudes and Attitudes](#), Thomas Friedman.

[The World is Flat](#), Thomas Friedman.

[Blink](#), Malcolm Gladwell.

[The Pentagon's New Map](#), Thomas P.M. Barnett.

[Globalization and Its Discontents](#), Joseph Stiglitz.

[One No, Many Yeses](#), Paul Kingsworth.

[Blowback](#), Chalmers Johnson.

[The Weather Makers](#), Tim Flannery.

[The End of Oil](#), Paul Roberts.

[An Inconvenient Truth](#), Al Gore.

[Collapse](#), Jared Diamond.

[The God Delusion](#), Richard Dawkins.

[A Devil's Chaplain](#), Richard Dawkins.

[The Blind Watchmaker](#), Richard Dawkins.

[Freakanomics](#), Steven Levitt.

[Chaos](#), James Gleick.

[The Tipping Point](#), Malcolm Gladwell.

[Breaking the Spell](#), Daniel C. Dennett.

[Beyond Oil](#), Kenneth S. Deffeyes.

[Letter to a Christian Nation](#), Sam Harris.

[The End of Faith](#), Sam Harris.

Bible reading on the airplane is really interesting. Especially when you're writing what you *really want* in the margins.

Today was unique though. Today this flight attended flirts with me.

I'm 40, professional, fit as an athlete, and at least not homely. Plus I had to have my wedding ring recently cut off from a trail running fall (granite bites). That said, I can't say I get flirted with on all but the rarest of occasions.

She looks like she's in her young 30s. Attractive, sparkly Texas cheerleader-ish eyes and smile. And no ring.

Seeing my Black leather, gold-leafed thinline NIV, "what book are you reading?" she asks.

"Romans," I reply. Wondering where this is going to go and reminding myself that a two plus hour flight is ahead.

"Oh, that my favorite book. I think it summarizes the whole Bible," she says with a smile.

I think it is indeed Paul's masterpiece and it does summarize much of aspirations of modern practicing Christians. But does it summarize the Bible? I think, *hardly*.

But politely I just let out a, "Well, I'm not too sure if one could reconstruct Joshua from it," thinking of the mandated genocide of the various non-Israelite Canaanites people groups when so much the Epistle of Romans is about the harmonization between Jews and Gentiles.

"I suppose not," she says in a perky voice.

Oh dear, I think. I may have just "impressed" her with my knowledge of the Bible.

And that's the whole interaction for the moment. Take off. I think why are airplanes always so cold.

She's sitting next to the other flight attendant in the jump seat in front of me. I'm at the seat by the door with the extra leg room. She's either witnessing to, or just simply having a Christian-to-Christian edifying conversation with the flight attendant next to her.

The guy next to pulls out his book. Coincidentally, a book essential summarizing the Catholic catechism. Isn't God just everywhere.

I figure, never mind. And dive into Romans. With my pen. Writing what I *really think* in the margins. I've done this on many flights. I wonder, do people look over at what I'm writing with such intensity. I'm sure they do. *Everybody* snoops at stuff on airplanes.

But nobody ever says *anything* to me. Ever. I keep what I write true but polite. I'm not so vulgar as to be able to write the three-letters "W-T-F" in a [Holy] Bible, but I circle hard, I cross reference, I ask the questions. Sometimes with three question marks in a row, "?-?-?," in polite surrogacy. After all, I don't want to get yelled at. Reminds me. A couple weeks ago, the guy next to me was fidgeting and almost steaming. But *nobody ever says anything* as I commit my silent, quiet, yet public and visible act of intellectual heresy.

It's mid-flight. The flight attendant comes back. She has a copy of *My Utmost for His Highest* in hand. Sometimes in the business circles I work in, mid-manager phoneys care a copy of that morning's *Wall Street Journal*. Almost as a prop. *My Utmost for His Highest* is a 100-year-old Scottish Minister's devotional that can serve almost equivalent needs in fundamentalist circles. But not so with this girl, she's real. And sincere. And sweet.

I say, "Ah, Oswald Chambers," naturally knowing the author's name.

With a twinkle in her eye, she says, "Yes." And asks, "Have you read it?"

To which I honestly respond, "Of course," yet not knowing exactly how this little ruse will continue.

And she continues with her duties. And I continue with my mad circlings and markings of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans.

Upon descent, she returns to the jump seat.

I ask in line with not uncommon frequent-flyer-to-flight-attendant small talk, "Are you done for the day?"

"No, it's a round trip, back to Dallas."

A pause.

She, almost timidly, asks, "Where do you live? Dallas or Denver?"

"In Colorado," I reply.

And "oh," she sighs unconsciously letting dozens of uniquely primate muscles relax. The sparkle dims.

And at that point, I *want* to say, but I don't, "And besides, I'm actually a happily married Atheist." I just couldn't.

The plane lands. I take my Bible and put it in my briefcase. And I exit the plane, she says in a warm-hearted kindness, "God bless you" in lieu of the stereotypical "G'bye" that all flight attendants say.

The jetway is warm unlike the plane. Both body and mind context switch.

I think of the mess I am in. And my real life. And how I love my fundy wife dearly. And how I've been faithful to her for *all* of these years. And how I spend out-of-town business nights at Barnes and Noble. And how my former pastor, Ted Haggard, spent his doing who-knows-what.

I think, I had better check voice mail.

To which my mind then context shifts again to my professional life.

If, in this whole process, I have tried to minimize big blow-ups, big events, and big conversations. However, today, if there ever is any to have, today, was **the** conversation with my wife.

I told a good bit of the story, from a personal point of view.

It was mostly, almost completely, calm and communicative.

Perhaps at the point of the most tension she asked, perhaps said, "Well then, you're not even really a Christian are you?"

Throwing out the unthinkable.

Calmly and with a slight sigh, I reply, "Perhaps not."

She ask me some questions. Some sincere ones. "How do you then..." and "Then, what do you think..." and "Why did you..." and I gave her honest answers that were simultaneously true to fact and true to feeling.

Upon hearing an answer at one point she would say, "Well, I don't really want to talk about *it*", it, beaing the evidence for a lack of belief in the tenets of the faith.

Upon which I calmly replied, "OK, that's fine. What would you suggest I use for ground rules about what and what not to talk about these things going forward?"

She *thought*.

And came back with more good questions.

I had my Bible in hand. And am sufficiently fast at finding things.

At one point she said, "This reminds me of the most miserable year of my life when I didn't believe anything and I do not want to do that again."

To which I said, "I understand, I completely understand. And I don't want to steer you from your beliefs. Only share enough to help you understand me. And to answer any questions honestly you might have."

We continued the conversation. I want to honor her in all this.

I asked her if she could think of any other ideas what I should do. She mentioned some prayer, some fasting. She also mentioned one of her favorite authors who really speaks to her. A few months ago, she had asked that I read one of his books.

I got the book out of the closet and showed it to her. I had read. I had read it in preparation for a day like today, perhaps, even for *today*. Every page, every margin marked up. A detailed, skeptic's critical analysis.

I, as calmly and logically and in fact boringly as possible, pointed out the top three faults that I found in this book. She had even been to a Bible study group on this book. I believe I nailed it with a simple, kind-hearted explanation of fallacies of the book. I asked if she doubted my sincerity. She indicated with a sigh of sadness, no.

Interested, but troubled, she again said she didn't want to talk about it anymore.

Yet I wondered if she still might have a few more questions.

I asked again, "What more do you think I should do?"

To which she replied, "I don't know really."

She understands. And she understands me. Both *enough* and certainly vastly more than what most people truly do find in this real world.

I am blessed to have the wife I have.

[...]

Maybe some of the "Fundy" Atheists around here will tell what I ought to tell my wife she ought to think, but stuff it my friends. A woman's got a right to *think* for herself.

Had some ups and downs with Easter. My family was in town. Busy. Let something slip out of my mouth during church. Weekend end with my wife explaining something to the kids about "Well, Dad has questions."

However, much more interestingly, my wife is about 80 pages into Ehrman's *Misquoting Jesus*. We even had a bit, a very tiny small bit, of interesting conversation.

I answer the questions asked. That's it.

She's holding fast to her faith. But she is *thinking*. And if nothing else understanding me at least a bit.

Friday night I got home late from an out-of-town business trip. Tired, I brought in my briefcase, but left my carry-on bag in the car.

Saturday morning was naturally a busy morning, scheduled with all the kids' activities here and there.

Saturday morning my wife goes out of my car and pulls my bag and other stuff out so she can take our one kid to baseball practice.

And there, naturally, with my bag are two Bart Ehrman books. And Darrell Bock's *The Missing Gospels*.

Last week, I had read one of the Ehrman books and was half way through *The Missing Gospels*.

In this whole process, I haven't been either one to advertise or to carefully hide my reading. But I wondered what she would *think* of these books.

After our son's baseball practice, I was helping clean up the house, tidying up the master bedroom at the moment.

"What is this heresy?" she asks holding up the Bock book. Her tone wasn't accusatory but nor was it completely open. It was one of those conversations that could go "either way," depending upon how I handled it. In all this process I have so very actively tried to keep all conversations out of the hyper-emotional fight-or-flight world of the pre-frontal cortex as once a conversation goes emotional, no *thinking* can actually happen.

I wonder where the conversation is going to go. But I also know it's the Bock book in hand. I *think*.

"Well, actually this book is by Darrell Bock. He's a very conservative evangelical Bible

scholar of Dallas Theological Seminary."

She looks at me with a bit of a furrowed brow. In this whole voyage, I have tried to read "both sides" or even the multitude of points of view over history to get a broad enough understanding.

I pick up Ehrman's *Lost Scriptures* and share, "These two books are kind of a pair. Ehrman is a very interesting author and best seller. He's become agnostic, in part, through his New Testament Biblical scholarship. Bock, on the otherhand, has written this book, in many regards, to "refute" some of Ehrman's findings. I find both these books very interest."

My wife makes some disparaging, eye-rolling comment of some sorts about liberal theology. I don't even remember exactly what she said. In the moment, I *knew* it was not the discussion thread to go down. I just let it pass.

Instead, I mention how the *Misquoting Jesus* book is the most interesting. And that it is one of the paperback best sellers in religion in spirituality right now. And that it is what people are reading. Not just me. I'm trying to appeal to a number of different dimensions. Specifically, I don't see how Christians can *not* read this kind of stuff. But I can't be so forthwright and direct in my tactics. I just need to give her pieces of information. And space for her to learn. And to *think*. To *think* for herself.

We're doing some more cleaning. Life continues.

Later in the afternoon, I see her back in the bedroom. Lying on the bed. Reading. Reading *Misquoting Jesus*.

I hop in bed beside her and get Bock. And continue reading.

And say *nothing*.

She asks me, "What does 'tractate' mean?"

I'm grinning inside. I'm hoping. Not that she'll change her way of thinking. But, at least, that she'll understand me and what I'm going through, just a bit.

"Like a treatise on something. I think it's the origin of the word 'tract,'" I reply. And stop there.

She continues reading. I can't believe it.

She asks, "Do you have a pen? Could you get me one?" She has seen my every-paragraph-and-margin-marked-up edition of a few books.

I get up and get a pen out of the kitchen.

She annotates something in the margin.

We continue reading, side by side. I put the Bock book down and continue with a Florida travel book.

She continues in Ehrman.

Knowing her The Message translation of the Bible is next to me at the bedside, she shifts her position and asks me, "Could you read I John 5:7 in The Message?"

I think, yes! She has hit the Johannine Comma.

I subdue myself.

Getting the Bible, I add, "I remember reading The Message translation on this a number of months ago. I couldn't really make that much sense out of it as it relates to the manuscripts."

I find the passage. And read it. And do not add any additional opinions from there.

And that was the whole discourse.

This morning I found her big study Bible open on the kitchen table. It was at a "Harmony in the Gospels" study section between John and Acts. The section details out the "chronological" timeline presented in the Gospels. My wife had been looking something up.

And I looked at a few of the annotations she had made. Most of them in the flavor of fair critiques of Ehrman asserting opinions as well as "this doesn't prove that it isn't inspired" type of comments. I thought, indeed it doesn't *prove* that indeed. And I recalled being several *years* where I too had the burden of proof inversed.

I wonder...

Will she finish the book? She already said she wouldn't if it didn't sit well with her "spirit" and caused her to "challenge her faith." I had told her I understood. Or will her curiosity keep her going. I don't know.

But she is *thinking*. And *thinking* for oneself is good. Very good.

I had a nice ten-mile run last night. At an 8:30 pace too! Not bad for a 40 year-old man.

Running has made a huge difference in my ability to handle the stress associated with deconversion.

I was out of town on business a couple days.

My wife finished reading *Misquoting Jesus*. And evidently mulling over her worst fears.

The one I predicted month ago would be coming, "How can you leave Jesus - it's a choice - and not being willing to do *anything*."

Trying to be conscious of my body language and tone, I went through some reassurances. Also had *some* discussion about Ehrman. Too much, I fear. Also, I'm sure the more she "gets" my answers, the more she hates their implications.

I'm trying my hardest with all I've got. If she only knew how truly important she is to me.

Ugh. This is so hard.

I had come out to my pastor friend first. I had shared all these concerns with him now almost two months ago. Especially my concerns and fears about my wife and that she might have exactly this fear.

I called him this morning. Asking he either return my call or just call my wife directly.

Later in the afternoon, my wife did say they talked. She seemed a bit relieved. This is good.

She also had a stack of books from the local Christian bookstore to read. Lee Strobel was the only one I had read before (read it twice). I was familiar with most of the other authors. Some of it will be interesting. Some of it I'm just going to have to suffer through reading. Even a YEC anthology in there. Sigh. But I'm gonna have to do it.

Between the pastor friend and my wife, I'm gonna get hit by the GIGO argument. Garbage in, garbage out. That filling one's mind with "bad ideas..."

Anyhow, you guys saw my list of books read in the last four years. I think I had some seriously respected scholarly sources in there. Now I gotta read this stuff including a bunch of, shall we say, "less credentialed" "authorities."

But I'm gonna do it. Gotta do it. Gonna go the extra mile. And then some. And then maybe a mile after that.

At least tonight we went for a nice walk. She's frustrated. A bit cold. But I can understand what she's going through.

I went through my parents' divorce as a kid, and here as an adult a number of job changes, relocations, and the death of two of my closets family members.

Loss of belief is harder than all of that combined. Several times over.

I think it is so hard for me because it was so core to my identity and because I really have no scapegoats. Most of the Christians I have had close relationships with have been good people. And while most families have their unique aspects of dysfunction, all-in-all I know statistically how good of family I have had.

Last night, after I had fallen asleep, my wife wakes me up at about 11:30PM.

"I can't fall asleep," she says.

Having been in a deep phase of sleep I try to bring consciousness to my groggy mind as quickly as possible. I know it is important.

She asks, "Would you read me *Green Eggs and Ham*?"

Every couple has it's unique, bonding aspects and me reading her to sleep with this Dr. Seuss classic has been one of ours. For nearly 20 years. While it happens less now due to the busyness of kids, in the early years it was much more frequent. Maybe even part of the bonding then knowing that we would someday have a family together and be reading this story to our kids.

I go to the one kids' room with a flashlight to get the book of the bookshelf.

And come back and read her to sleep. Through the phases of life we have shared, *Green Eggs and Ham* has always been there.

And it is a wonderful story. About being challenged in one's presupposed view of things. And finding out that it isn't that bad at all. That with a bit of openness, and open mindedness, new experience, new shared experience, and new relationship can happen.

Today was Sunday and this morning was church. Church begins with "praise and worship." The music is absolutely incredible. The band is comprised of all professional musicians with numerous songs published, a part-time tour schedule, and a number of albums to their name. The music Sunday morning is at least as good, maybe better, than anything you'd get Saturday night in the city aside from some sort of national tour.

And everybody is singing joyfully. The choir singing and swaying in unison. Hands up lifted. Lights, effects, and everything.

And me.

Standing there.

Looking around. Almost gawking.

Analyzing the lyrics of the song at hand, the etymological roots of the words, the implied Christology of a given lyric, the unevicenced scientific assertions of a certain phrase. Studying. Analyzing. *Thinking*.

Me. Just looking around. Not singing. Almost staring in disbelief at the masses and at individuals in their suspension of disbelief.

An anomaly. "Quenching the spirit" in the local parlance.

I see my daughter lean over to my wife and whisper something.

I overhear my wife say to her, "Well, why don't you ask him yourself?"

I think, this is a good thing. She didn't answer on my *behalf*.

"Daddy, why aren't you singing?" she inquires in the most innocent of voices with her blue doe eyes looking up at me.

My heart melts. My heart breaks.

"I'm *thinking*," I reply in simplicity and in honesty. I wonder where this conversation will go.

After a brief pause, she follows, "What are you thinking about?"

With a multitude of thoughts firing in concert and in conflict with each other in my mind, I simply pick one. "Right now, I'm thinking about what different parts of the Bible say and how they relate to this song."

My wife steps in. "Don't you think you can sing and think at the same time?" she asks.

"I find it harder," I answer.

Pause. And another pause.

"Besides, any sort of *authentic* worship would have to be about how one lives one's life through the ups and the downs, not just simplistically feeling good, for the moment, in a heightened communal experience."

Grr. Why'd I let all *that* blurt out of my mouth, I *think*.

Praise and worship wraps up. The kids get dismissed for Sunday School.

The guest pastor starts up. And about *faithfulness*. I am delighted. My wife and I had just had a conversation about faithfulness - how one *lives* - and how meaningful that is in contrast to what one *hopes* and *professes*.

It's looking good.

And then he goes off on who knows what.

My wife looks at me and nods with some sort of almost smug *this-is-for-you* grin and head nod.

I flip through the pages of my Bible and hit a contraction at hand for what he has said. And reference a church father who thought otherwise. And reference a non-canonical early church writing with yet another point of view from the guest pastor's.

And do it loud enough that the people in the row in front can hear and the row behind can hear. Automatic smiling and "amen"ing is best. Sleeping in church is even OK. But critical thinking aloud? Not so, not permitted.

A couple more such incidents happen.

My wife and I even pass some notes back and forth. Half of me thinks, this is fun. The other half of me isn't even thinking.

She writes back, "This is stressing me out. Please stop."

The most childish thought, "she started it," pops into my mind and immediate dissipates knowing such a thought is pointless.

I stop.

I went too far.

After church we go to Wal-Mart and get some stuff for the kids' baseball activities. Then go to a restaurant. The kids are at a table all behaving pretty well. And we're talking. And in the middle of the conversation "sandwich," between the niceities of civil exchange that need to occur between even husband and wife, I mention, "I'm sorry I stressed you out at church."

"That's OK," she replies.

"Really I mean it."

"No worries," she continues.

"Can I ask you something?" I inquire.

"Yah."

"If you don't want to know what I'm thinking, don't ask, don't provoke," I put out there with a degree of verbal boldness unmatched by my softened body language.

"I was kinda thinking that too," she replies.

And the conversation goes back to all the bazillion things which adults and parents need to discuss about life and kids activities and coordination logistics of the day-to-day.

Every day I wonder how I'm going to navigate each turn for just that day.

[What is God's voice, and how do you know?]

That was exactly my key question to my wife in church yesterday.

The guest pastor was gone of on these cheap anecdotal story about [metaphorically?, indirectly?] The Devil speaking to him about what he can't or shouldn't [be able to] do.

Your basic, cheap, Devil-is-the-source-of-your-self-doubt-and-limitations and you need Geezus to [be more than a conqueror, blah-blah-blah, blah-blah-blah].

So he tells one story about being about to board a flight and some sort of "the planes gonna crash" *feeling* that enters his mind. And then the usual talk-to-Satan schtick. "I do not accept this in Geezus name. Alacazam. Mumbo Jumbo. Haleluia.

Amen."

But since he was a guest pastor, he didn't know that usually the *far* and that *type* of a stretch of disbelief didn't come from our pulpit much or that often.

To my wife I whisper, "how did he *know* that voice wasn't the voice of the Holy Spirit?"

"How did he really *know*?" in a slightly increased voice.

"How did he really *know* it wasn't God trying to give him a warning or to save his life?," loud enough that those around could hear.

"How did he really *know* it wasn't just his own fears and **imaginations**?" I say in an almost disruptive voice. (The poor chap had just finished his prior point in his sermon from 2 Corinthians 10:5 on "casting down *imaginations*.)

My wife goes, "Sssh!"

I retort with, "I'm paying attention and it's a really good question."

After a minute or two of my wife thinking, she leans over to me and says, "It depends on what the voice sounded like - whether the 'voice' sounded threatening or protecting."

My immediate reply goes, "Well, one would think The Devil would be a whole lot more deceptive than that. Plus take a look at how God actually does talk to people."

In a second I flip my Bible open to Leviticus 26. Heavily marked up. Lots of "???"s in the margins. And a few "I don't get it"s in my hand to boot.

14 " But if you will not listen to me and carry out all these commands, 15 and if you reject my decrees and abhor my laws and fail to carry out all my commands and so violate my covenant, 16 then I will do this to you: I will bring upon you sudden terror, wasting diseases and fever that will destroy your sight and drain away your life. You will plant seed in vain, because your enemies will eat it. 17 I will set my face against you so that you will be defeated by your enemies; those who hate you will rule over you, and you will flee even when no one is pursuing you.

18 " 'If after all this you will not listen to me, I will punish you for your sins seven times over. 19 I will break down your stubborn pride and make the sky above you like iron and the ground beneath you like bronze. 20 Your strength will be spent in vain, because your soil will not yield its crops, nor will the trees of the land yield their fruit.

21 " 'If you remain hostile toward me and refuse to listen to me, I will multiply your afflictions seven times over, as your sins deserve. 22 I will send wild animals against you, and they will rob you of your children, destroy your cattle and make you so few in number that your roads will be deserted.

23 " 'If in spite of these things you do not accept my correction but continue to be hostile toward me, 24 I myself will be hostile toward you and will afflict you for your sins seven times over. 25 And I will bring the sword upon you to avenge the breaking of the covenant. When you withdraw into your cities, I will send a plague

among you, and you will be given into enemy hands. 26 When I cut off your supply of bread, ten women will be able to bake your bread in one oven, and they will dole out the bread by weight. You will eat, but you will not be satisfied.

27 " If in spite of this you still do not listen to me but continue to be hostile toward me, 28 then in my anger I will be hostile toward you, and I myself will punish you for your sins seven times over. 29 You will eat the flesh of your sons and the flesh of your daughters. 30 I will destroy your high places, cut down your incense altars and pile your dead bodies on the lifeless forms of your idols, and I will abhor you. 31 I will turn your cities into ruins and lay waste your sanctuaries, and I will take no delight in the pleasing aroma of your offerings. 32 I will lay waste the land, so that your enemies who live there will be appalled. 33 I will scatter you among the nations and will draw out my sword and pursue you. Your land will be laid waste, and your cities will lie in ruins. 34 Then the land will enjoy its sabbath years all the time that it lies desolate and you are in the country of your enemies; then the land will rest and enjoy its sabbaths. 35 All the time that it lies desolate, the land will have the rest it did not have during the sabbaths you lived in it.

36 " 'As for those of you who are left, I will make their hearts so fearful in the lands of their enemies that the sound of a windblown leaf will put them to flight. They will run as though fleeing from the sword, and they will fall, even though no one is pursuing them. 37 They will stumble over one another as though fleeing from the sword, even though no one is pursuing them. So you will not be able to stand before your enemies. 38 You will perish among the nations; the land of your enemies will devour you. 39 Those of you who are left will waste away in the lands of their enemies because of their sins; also because of their fathers' sins they will waste away.

Today will be a tough day.

I accepted Jesus into my heart April 24, 1971. Thirty-six years ago **today**.

[...]

Part of the power of the meme is that it redirects all questioning back at oneself.

Starting with Sunday School, any sort of skepticism is redirected back at skepticism at oneself, at one's belief, at one's faithfulness, at one's intentions, and finally would end up evidence as sin in one's life.

In the faith, the simple phrase, "I'm doubting my faith in God," is always channeled to the object of the doubt being the faith, not God proper.

So naturally, I had a lot of that going on. Questioning of myself, question of my motives, etc. I was doing all of that to myself, just as you see many theists in the debates questions your motives and your intentions. In an unveiled, unnuanced form, it appears as, "well, that's just to justify hedonistic sin in your life."

So I had to get past questioning of myself.

And to do that, well, I think simply I had to age and to mature.

I live a moral life.

I have lived a more moral life than the two most influential pastors I have had. I live a more moral life than most of the heroes of the faith of the Old Testament.

At some point I just had to realize and to boldly accept that the primary questioning of myself and my intentions and my morality was displaced and the questioning properly belong on the tenets of the faith.

And before I reached the tipping point of cognitive dissonance, I did not have the boldness, feared that others would attack my moral character, and feared that I just might not be right and didn't want to negatively impact the eternity of any other human being.

The passage that comes to mind is 1 Corinthians 10:32-33.

Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God— even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved.

[...]

Thirty-six years ago tonight, at the age of four, I was in the car with my mom and my brother on the way home from an out-of-town shopping trip. It was dark and late at night, after dinner.

My older brother and I were asking Mom *questions* about God and stuff. Kids often do their deepest thinking in the evening as the day is winding down. I remember that the questions were being answered to my young satisfaction, and that there was a feeling which could be described as a tugging at my heart, and that I ought to do something. That I ought to do something in response to that feeling.

We pulled over to the side of the road and my brother and I both prayed the sinner's prayer. Heads bowed. Hands folded. In the backseat of our family Olds Delta 88.

I know exactly the spot on the side of the rural highway. I drove past it every few weeks until the age of 18 when I went off to college. And then even in college, I drove past that spot where I accepted Christ on each trip home to see family. And each time driving past it, I smiled a comforting smile. And each April 24 since, *until today*, I have celebrated in at least a very private, personal way.

After we had accepted Jesus into our hearts, as soon as we got home (which was long before the age of cell phones), my mom called everybody in the family.

It was joyous. I was told angels were singing in heaven.

My mom had taught me the alphabet and the very basics of reading on writing even before I went to Kindergarten. Before I went to bed that night in that bottom bunk, I wrote on my calendar beside my bed, in the neatest letters I could muster, in the little square for April 24, 1971, "**I met God.**"

Today, coincidentally, I got one of the biggest promotions of my career. But much

more so than any of that, I am still that little child. Or at least, perhaps, I innocently and naively wish I were.

I called my wife and told her about my promotion. She was in a good mood.

We have a family vacation coming up. I asked if it would be OK if we didn't talk about "theology and that." She liked the idea. And I asked if it would be OK if we took care not to provoke each other. And she liked that too. Finally I asked if I asked, "If you do bring something up, would it be OK if I asked 'would you prefer I respond or not respond to what you've said?'" She liked that idea too.

And I said I'd have a great time if we just got to walk around and hold hands while the kids had fun. "Assuming I don't lose the camera," I continued in reference to how my stupidity ruined a few days in Paris almost five years ago.

I heard her smile through the phone. A smile that means the world to me.

OK, so you know Ted Haggard was my pastor and maybe that makes my perceptions a bit skewed, but one of the things I been noticing and thinking about recently is how much people's priests, pastors, and ministers affect their faith. I mean something like 85% of Americans identify themselves as Christians yet few know the most basic doctrines and hardly any know the scriptures, any degree of church history, or any amount of Biblical scholarship. But what they do seem to know is what their pastors think and say. (And unfortunately in my case many times *not* what their pastors *do*.)

So I travel a lot on business and often what I do on airplanes is read. Perhaps part of why I got to my deconversion principally through science first is due to my timidity in reading of controversial religious material. In public settings. But then when I read *The God Delusion* in my travels last year, I kind of broke through this barrier. I am not ashamed of the gospel and I am prepared to give an answer to anyone who asks. That is, if I have to.

So again yesterday I was traveling. Reading one of the books my wife got me, Liberty University's Habermas' *The Case for the Resurrection of Christ*. The book is written in this hokey, non-scholarly coaching format (here's how to witness to your non-Christian friend on the resurrection of Christ) but I'm managing to make it through it. I mean Richard Carrier and others have some good stuff on this (including some key contrarian, silent, and timeline evidence which Habermas and Licona kind of gloss over), but that's not really the point of this post.

Yesterday on the airplane I'm seated next to this nice couple retiree.

Husband: "What are you reading?"

Me: Showing the title, "A book on the evidence for the resurrection of Christ." What a nice elderly couple I think.

Husband: "Looks really good."

Me: "It's OK." I think whether or not I want to be writing my typical heretical *thoughts* on every margin like I now critically read many things. I know I don't really care to say anything as there's no reason to hurt their feelings over religion.

Husband: "Our pastor is Pastor Jeremiah. Maybe you've heard of him. He's always on the radio."

Me: "Unfortunately, I haven't."

And that's the whole conversation.

But what's weird, is that in my travels, whether I'm reading the Bible, Christian, or anti-Christian authors, the reactions I seem to get are these.

1. People say nothing. This seems to be the vast majority. I've seen people fidget. I've seen what appear to be socially conservative people fidget when I get out my secular readings. I've seen what appear to be socially liberal people fidget when I get out my Bible to read. But more often than not, nobody says anything (as I continue to scribe my heretical thinking into the margins).

2. People talk about their church or their pastor. It seems that this is either so influential or that this is what people feel comfortable talking about to a stranger. Especially if they assume I'm a fellow believer. (The fact that this is next on the list I guess was my thoughts for this post.)

3. People talk about the most syncretistical beliefs. Early this week I had this guy telling me about this combo that seemed to be a fusion of Catholicism + Chopra + The Force. And more often than not, this category seems to be a mix of some verbal teachings from some revealed religion plus some pop psychology or pop religion or pop self-help book they had read (as in one book read in the last five years) plus some pop culture plus some sort of personal experience rooted in a point of psychological vulnerability in their lives.

Only once or twice I have actually gotten into content with a stranger. I mean, what's the point.

Anyhow I just found it all interesting tonight. When I was a Christian, I never would have considered reading my Bible in a public setting like this. I never would have read anti-Christian material in a public setting. Maybe something devotional. And if anything would have come up, I think I would have gone into some sort of helmeted witnessing mode where I did a whole lot more talking than listening.

Now that I can read on religion in public and listen, I just find it all a whole lot more interesting. From a sociological perspective.

In all of my travels in the recent years, I had one interesting discussion on religion. It was on a flight between Calcutta and London. The guy was doing research involving source manuscripts in Calcutta libraries looking at some of the effects of Protestant and specifically Calvinistic doctrine in the colonization of Asia. Now *that* was an interesting conversation that helped shorten a long flight for both of us.

Note to self: Should write something on why I like reading the Bible so much more

now as an apostate.

It's late and too much thought. Deconversion from 35 years as a fundie is too hard. To help myself, I was thinking through some thoughts and put this almost manifesto-ish/creed-like set of statements together. Thought I'd post it.

I'm sure it's *like*, "*duh*" and obvious to most of you. You guys already know how stupid I feel. I'd ask you not beat me up. Just that I thought I'd write it down.

I can not affirm the creation myth, the human origins myth, the language origins myth, or the flood myth.

I can not affirm the incarnation, the virgin birth, or the physical resurrection.

I can not comprehend the mysteries of the Trinity or any orthodox Christology.

I have not found evidence that convinces me of an afterlife, of a heaven, of a hell, or that a mind or soul transcends the boundaries of death.

I can not rationalize or condone the positive or casual treatment of the genocide, murder, slavery, misogyny, polygamy, rape, prostitution, racism, mob justice, or non-individual-based sense of justice of the Old Testament.

I can not see more than the effects of human minds in the oral tradition, authorship, copying, transmission, canonization, and translation of the texts held to be inspired, revealed, and sacred.

I see numerous areas in various scientific fields of study that do not affirm the assertions of these ancient texts.

I can not materially comprehend the eschatological beliefs of many of the Christian faith, yet I fear potential consequences of possible self fulfillment.

That said...

I do not see that the assertions of any other religion to be rooted in other than human imaginations.

I will live a life founded in responsibility, fairness, compassion, reciprocity, and generosity.

I will live a lifestyle in the norms of that which is aspired to by modern, American, Protestant, Evangelical Christians where it does not conflict with these principles.

I will strive to love my neighbor as myself.

I will continue to go to church to honor my wife, my family, and my commitments made to them.

I will be honest in my loss of faith should people inquire, but I will do all that I can within that constraint to minimize the negative relational consequences my loss of

faith will have on my wife, my family, my extended family, and friends.

I will keep my mind open to learn more. And open to personal experience. As I know all evidence is interpreted through a personal filter.

I will not condemn or tell others what they should know or what they should or should not believe as I know each person's experiences differ from my own.

And in the off chance there is a god, and if that god is God, and if God is a he, and if he is the He, and if He judges me condemning me to eternal torture for this, so be it.

Here I stand. I can do no other.

(And yes it is very deconversion oriented. Maybe in a few years it'll be more "generic" if you will.)

Ralphy,

On one side I recognize that though I've done a wholesale swap out of many of my *memes*, I still must do what I must do to ensure the success of my *genes*. Long before the Tipping Point of Cognitive Dissonance, I learned of natural explanations of the phenomenon of religion--the key role that it plays in the bonding of family, community, society, and culture. I personally, in a naturalistic and evolutionary sense, can fault no one for staying in the closet completely given this. Even myself. And I reached this conclusion prior to the Tipping Point.

However...

I am a bit of a troublemaker and I can't imagine not stirring the pot a little. Just that when and if I should choose to do something.

1) I would do so with a bit more time as an apostate under my belt. With a bit more observation of the social dynamics from this side. With a bit more study and preparation.

2) I would do so with techniques a whole lot more subtle, perhaps even subversive, than hit-em-over-the-head-with-a-2x4 and make-em-feel-stupid monologue of your garden variety Atheist.

RalphyS, it's not just that I have "studied the matter so much." It is more that - I am them. Not only do I see the faulty logic, the ignorance of science, the ignorance of broad aspects of religion and religious studies. More importantly, I can empathize with their hopes, their fears, their doubts.

Just for now. This season is all about caring for my family. (And technically my genes before you get all sentimental on me.)

I was able to remain quiet yesterday. And not gawk so bad during "praise and worship." Going to church is what I have decided I need to do to preserve very important relationships.

The church has free wi-fi and I really want to bring my laptop and cross reference stuff. My fantasy is to research every point during the sermon and write up a review real time and then email to the speaker at the end of the hour. Too conspicuous though I think. I have to settle with just cross referencing within the the Bible for counter points.

I'm getting a bit better (at least for the moment right now) at handling church. The primary thing that really, I mean *really*, gets to me right now is the false dilemmas.

6The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; 7the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. 8Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. ~ Romans 8:6-8

The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. ~ Galatians 6:8

You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. ~ James 4:4

The if-you-don't-believe-in-Jesus-the-only-other-choice-is-self-destructive-hedonism line.

I mean, what kind of stats are there to back of that hooley?

That's the primary thing that disturbs me. It trivializes what has been my pursuit for truth as less than genuine, it presupposes that I had motives rooted in character flaws, and it grants opportunity for people to reject me, not based upon who I am or what I do, but simplistically based upon what I do or don't profess.

Grrr.

But otherwise, it seems I can sit there OK.

I just got back from a week's family holiday at Walt Disney World in Orlando, Florida.

One thing that struck me was what I would like to refer to as "The Gospel of Jiminy Cricket." Perhaps you know the lyrics of the famous song from one of Walt Disney's earliest animated feature films, *Pinocchio*.

*When you wish upon a star
Makes no difference who you are
Anything your heart desires
Will come to you*

*If your heart is in your dream
No request is too extreme
When you wish upon a star
As dreamers do*

*Fate is kind
She brings to those who love
The sweet fulfillment of
Their secret longing*

*Like a bolt out of the blue
Fate steps in and sees you through
When you wish upon a star
Your dreams come true*

The Academy Award-winning song has become a theme song for the Disney company. In fact, in Scandanavia, it has become a Christmas song of sorts.

The message is a universal one and a human one - a message of hope. That basically, if you wish and your heart is pure, your dreams will come true. A familiar inspirational key tenet of many theistic belief systems.

I remember as a child listening to the opening theme song of the Oral Roberts TV program in the 1970s...

*Something good is going to happen to you
Happen to you
Happen to you*

*Something good is going to happen to you
Happen to you
This very day*

*In each and every way
because Jesus of Nazareth
Is passing your way*

"Beloved I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth." ~ 3 John 2

In my voyage of discovery of the last few years, this is one of the harsh realities, that as part of my deferred process of "growing up," I have had to come to accept just isn't so. That, that which is so, and that which I hope to be so are not necessarily the same thing and that an increased "hop-ed-ness" does not result in a increased "so-ed-ness." (Forgive the liberty at which I make up words. Perhaps "*argumentum ad votum*" might be a more high-brow moniker.)

Anyhow, Disney World and all that the Disney culture is, is so full of wonder, dreams, wishes, hopes, and imagination. It is the World's Happiest Place. The traditional park is the Magic Kingdom. Where Aladdin flies on his Magic Carpet. As part of this year's theme - a Year of a Million Dreams. Every little bit of this and that was referred to as a Magical Moment. The park opening sometimes an hour early for customers paying the premium to stay "on property" are "Extra Magic Hours."

Whether or not it was actually magic, I don't know.

But what it was, was over-indulgent, and over-stimulating.

Never before in my forty years have I seen so much over-indulgence in sights (and as many small, medium, large, and HUGE video screens), sounds (and speakers way too loud every few feet playing yet another Disney tune), or tastes and smells (and huge amounts of quite unhealthy food). Never before I have seen so many obese people (personally wondering about some sort of associative connection in all this), so many exhausted, crying children (from too much of everything), so many people "needing a vacation from their vacation" as one fellow set of parents phrased it.

It was completely over-the-top for me. I was just taken aback by it all.

We watched the parade.

I knew the heros. I knew the stories. Familiar and comforting. Where good conquers evil. Where a bit of persevance is all it takes. Where dreams do come true. And everything ends happily ever after.

The complete pantheon of Disney characters marches by. My little guy is getting heavy on my shoulders.

And I am reminded of other types of parades which I have seen over the years in my travels. Not the flag-waving American Independence Day Parade where Kids, Shriners, Vets (real heros), and First Responders (more real heros) pass by, but of other parades founded in the belief that something good/magical just might happen. I wonder, what are the differences? Are admiration, veneration, adoration, and worship just different sections on one common scale?

Am I think only one thinking this? Wow, I didn't expect to lose completely the magic in life, the spark of imagination. Have I lost that? I hope not. That would be sad.

Does anyone else think about these things so analytically? What do other non-theists think about Disneyana? I have no idea.

All I see is seas of smiles around me. And kids elbowing their siblings.

Standing there with almost a blank gaze on my face, I get interrupted by the kids. It's time to run off to Splash Mountain before our Fast Passes expire.

Good points DLL.

In many regards, it was a "must see." I've been to Disneyland in California as well as in Paris and in Tokyo. The whole Disney brand and corporation and genericised message of hope is at the core of many globalisation trends.

It's like I wanted to do some sort of study on everything. I found it all so fascinating in this regard.

While The Gospel of Jiminy Cricket is very appealing to deep human need of **Hope**, the Disney message is also definitely one of [American centric Western] **Globalisation**, of **Progress** and of **Humanism**. I think the [ride through the Epcot ball](#) clearly embodies those themes. As did much of the IllumiNations Epcot fireworks show.

I just found it all amazing. As amazing as if I could attend an event at the Roman Colosseum during the reign of Titus. Or as amazing if I could witness the palace intrigue at Versailles in the reign of Louis XIV.

So much of modern humanity can be studied at Disney World.

Plus Space Mountain is always fun too.

Today I read [Why Mike's Not a Christian](#) by [Ben Young](#).

I emailed the author giving a bit of my story asking if he'd be interested in some dialogue.

I got into a bit of a theological discussion with my wife tonight.

I didn't want to do it, but I guess it happened. *What a lame denial of personal responsibility.*

I read chapter one of *Why Mike's Not a Christian*. It's the standard C. S. Lewis moral universalism shtick. Ugh. Yuck.

At the end of the chapter is a number of questions. The kind of questions that might be used for friendly discussion in a group Bible study. How quaint I think. Everybody pleasantly reaffirming each other's faith wanting to get to the punch and cookies. Nobody saying aloud what the "still, small voice" is really saying. I can imagine such a Bible "study," but this isn't that environment. This is real and it's my life.

I ask my wife if she wants to discuss. Stupid me actually taking the initiative. This is something I want *not* to do. Grr.

A couple glasses of Cab. That was the problem. Grr. *Yet another excuse and denial of personal responsibility.*

We discuss.

I say too much.

Voices raise enough that she transitions out of a good solid thinking mode into an emotional state.

But it was so hard not to. As **this topic** was the very origins of my skepticism in college when reading *Mere Christianity* 20 years ago. Grr. *Yet more excuses. Aren't I just the excuse factory tonight.*

But it's even worse than C. S. Lewis. The author is using slavery and genocide as his only two examples under an otherwise undisclosed definition on what this asserted absolute morality is. Slavery? Genocide?

Why any Christian (at least one that has actually read the OT) wants to lead with

"moral absolutes" is beyond me.

I hold back some. A lot actually. A whole damn lot.

At least my wife was holding my hand at our son's Spring band concert. It's not like we don't have a solid foundation.

But sheesh. I gotta do better than this.

Kick self. Kick self. Kick self.

Thanks Gil.

The other morning I had breakfast with one of the senior lay leaders of our church. My pastor friend had set it up. Thought we might want to get together. I had asked for something like this. In part to do due diligence, but in part to sincerely work through my own grief.

A nice, gentle spirit, sufficiently intellectual guy (OK, at least *prima scriptura* and not *sola scriptura* and that's quite impressive in evangelical circles).

We have breakfast and talk. It is so wonderful to not even worry about who might be sitting at the next table over listening in. It is so wonderful to be so sincere and honest to oneself in what one truly does and does not believe and to be able to share that calmly to someone who cares to listen.

I give him an overview of my church background. It felt a bit like what scholars might do going through their pedigree, or white collar professionals might do going through the list of firms with which they've worked and clients for whom they've done various engagements. I kind of give the list of churches (Baptist, AofG, Episcopalian, non-denominational) I've attended, the various lay leadership types of roles I've played, and how I became associated with the present church. I think he just kind of wanted get a feel for what kinds of theology I had been exposed to over the years to see where I might be coming from in those experience.

He is a professional psychologist and was a nice guy. Going down the typical question-based approach to the conversation.

After the initial ice-breaker-if-you-will discussion of church background, he makes the transition, "So, our pastor friend gave me a bit of background on this, care to share where you are presently at on your faith and how you got here?"

It was nice and "professional."

I give my deconversion testimony. Starting with the awakening of my initial skepticism in college upon writing a refutation of *Mere Christianity* just for the fun of it out of an otherwise boring assignment. Then, in terror of its implications, putting my skepticism on the shelf for 15 years and focusing instead on serving the Lord in the context of starting family and career. Then, about my part-time level-of-effort pursuit of truth of the past four years upon reaching the tipping point of cognitive dissonance last autumn.

He listened and listened quite well.

I wanted to keep it all out-of-the-theology if you will, unless he took the initiative to *go there*.

I talked about the challenges with my wife and family. About the fears of social ostracism.

Though kind and affable, I got the impression he was looking for *the wedge*. A wedge in my understanding. Or a wedge in my character. In lines with what I have anticipated and prepared for in such types of discussions I expected would need to be occurring over the next number of months.

Given that the conversation isn't really going anywhere he can offer up a either a spiritual chastisement or spiritual quick fix, he turns the corner and *goes there*.

To talk about theology.

He brings up this argument or that argument.

I say what nearly each given argument is often formally referred and go ahead and play out the next set of volleys myself on both sides of the exchange. I bring up how a certain snippet of scripture fits in, how a certain naturalistic explanation fits in, what a non-canonical gospel said about that, what the devout of another belief system do in parallel.

Intelligent Christian with a set of strategically placed and carefully propped up NOMA firewalls blocking the interchange between different parts of his mind. Almost like scar tissue of neurons. Been there, done that.

He asks if there is any thread which I can hang on to. I say certainly. That much of the teachings of Christ are founded in reciprocity and I more so than ever want to live a life *defined by* discipline, reciprocity, and generosity. And that I really like Ecclesiastes and a few parts of James and the Johannine epistles too.

The guy wasn't half bad, but I didn't really feel challenged in the responses.

Some around here seem to worry about not being ready for an argument or whatever, but so far, it seems almost too easy. Live a moral life. Be kind-hearted, genial, and honest in the conversation. Keep the discourse above-the-line, out of the emotionality of the pre-frontal cortex, always keeping the other party out of the emotional zone, always keeping them in the thinking zone, preferable just on the *edge of discomfort*. All you really gotta do is look them in the eye, with a directness and honesty that is admired in the faith, and ask, "So how do you *know*?" "I mean how do you *really* know?" "How do *you* truly know." Each time emphasizing a different word of the question.

For most so far, it seems it gets down to a final "leap of faith" assertion underneath it all for which the final question is, "so then how is that materially different from the devout of any faith, of any thread of Christianity, all the way to the devout of extremely different religions?" So far at the point, the other part has just produced an honest, black stare. Or reiteration of an unsupportable maxim with glazed over eyes. Though I've only had a few of these conversations, it seems when the latter

occurs, I know I've pushed to far. But with this guy, it was the former. The honest, black stare.

A fidget or two, he started getting a little uncomfortable. Starting to get out of his professional zone.

The conversation backs off a bit in its depth. A little bit of what I would consider to be theory of discernment comes up (how does one know to attribute the idea, the voice, to one's imagination vs. God vs. the Saints vs. Satan vs. demons vs. Ganesh vs. the Great White Spirit vs. whatever). It looks a bit like his responses aren't even sufficiently convincing for himself. I back off.

It goes on more back to the social aspects. He goes back to the discernment thing and make some comment about "bounce ideas of others" and the value of that. True this is good stuff and no man is an island by all religious groups greatly use the power of the group to influence the mind of the individual.

I remind him about the social implications. About how I honestly shouldn't volunteer to participate in the leadership of my boy's Cub Scout Den. How disbelief is the #1 social stigma and not since the days between say Jefferson and Lincoln was it safe for a politician to be somewhat exposed about the state of his disbelief.

"After all, it's not like I can go to the average Bible study and expect to be anything but a disruptive force by asking these questions and talking about this stuff. I'm not going to turn it into a let's-make-it-about-me night."

He see's I nobody's fool. At least not any more.

Almost at a loss of what to do, he asks what I suggest for next steps.

I tell him I'm doing good enough for now, but I maybe, and potentially at anytime, I may be calling with some sort of panic phone call to help intervene in some sort of family or other misunderstanding that I fear might erupt.

He gives me his card. He is a professional counselor after all.

Thanks. I find every interaction amazing.

Had lunch at my daughter's school today with my daughter. Steffi was there at the girls' table with us. She's the one who I was second place after.

I brought a sack lunch in. Some sort of Tupperware and Disney branded "souvenir" drink container from Walt Disney World.

Reading the text printed below all the Disney characters on the drink container, Steffi asks my daughter, "It says 'where dreams come true - did your dream come true?'"

My daughter replies, "No."

I inquire, "What was your dream?"

She says, "I can't tell. Otherwise it won't happen. That's part of Cinderella."

And I think, there it is.

Again.

Everywhere.

At every turn.

The self reinforcement of the myths.

100 make a wish.

80 don't say anything and their wishes don't come true but they keep silent because it just might. After all, if you wish upon a star, beloved I wish you prosper even as the force be with you. Or something like that.

19 blab. Oh, that's why their wish doesn't come true.

1. Gets lucky. Wish comes true. And tells all.

And the meme replicates and replicates and replicates with a viral unstopability.

Now normally, I might want to ask my daughter a follow-on *thinking* question. But no. We're with her friends and her *best* friend at that.

Dad is already known to be uncool enough and I am just pleased that my daughter had invited me to her school to have lunch with her.

I read *Case for the Resurrection of Jesus* this week.

I love to run.

This morning I had a wonderful 10 miler along Lake Michigan in Chicago being out-of-town on business. Beautiful sunrise over the lake. OK, I did swallow a bug, but otherwise, it was a great run. Lots of people out in the spring time. Nice to see people making healthy choices.

Anyhow, I had a wonderfully close relationship with my grandfather. He passed away about 12 years ago and I still really miss him. The other day I came across an old photo of him and my brother and myself sitting on the porch swing on the front of his house. I'm there, about two years old sitting next to Grandpa with my hand tenderly on his arm. He had strong arms and gentle, yet worn, hands from years of honest farm labor, under the sun, in the vast wheat fields of the North American Great Plains.

After retirement when my grandparents moved out of their house to move to a smaller, yet "independent living," accommodations for an end stage in life, they left that special-place-for-me porch swing there with the house. That I did not buy it from them at that point is one of the biggest regrets of my life.

I could go on and on about stories in my childhood about my grandpa, how I spent time with him, how he patiently taught me things, how he was always there. I think the key point is that there have only been four persons in my life with whom I have been really close - my mom, my dad, my grandpa, and my wife.

Tying this all back together, a bit like me, my grandpa was a bit athletic. I remember how well he used to play softball. Even in his 60s. At least before arthritis had really set in from decades of manual labor.

And I remember how my mom, my dad, and my grandma each attested that he could do something quite amazing in his youth.

Extremely amazing in fact.

That he could run a four minute mile.

Incredible.

That fast?

It probably would have been 15 or 20 years before Roger Bannister did the same.

He never ran as part of any sort of organized competition or team. So it's not like there is any record.

But my mom used to say that, and my dad, and my grandma as well.
I wonder...

Is it true?

I sure would like for it to be true.

I would love for it to be true.

As I love to run so much myself.

But do I know?

I know he was athletic although a bit short in stature. And that he was a wonderful, honest man, one of the best men I have ever known.

And that I don't see my mom, my dad, or my grandma as intentional liars about stuff. And I vaguely remember in my earliest years that when they would make such a claim around my grandpa, he would just kinda silently smile and nod in that gentle way that was characteristically unique and humble to him.

So I wonder...

Could he have actually run a four minute mile?

Anyhow, I was quite surprised this all came to mind.

An incredible event.

About seven decades ago.

I'm telling you I know and interacted with the principal but after the event.

And that I know one still living witness.

And that I knew and know others who would attest to it.

It's oral tradition.

Now you need to write down what happened.

I'm Paul. You're the author of Q.

Today was a great day.

This morning, two kids' baseball games. One kid's team won, the other tied.
Beautiful day.

After lunch, I ran an easy 5km while my little guy pedaled beside me. Beautiful trail.

Had a great, bidirectional, interesting conversation with my wife about genetics
seguing from a conversation about my one kid's sex ed class.

Went to an acquaintance's wedding tonight. Wife and I held hands during the
ceremony. Immensely enjoyed dancing with my wife of almost two decades as she
did with me.

And she whispered in my ear that the last few years have been the best years. And
how much she loved me.

Today was one of the best days I have had in many, many months.

I think I can now say I have "successfully" "come out," at least to a few key people.

Last November was the tipping point.

I found this site in December.

I started this thread in January.

I thought, planned, and decompressed in January and February.

I came out to my pastor friend in early March.

I came out to my wife in early April.

Now here in May, had a good vacation with my wife and family. And seem to have
made significant additional progress in the context of a birthday, of a wedding, and

of Mothers' Day.

I think, at least for now, my wife is past the acid-in-the-stomach and many-sleepless-night stage. I know I need to be careful as any sort of intensive fundie lectures, intervention ideas, etc. could reflate, but for now, I think we're past the initial risks associated with "coming out."

This is why I came out to the pastor friend first. He knows me and has known me well around 20 years.

At the point when it was roughest for my wife here a few weeks ago, I called our pastor friend and asked that he call *her*. To calm her.

As I said, she's given me a stack of books from the local Christian book store to read. So far in the last few weeks, I've read *Why Mike's Not a Christian*, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, and *The Big Argument: Does God Exist?*

I've also recently made through my annotation of Jeremiah and John. Jeremiah was a slow go. At this point I have Leviticus, Joshua, Judges, 1 Kings, Ezra, Esther, Ecclesiastes, Jeremiah, Daniel, Amos, Nahum, Haggai, Matthew, John, Romans, Ephesians, Colossians, Titus, James, 1 John, and 2 John fully annotated. It will at least take until the end of the year, maybe significantly more, to get it all annotated.

There are several benefits for this every-margin annotation. It is helping me say "good bye." The process of doing this is getting less and less painfully intense. It is helping me work out frustrations with myself. I am also doing this because I don't know who and how many I'm going to have to come out to. So far I have been able to be sufficiently prepared for the conversations I have had, but I anticipate intervention like activities. In many regards, I have taken **kind, open, honest, first steps** which I believe have enabled me to be, at least to this point, more proactive than reactive. That said, while I feel as though I have gotten through a first step, I still have a lifetime ahead of me.

At the dinner table Mother's Day, my mother-in-law is talking about the toasts made at the wedding the night before.

She says that the toast of the stepfather of the bride (who I'll call "Thomas") was the most wonderful toast, from the heart, even that it was "from God." I'm trying not to roll me eyes, perhaps even trying a bit to disinterest myself from the conversation and the she follows up with a...

"although he doesn't say he is a Christian."

My attention is grabbed and centered on the conversation immediately. Even so, I try to keep my face from making any new facial expression. I hope I'm less obvious than at least a deer-in-headlights.

I think, I never knew *that*. How come nobody even told me *that*?

Not a *Christian*?

With the new bit of information my brain cross references all sorts of past

conversations with "Thomas," about "Thomas," trying to see why that might be.

Thomas is, as far as I have been able to tell, a wonderful man. Intelligent, articulate, professional, warm-hearted, kind, and considerate. Maybe in his early 60s. In many regards and in personality like me (but also in character like what I *hope* to be).

I have known him through my in-law's relationship with him and his wife for almost 20 years. But never before had anyone mentioned that he didn't consider himself a Christian. I just *assumed* he was given his wife's beliefs, his [step]kids' beliefs, his [step]kids' professions, etc.

Last night after dinner and after tucking the kids into bed, I have a conversation with my wife.

Me: "About what your mom said at dinner..." I say after talking about the logistics of life.

DW: "Yeah..." wondering a thousand different things because the relationship between a mother and daughter has so many different dimensions and it *is* Mother's Day after all.

Me: "She said Thomas isn't a Christian."

DW: "Yeah..."

Me: "I didn't know that, did you?"

DW: "Yeah, I did, but I don't know that much."

Me: "I wonder why that is... Why do you *think*?"

DW: She gives an explanation concerning personal bad experience with the faith but I know that such a response has already gone through her theistic filter if not one or two others before the information reaches me in this moment.

Me: "As far as I know, he seems like a good guy," I say wanting to test what my wife *knows* of him with her in full awareness how deep this conversation could potential go.

DW: "He is..." and she relays more and why. I knew she had thought a lot of Thomas, but I just wanted to hear it and to confirm it within our new context of our relationship.

Me: "I was just wondering if he has some sorts of skeletons in the closet, do you know of any?"

DW: "No, he is a very kind man from everything I know."

Me: Wonderful, I think. "I'd love to talk to him," I say testing the waters more to see if she will try to keep me from knowingly reaching out to him. She knows I've been looking for mentorship in this journey.

DW: "I think you should."

I'm shocked. She trusts me enough, even in the midsts of potential challenges to her own faith and her worldview, to let me seek understanding and counsel.

Maybe, just maybe, she sees me a little bit like Thomas.

I am so curious as to what Thomas' story is. I am going to talk to him in the upcoming weeks.

[My "preacher"] not really the "preacher" type. More the "pastor" type. He was shocked and disappointed. I asked him how many conversations he'd had like this over the years. He said three or four. I think though that we've known each other so long, he knew my character.

I haven't yet told anyone other than DH. But even little tidbits of information I throw out for others to digest has been met with an uneasiness.

Of course. It's scary for them.

[...]

That reminds me of a story. (Imagine that.)

My kids are scripture memory aces. Learning lots of Bible verses. For free candy.

Though otherwise passive on the topic, a few weeks ago I suggested the do Matthew 17:21.

"Why Dad?"

"It's even easier than 'Jesus wept.'" in reference to John 11:35.

"How?"

"Look it up," I reply.

My daughter looks it up. Flips pages back and forth a few times. She looks looks puzzled. She looks at me.

I ask, "What's it say?"

"Nothing. It's not there. There's nothing between verse 20 and 22."

"Did you read the footnote?" I continue.

"It's something about some manuscripts."

"Yeah, they took it out of the Bible here not too long ago," I state rather dryly.

She gives me a stern, cross look.

And then I explain just a tad of the notion of textual criticism to a kid who has otherwise lived in an inerrant world.

Sometimes I'm just dumbstruck by it all.

Through my deconversion process I came to appreciate the role that religion plays in the maintenance of social bonds at nearly all levels of our primate species. In bonding family, in bonding extended family, in bonding clan, and in bonding culture. Primatal, social, bipedal, naked, barely conscious, barely rational, and overwhelmingly superstitious and religious. That's who we are.

I just don't get how the every-fundie-is-so-fuckin-stupid line is grounded in an understanding of the consequences of naturalism or evolution. To me it seems about as incongruous as a God-is-good/good-killed-all-the-Canaanites dichotomy.

But then. What do I know.

[...]

I recognize, more than ever, how hurt some have been. Have been rejected. Have been ostracized. By those they love[d], who they *thought* loved them.

When I came to this board now almost six months ago, I had thought I had it rough. That because of my half life as a fundie, because of my nearly exclusive set of fundie family and friends, that I had it rough.

That it was some how "harder" for me. Because I was in the thick of it all.

This morning's run, I was wondering... What if I had pursued that initial skeptical inclination 20 years ago in college? What would I have done? What would I have done if I had come out to say, my dad, first? With no plan. With no preparation. With no track record as a moral, responsible adult.

While I don't really know, I suspect I likely would have botched it. I would not have had the maturity, the social skills, the courage, and the patience to handle it in any way that would have been other than interpersonally disastrous. Perhaps even devastating.

So as a former fundie and as an adult. As someone "my parent's age" for many of the most acerbic on this board...

I'm sorry.

As a former fundie, I'm sorry for the hurt that your families have caused you.

And I apologize for considering my path any harder than anybody else's.

Today I am grateful for how easy I have it.

OK, so Sunday at church, toward the end of "Praise and Worship," the pastor is making some point.

And my wife gives me a *look*.

And the pastor makes some other unevidenced assertion of propositional truth.

And my wife turns again toward me and gives me another *look*.

"Why are you giving me that look?" I ask, always wanting to center any discussion around questions.

"This is for you," she asserts with a tone somewhere between a peace that pass all understanding and a human venom.

"What do you mean?" I continue almost playing dumb so as to keep my emotions toned down.

"I can't *believe* you *deny* what God has done for you. How you have forgotten that He [this particular attribution of some miraculously wonderful event in our lives]." She continues to list four or five of her other personal "evidences" for God.

It's emotional and it's personal and it's a public environment. Thin ice.

"What do you mean?" I continue just to buy a bit more time to *think*.

She's starting to heat up. The kids are moving in closer to listen. Bothered a bit by the fact that their parents are having a conversation with a bit of conflict as all kids do.

"I can't *believe* you've *forgotten* what God has done for you," she pleads.

"No, I haven't *forgotten* what has *happened*... It's more a matter of attribution. My question remains... How do you *know*, I mean really *know* who to attribute any otherwise unexplainable phenomenon to? How do you *know*? I mean really *know*?" I ask building on the most recent similar sidebar conversation she invoked at church which I mentioned here.

I wonder how many people are listening in. *Nobody* talks like this at church.

She's getting flustered. I wonder why she *went there*. Maybe it was just an eruption of raw emotion. Good insight to what she's really thinking I think.

She changes angles, "I can't believe you *read* what you did, letting all those *worldly ideas* into your mind."

"Hey, it's what Pastor Ted preached. 'Free market of ideas.' 'Let the best idea win.' I was just doing what he preached." I replied in reference to Ted Haggard's frequent unattributed preaching of many of the ideas of former Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes.

I was unwilling to take it the next step further, to emphasize which ideas lost out.

"What is it mommy?, What is it daddy?" my sweet daughter interrupts.

"Mom and I were discussing something," I reply to "honor" my wife yet knowing that such as reply is all-too-dismissive of her. I wonder when I will have better options.

My wife doesn't continue any further.

Praise and worship comes to an end. The pastor preaches. I have my Bible in hand and quickly flip back and forth between every point preached and cross references vs. various other scriptures with supports as well as counter points of view. My Bible is the most marked up I have ever seen. The speed at which I work through it is as quick as any Bible school student's. I see in the corner of my eye my wife shaking her head.

I'm deeply, very deeply engaged at what the pastor is preaching.

Late in the sermon I turn to look at my wife. Looks like she's sleeping. I shake my head in disbelief.

Later in the afternoon, in a separate quiet moment at home, just between her and me...

"Can I ask you something?" I ask.

"Yeah."

"Would it be OK if you didn't give me dirty looks at church?"

"OK," she responds.

"It feels insulting," I end with.

Bit by bit new ground rules are being established. I can barely imagine how disappointed she is in me. I wonder what this is doing to her own faith. In one conversation she even said, "I don't have answers for you; I can't explain my faith to you; I only know what I believe and I can't explain why."

If you recall from my original posts, I was working through a moral dilemma. The wrong of living a disingenuous life vs. the wrong of bringing hurt to someone I love.

I still really don't have any more clarity than I did then.

With regard to my marked up Bible, I just read the following Dan Barker quote...

Quote:

Let me tell you what would have impressed me, 12 years ago. This will apply to most fundamentalists, but not to all Christians. First, informed bible criticism. If you would have opened my bible and pointed to relevant verses, I may not have instantly converted to atheism, but I would have been impressed with your grasp of what I considered important. It would have hit the nail right on the head. Although they praise the bible as the greatest book ever written, few fundamentalists know much about it

I haven't had time to follow up with Thomas yet. I've been really busy at work starting up a bunch of new stuff.

I like everyone's read on the whole inner vs. outer struggle.

It's quite accurate, however...

There is an element of inner struggle that is far from over. And it almost rages.

While I have passed the intellectual phase internally, I have not emotionally.

To a significant degree I have accepted intellectual honesty at the cost of personal, internal emotional pain.

Emotionally, I think I would still go back to the [false] comfort of the everything-happens-for-a-purpose world. In a heart beat. But I also know I *can't*. I am ashamed and guilty for admitting this to myself. Call me a Cypherite. But right now, tonight, this is where shamefully I am. And often am. And I wonder how long I'll be here.

While I do have a new worldview that intellectually is removed from its "tensions" (in the spirit of Francis Schaeffer), emotionally, I feel alone.

As one alone.

As one.

Ughh.

It is so tough. After dinner last night with a couple of our close Christian friends in which they asked "Do you want to talk about it?" and my wife replied, "No, I'll cry."

Then at home late...

"I can't believe you let this happen to yourself."

"You are deceived."

"Scales on your eyes."

"Ruined everything."

"I had followed you because you believed."

"You were a man of God."

"I gave up my dreams for you."

"I never saw this coming."

I apologize, stroke her hair, and tell her I so sorry for the hurt this has caused her.

"You're not sorry."

"Otherwise you never would have let this happen."

"You let yourself be deceived."

Emotional hyperbole. For the pain she is going through.

This morning. The sun comes up. And the birds sing. And I go for a quick five miler in the park before she's up. I notice wildflowers along the trail in the full bloom they'll only be in briefly for this but a moment of the year.

And come back and give her caresses and tell her "it'll all work out" in full knowledge that it may and it may not but what we choose to do will determine that but also in full knowledge that my propositional assertion that "it'll all work out" brings her a comfort she needs from a man she needs to be consistent and strong and there for her.

I am Cypher.

After a couple rough days, today was much, much better.

Plus I had the conversation with Thomas **and** his sufficiently liberal, mainstream, devout Christian wife. A very good conversation with the *two* of them after me shocking them with just coming over and dumping it out there.

I'll post more later when I have time. Thanks for your interest, support, and ideas. I'll post responses when I have time. Thank you.

I am fundamentally "out." What my wife doesn't understand about my beliefs at this point is governed by two things - her present lack of understanding of a good number of things and her inability or unwillingness to be ready to accept that the way I am is the way I very likely will be.

Reminders me of a conversation I had with my pastor friend.

"Well then, do you believe in the resurrection?" He asks.

And I'm thinking what do you mean by "believe?" To know?, to hope?, to profess?, to place stakes upon?, to hope to know?, to profess to hope?, to profess to know?, to hope to hope?, to hope to hope to know?, to place stakes upon without knowing?, on and on and on I'm wondering.

And I'm thinking, what do you mean by "resurrection?" "Spiritual"/mythical?, physical?, attested event?, attested spiritual/mythical event?, attested physical event?

I was able to help my pastor friend get it. A bit. For a micro second of rationality before the waves indoctrination came back in and covered it up.

But with my wife, she would have a ways to go before she can disambiguate a

number of concepts.

Teaspoon at a time. Day at a time.

At this point, some stranger will have minimal influence. I've already come out to Thomas and his Christian wife, "Margaret." My wife already sees Thomas in a moral non-Christian context. Plus I have another friend in mind. I suspect the husband of one of my wife's best friends is a dis-believer. He might be the next person I come out to and that would probably be a month from now.

The familiar is the foundation from which I'm going to try to build first. I'm trying to think through all the acquaintances I know where are Christian wife + non-Christian moral husband.

[...]

We have been through various "seasons" of life together. And all-in-all we have weathered the storms better than what most seem to do.

But we have never gone through anything as big as this. At one point I even got an "I'd rather you had an affair."

A key tenet of fundy-ism is guarding one's heart and one's mind for contrary ideas. I would only be able to assert I "sought God" but "in the world."

That's a non-starter in fundy-ism. Fortunately, just barely, I have a crack opened up by Ted Haggard. (OK, very bad pun intended.) Anyhow, Ted used to preach this sort of Oliver Wendell Holmes-ish idea of "let the best idea win!" With this very strong bravado assertion that Christianity represented the best idea out there. I think it helped bring comfort to the doubt of the sheep. And keep them for researching, thinking and learning too much.

Anyhow, it's kinda back fired. I can't rub it in. (OK, yet another really bad pun.) But it is a interesting dichotomy and enables me to introduce a bit of cognitive dissonance to any inquirer in the church environment.

Ugh. Just got of the phone with my dad. Ya know, I haven't really talked about extended family much yet. Just not ready for that part of my deconversion story, and in fact I may never be.

But though I am behind in posting some replies and in telling the story of my interaction with Thomas and his wife, I thought I'd briefly tell of the conversation with my dad tonight.

We mostly needed to coordinate on things of the summer. Kids going out to see him for a week or two.

After logistics, he wanted to compare notes. His church is without a pastor too. Mine due to sexual scandal. His due to financial scandal. He's one of the elders. He had a story about politics about a candidate that almost made it, some "quenching of the spirit," etc.

But then he got to the middle of the conversation and the middle of the conversation always has the most interesting topics.

I learned my cousin "Jonathan" is dying of cancer and that he is in a coma.

Out of 28 cousins, as far as I know, Jonathan is the only one openly gay in an otherwise nearly universally salt-of-the-earth, God-fearin' family.

I don't know him well. He's about 15 years older than me and I've only seen him once or so in the last 20 years.

The last time I saw him, I wanted to say *something*. Something of acceptance, despite still being on the fundie side of my personal tipping point of cognitive dissonance. But my kids were running around at the reunion or some other excuse my mind wants to make up for me for not acting on my conscious approaching an awkward situation.

Anyhow, my dad was telling me before Jonathan went into the coma.

Jonathan said he saw an angel.

And how the angel told him he could be right before God.

And that he could come "home."

And see grandpa and grandma.

Or at least that what I understand my cousin Jonathan told his parents who told my dad who just told me.

A story of incredible comfort for his loved ones.

I didn't really know him but he was always a loner, always a bit weird. Though I never really knew him, he is my flesh and blood.

And tonight. My heart goes out to him.

[...]

Sheesh, I'm too subtle sometimes I guess.

I'm assuming Jonathan may have just done something out of selfless motivation, telling his family what they wanted to hear.

Made me think today...

Though I've come to discover I can't live a dishonest life, I wonder if I could die a dishonest death. I wonder if today if I had terminal cancer, I just might tell my loved ones a similar story.

I don't know. It's hard to judge the answer until one is actually *there*.

The fact that a believer is happier than a skeptic is no more to the point than the fact than a drunken man is happier than a sober one.
George Bernard Shaw (1856 - 1950)

A lie told often enough becomes the truth.
Lenin (1870 - 1924)

Those who can make you believe absurdities can make you commit atrocities.
Voltaire (1694 - 1778)

Last Sunday night I went over to Thomas' and Margaret's home. I just went over and rang the doorbell.

Thomas is about 60 years old. He is a medical doctor and is my kids' pediatrician. He is a kind-hearted, quiet man and gentle in his ways. I found out a few weeks ago he just might not be a Christian.

His wife, Margaret, is a very nice woman. She conducts herself in a way that could best be described as cultured, poised. She is a devout Christian, but not fundamentalist in nature.

Margaret has been a friend of my wife's family for many decades.

I met them both around 20 years ago before my wife and I were even married.

Sunday I had a moment and someone here had mentioned Thomas, so I just went ahead and decided to go over.

Driving over I realized I had a GOP campaign team T-shirt on. And I thought of the bumper stickers on my car...

I rang the door bell.

My pulse quickened. I felt my palms get a bit sweaty. I wondered what I was doing.

Thomas and Margaret answered the door and invited me in. I've been to their home a dozen or so different times in the last few years since living near by. They have a lovely home, well decorated, well taken care of as is so easy to do after the kids are gone.

They invite me in.

I ask if I can speak with Thomas.

It's out of the blue.

I'm thinking the first thought going through his mind has to do with the fact that he's a medical doctor.

I think, I bet he's thinking I have contracted some gawd-awful communicable disease and wonder if he's after had that conversation before with people just coming over.

We pass through the kitchen.

Somewhat impolitely I ask if I could have some water.

We sit down in the family room.

I tell the brief story how I had recently heard he might not be a Christian.

He's giving me these dazed looks. I can see his mind transitioning from a medical explanation for my unannounced visit to a come-to-Jesus-meeting explanation from his younger fundie friend. Me.

I ask a bit of his beliefs. Round in circles, a bit of pantheistic flavorings, a bit of frustration with the Religious Right, a "I did go to church today," and a "I do consider myself a Christian, a follower of Christ." Shamefully I was half interested in seeing how he would handle this situation before I told all. I wondered, and still wonder, about the "I consider myself a Christian" comment. I bet that appeases many if not all.

I tell my story of deconversion.

His jaw drops.

"Honey..." he calls to the other room.

"Honey..." he gets up abruptly from our conversation. I feel the "Honey, you gotta hear this" brain waves flowing across the room.

While he gets her I get another glass of water from the kitchen.

They return to the room together, she graciously offers a glass of wine, and suggests we continue the conversation in the dining room.

I retell the story of my deconversion, possibly swapping back and forth between "Christian" and "fundamentalist" where I might have just used "Christian" with Thomas.

They ask a few questions.

The answers come easily. Everthing I've already had to answer my own questioning self.

They see I am no longer really "seeking" but that I am at ease with myself.

Much to my surprise, Margaret was quite intrigued and impressed.

I discuss a bit of the 100+ books I've read in this pursuit and a bit of *why*.

Margaret tells a story of a similar conversation with one of her kids. I am troubled that she didn't even seem that troubled in repeating the story.

She makes a somewhat disparaging comment about fundamentalist beliefs. I just

kinda tilt my head and nod a bit.

A few zingers, which I have yet to orally utter, flow from my mouth.

Thomas says he has 200 fold respect for me.

Margaret says it's a bit like growing up.

I feel stupid.

But I feel honest.

I bare my soul.

And what I got back was absolutely precious. It was the first real-world positive feedback for any aspect of what I've gone through.

As I'm fundamentally past a state of disillusionment, I didn't really want to talk religion all that much. Just enough to help them understand where I was at.

What I really wanted was mentoring.

I tried a few times to steer the conversation to their advice, but I think they were dumbfounded at my appearance at their door and at my never-would-have-believed-it-in-a-million-years deconversion. I don't know how many times I heard, "I never would have guessed."

We finally got on to my request for help.

They said they'd be glad to help us out. And Margaret said she'd be glad to talk through things with my wife on how she works through this with her willing-to-go-along-to-church disbelieving husband.

So while the gap between Thomas (pantheistic seeing coping benefits for many in their religious beliefs) and Margaret (devout non-fundamentalist mainline Protestant Christian) is narrower than between that of my wife and myself, I think we have someone who can possibly help.

I discussed with my wife and am hoping she reaches out to Margaret. Regardless, I have two friends we can call upon in a time of need, a help line if you will.

This is reason for encouragement.

In the real world, I'm up to:

- Five strangers (to merely practice vocalizing my disbelief)
- My pastor friend (as the first person who knows me to help me through ideas with my wife and family)
- My wife
- Thomas
- Margaret

That's it, now six months after my tipping point of cognitive dissonance.

I think my wife is seriously examining her faith. She bought all those books for me to read. I've read about half a dozen. She's reading them too. Some with my customary every margin annotation. I'll have to write more on this later.

However, before I do... I'm thinking about stopping this silly thread here. I mean it's weird. It just sticks out. Maybe I should go find a site to blog on or something. I'm not sure what I'm going to be doing with all this. I have a few offers to write for a few things. I'm not sure what I'm going to do with my story. Maybe something. Maybe nothing. I don't know.

Sigh.

I said I was wearing a GOP campaign T-shirt in one post. Oh, the extrapolations the mind makes.

The T-shirt came from some of my wife's local campaigning.

All the T-shirts, hers and mine, just kinda go on the same shelves - after nearly 20 years of marriage there's no longer so much "his" and "hers" about a number of things.

And maybe you just don't know what was clean in the laundry that day!

Sheesh. Sometimes it's like a bunch of theists around here.

Anyhow, I really appreciate everybody's thoughts. Yours too RalphyS.

I'm thinking about setting up a blog elsewhere. This thread seems too weird here. I had thought that a few other folks might get started on something like this here, but no.

Over the last week, I've had three very interesting conversations. Thought I'd share them.

1. A late night heart-to-heart with my wife. Couldn't believe the venom that came out of her mouth. I felt like it was heart-to-heart on my side in that coming out with her was truly bearing my soul with her, my soul mate. I'm greatly saddened in that I now doubt what she wanted was someone to share such things with but instead wanted more someone who would boost her faith, help her in her belief. She told me that she had told her parents. Secondhand, what she said her [genius IQ, former military officer, fundamentalist Christian] father said was quite painful to hear. I reached a point where I wised up and shut down. We transitioned to a "not talk about it" phase which we are now in. I know many of you are in such states with many people and I wonder how one can go for years with such things unspoken. Until a few nights ago, I had thought "delusion" had a bit of hyperbole to it. I no longer do.

The next day Sunday, the pastor preaches. On servanthood. More or less on being a servant and the fact that sometimes when you do that, when you really just suck it up and do the right thing, people don't really appreciate what you're doing, why you're doing it, and frankly treat you like a servant. I wept. At least on the emotional

side. On the intellectual side I couldn't figure out what the guy was saying about nearly the only theological and doctrinal content of his message which ever so slightly, and maybe even near incidentally, touched on the question of [what Jesus did or didn't know](#).

2. The next day had backyard BBQ after church with the in-laws (who I knew that they knew), my wife, and by chance (really by chance I think), James and Margaret's one son, his wife, and their kids. While I have now heard James professes some unclear form of pantheism and know Margaret to be a relatively liberal mainline devout Christian, their son and his wife are off-the-charts fundamentalists. OK, maybe still on-the-charts as there is no John Brown beard and gun in hand, but otherwise, theologically ever second or third sentence is infused with some sort of Christianspeak. I just observed the conversation like a sociologist. It is amazing. Amazing. Amazing. If you just listen. Like a protocol of primate grooming.

A: Something with a tinge of doubt, or of ever some every-so-minor confession of on-the-edge behavior that might be just outside the boundaries of the in-group.

B: Some sort of scripture, song verse, maxim, cliché, or other encouragement or blessing [that is a total eyeroller within any degree of analytical thinking]. Or even some sort of negative comment of famous persons, familiar persons or stereotypes outside the in-group.

A: Some sort of expression of thanks, bonding agreement, mirroring of body language, denial "didn't really mean," etc. bringing back into boundaries of the in-group re-establishing the closeness of the bonds.

And the volley goes on and on in primatal social fashion.

The need for in-group and the need for comfort (in belonging, in being, in being accepted, in being *OK*, err I mean "saved" or "justified") is so strong. Stronger than about anything in our species.

3. After the other guests left, had a brief conversation with my in-laws. I, at that point, knew that they knew. Given I'm not ready for all this yet, taking it step at a time, I slimily had already decided that if they pressed, I'd more or less deny it all, scoffing at them asking "what are you talking about???"

They beat around the bush. Talked more about other stuff. Incrementally they tried to work their way in. They had already seen me crying at church. My wife had too. And nobody even bothered to talk to me about that one or *ask* me why. I assume it was attributed to some sort of "power of the Holy Spirt working in me." It's all so self-reinforcing. The memes are incredibly powerful in their self replicating abilities. Otherwise they would not have survived so well, so long (and this is the stuff RalphyS just doesn't get).

Anyhow, the in-laws work their way in. Say some sort of dispairaging comments about *rationalism* and *intellectualism*. And how they go nowhere.

My MIL is trying to [at least kind-heartly] talk through it.

She draws on the table with her finger this little like figure 8 thing. Like the eternity symbol. And she says that rationalism and intellectualism "gets you nowhere," that it doesn't "take you anywhere," that it leaves you "right back where you start."

And all alone, to myself I'm *thinking*... Indeed. It takes you back to *yourself*. That there is no quick "it's all up to Jesus to take care of me" answer. That I must be fully accountable for myself despite how painful that may be.

But ya know for many... Maybe even for *most* in the world... It is such more comforting to have an *easy answer*. Especially if indoctrinated at a young or otherwise psychologically vulnerable point in life.

After two intense days, I was honestly thinking through my options...

- A) Keep up the struggle, day at a time, *probably* incrementally working it's way to one of the options below.
- B) Completely conceded and recant and live an intellectual lie yet retain "my life."
- C) Declare a "do over." Lose everyone and everything. Yet cling to my intellectual honesty like it is *everything*.
- D) Suicide.

A few days have passed.

I'm debating A and B.

Sorry for all the typos. I need to go run this morning. Get those endorphin levels back up.

I may be starting a blog elsewhere soon.

Sorry for such a somber post. But lying to oneself isn't the answer. Or maybe it is the answer. Just that for me, it is no longer possible.

[Fundamentalism is] not about knowledge at all. It's about in-group, and acceptance, and community, and love, and commitment, and insecurity, and security, and identity and a number of other very human, very natural, naturalistically explainable things.

When challenging a fundamentalist in his beliefs I hope you really understand what you're asking him to do. I don't see why any [at least middle-stage-of-life] fundamentalist's coming out would be all that different from mine.

Ya know. I just don't know what to think of this whole contemporary "harmful to society" line.

Yes I've read the St. Dawkins et al and sure, my life really sucks right now but... I also understand (not in a *justification* kind of way but a naturalistic explanation way) why religion sticks.

Watching the dialog of my fundies friends is strangely familiar to watching the chimps groom at the zoo.

Seeking and giving of comfort, seeking and giving of acceptance, seeking and giving of belonging, and for us homo sapiens even seeking and giving of identity, meaning, and purpose.

I'm not going to argue for religion. But frankly, for much of [very insecure, uniformed, just barely emotionally, psychologically, and financially getting by] humanity, it is religion that offers so much to us as conscious, social creatures.

I fear thinking humans realistically can give up belief-based in-groups is like thinking chimps realistically can give up grooming or bonobos realistically give up sex.

The other day I was approached by this girl at the airport.

She wanted me to join her environmental cause. Although understanding, sympathetic and supportive of such a cause in an abstract sense, I had never heard of the organization she was with and had no clue to their emphases and their agendas.

I asked her what their web site address was so I could look into them.

She tries to press further.

I reply with a to-the-point, "I'm sure that before you joined this cause which is so important to you, that you made a researched, informed decisions. I would like to ask you to let me do the same."

She didn't really have a canned reply for that one. But she was *thinking*.

I think a lot of secular humanists have a delusional false hope for which they don't really have the evidence on this one. Just because it feels good to think that we, as a species, can pull ourselves out of this mess [of religion] we're getting ourselves into, doesn't mean we can.

I think I'm somewhere along the lines of a Jared Diamond on this whole topic.

However, I do think that the two big unknowns are **globalisation** and the **Internet**.

Never before in human history has there been such a memetic free-for-all. I mean each of these memes in the landscape of daily cross cultural contact both face-to-face and in the ether of the Internet are having to compete for their existence like never before.

Personally, I just don't know. But I do think we live in one of the most interesting chapters of human history in significant part because of these two trends.

London is one of my favourite cities. I've been there about 15 times. One of my favourite runs ever was across Hyde Park, past Buckingham Palace, across St. James Park, past Westminster, along the Thames, past London Bridge, across Tower Bridge, along the South Bank a ways, and then back!

I remember the first time I went to the British Museum. The first time I went to the British Museum was in the early 90s. Though college educated and professional, I remember walking the halls and seeing the exhibits and looking at each through

what I did not understand then to be a strong confirmation bias. I remember looking at the Codex Sinaiticus and almost feeling a shiver at this nearly ancient attestation of God's revelation of Himself to humanity. In fact, I'm sure I looked at every exhibit through that same confirmation bias, one perhaps not too different from many of the original discoverers and interpreters of each of the exhibits. Perhaps I was still in the early European Renaissance in my own worldview.

But I also remember another one of my trips maybe four years later. I was into the thick of my intense reading phase of my voyage of discovery. I was on a business trip going through the museum alone on the weekend. Though still deep into my faith, I was aware of my self examination. I was increasingly aware of my confirmation bias. I remember looking at many of the exhibits. And I recall looking upon the same codex with a bit of Bible history and textual criticism behind me. And not feeling the same magical feeling. And saying a prayer.

Already a couple years before my deconversion, I, too myself, had seen it likely to be coming.

I remember sitting by myself at the court cafe there under the new roof and *thinking*. And praying. And wondering where it would all be going.

Oh, sheesh am I trouble.

This morning I was at a Starbucks. Urban city centre in a large cosmopolitan US city.

There was this group of twenty somethings having a Bible study. The group leader is talking about witnessing. All opportunities. In season, out of season. All that stuff.

I go over.

"Would you guys like to have a Bible study you'll never forget?" I ask.

I get some deer-in-headlight looks.

"I was a devout, born-again Christian for 35 years and deconverted her last year after an intensive study of the Bible, history, various fields of science, of logic... Would you like to hear why? Would you like to witness to me here today as well as let me tell my story in a free exchange of ideas?"

It's not like they can say no at that point.

"I have about 15 minutes before I need to get into the office."

I think my style is very, very different from most non-theists' "confrontations" and "debates."

So far my discussions like this have yet to produce anything other than dropped jaws and a deer-in-headlights look.

I give me testimony. I know how to give a testimony in proper testimonial form...

a) Problem

- b) Decision/action
- c) Benefits

The point is you have to give a testimonial in these three phases and not go back and forth and not aimlessly ramble. This is taught in evangelism basics. But the same technique is taught in sales training too. Pay critical attention to every testimonial-style advertisement, especially infomercials. They consistently use this structure.

- a) Devout, born-again, moral Christian for 35 years. Had inner nagging. This still, small voice. That it didn't just sit well, not in a profound it-is-well-with-my-soul kind of way.
- b) Began reading. Seriously seeking answers to my questions. Read up on logic, read up on cosmology - the beginnings of the universe, read up on human origins, read up on evolutionary biology, read up on Biblical scholarship, read through the Bible in serious analytical detail. Eventually reached a tipping point of cognitive dissonance, where it just didn't make sense.
- c) Now the whole thing makes a lot more sense. No more inner questioning. No more avoiding my feelings. No more avoiding my fears. Now better understanding human as well as my own morality. Finally it makes a lot of sense. Though I have far from all the answers, my questions are a lot more profound as is my inner peace really.

That's kinda the outline. I try to lay out there in this context that I am willing and capable to put the rawest of emotions out there as well as converse about a number of fields intellectually and to do both in the same context. Raw, intellectual, emotional, integrated self-honesty.

Then come to points, and questions and all that. They're all the standard ones that get tossed around here all the time. Then each of my responses generally flow.

- 1) Sincere clarifying questions. Maybe a question or two to seriously try to clarify what their saying. "So you're basically saying _____." Once I get a "yeah" the other party feels listened to and understood.
- 2) Boxing their idea. "That's what's referred to as _____." Might be "the teleological argument," might be anything. Generally I start out with taking their unanalyzed thought and capturing it in proper Christian apologetics.
- 3) Appealing to Christian apologetics. "In fact _____ builds off that idea in _____." Might be Augustine, might be C.S. Lewis, might be Josh McDowell, might be Lee Strobel, might be Francis Schaeffer, might be several.

In steps one, two, and three I am speaking nearly completely in evangelical Christian in-speak. Not too different from what the most knowledgeable guy at the Bible study might do.

- 4) Transition. "I seriously investigated that and wrestled with that a lot and what I discovered is the problem with _____ is _____." Here I might then introduce and describe a logical fallacy. Or a naturalistic explanation. Or whatever. It is the standard atheist "rebuttal" content but I word it in an empathetic style and speak in first person about it in the way a believer might be doubting and questioning. "I learned _____ and it made me wonder _____. I mean like how can _____ really _____? It just didn't make sense."

On my side, I am willing to be raw and emotionally and intellectually honest about all the doubts and concerns I have had to go through in my own voyage. I describe what *I* learned, what *I* discovered in first person.

On their side, I want to keep them in a rational state of thinking. I take care not to push it too far. I do not want to push the other party into an emotional state.

5) Teaser. "I mean, you can decide for yourself, but you might be interested in _____." And then there I give them something to google and suggest they google it. Or I describe how Dawkins, or Dennett, or de Waal, or Diamond, or Thomas Paine, or Ehrman, or whoever said about it in whatever work.

6) Seal with Scripture. So here I basically proof-text the good stuff out of the Bible to support a theme in quest of truth related to the topic at hand. Some scripture about the importance of knowledge and wisdom, the importance of testing the spirits, the dangers of false doctrine and false teachers, about being in season, out of season, testing like the Bereans, about truth that passes (not by-passes) understanding, about knowing the reason for one's hope, and about working out one's salvation in fear in trembling.

I think many atheists want the theist to feel stupid and admit their stupidity on the spot and fantastically get struck by lightning and deconvert.

I just want them to consider reading and learning a bit and answering their own questions for themselves.

Consistently the result seems to be dropped jaws. And deer in headlights. And it seems that I can sustain the conversation for quite a while and keep it [relatively] nice and calm. Any heat just results in me saying stuff like, "one at a time, please," "slow down," "I'm sorry I don't understand, could we explore that in detail a bit."

While I recognize the logical flaws and fallacies of the technique I describe here that would never stand up in debate, it seems to work for me so far. After all, I have training in evangelism.

Anyhow, the conversation went through both moral universalism and the teleological argument in the above formula. Then had to dismiss myself to get into the office. I have no idea how their Bible study ended after that.

The leader got a bit steamy though he knew he couldn't take me on. One guy was grinning. The rest deer in head lights.

I think step 1 is the most important.

Anyhow, I completely differ with the parroting lines comment.

I have become so comfortable talking about religion and belief matter-of-factly. On airplanes I'm often reading various religious or irreligious material. When people go ahead and do talk to me, I usually just let them talk away and with head nods and "uh huhs" affirm not so much what they are saying but certainly that they are free and safe to say whatever they want to a stranger, me.

And what comes out of their mouths is amazing. All over the map. Not only do few have critical thinking skills, few actually know anything about the doctrines or defenses of the doctrines they supposedly possess.

Anyhow today at church I even got referenced in the sermon. 🙏

Things are going "OK" with my wife. We're not talking about theology. At all really. She's not saying any button pushers. Me neither. I'm comfortable going to church. Devotionally it is absurd. But sociologically it is extremely interesting. Today I felt like the Jane Goodall of the fundies.

Back to my wife. At least she's reading *some*. My doubts have got her reading some of the Christian apologetics and "scientific" authors.

Dangerous reading that stuff if you think about it too much. I mean, without a peer review process and a scientific method, the literature is all over the map. Reading this stuff should generate more questions than it answers. Of what she bought I know how all-over-the-map it was when I saw the authors names, but I don't think she knew.

On to one of the better books...

We both read Timothy Johnson's [Finding God in the Questions](#). Before I read it I thought, what an eyeroller - I mean what could a television personality actually know about anything.

Turn's out the guy is pretty well read. He went to seminary then became a medical doctor. You can tell by his vocabulary as well as by the order in which he presents ideas, the guy is quite well read on a number of topics. It's an apologetic book (of sorts). While Johnson is not strongly assertive of doctrines in the way of classical or even presuppositional apologists, he simply seems to be better read, actually to know the next volley in the conversation, where so many apologists fall short in obvious ignorance.

The guy is a theistic evolutionist and naturalist (if not very, very close to a naturalist). He's also moderately well read on NT higher criticism and textual criticism. Seems a little short on the OT and also in primatological research and research in other social animals.

Best I can tell, he is some sort of Pre-Nicene "Follower of Jesus." Perhaps even docetic. Hard to tell. He doesn't come out and say it so clearly. Several times while reading it I had to flip to the back cover to confirm the sticker from the Christian bookstore where my wife bought the book was still there. I mean, this is honest questioning in combination with about as liberal of theology as one can have and still profess the faith.

Interesting quotes...

Quote:

"Frankly, I am often surprised by some of my friends who basically have not thought about their religious beliefs since childhood and seemingly have no interest in doing

so. They have essentially decided that what they learned in Sunday school or from official church teachings is good enough when it comes to religious beliefs. It reminds me of the attitude expressed on a bumper sticker to the effect of: 'God said it. I believe it. That settles it.' Most professionals would never dream of taking that attitude in presuming that what they learned decades ago in medical or graduate school is still adequate. But when it comes to religion, they seem to have concluded that the less they expose themselves to new ideas, the less they will rock their intellectual or spiritual boats, and the better off they will be."

"But it does mean that I believe the God of truth expects us to be open to new ideas and new research, and honor the path of truth-seeking wherever it might lead."

"It helps to remember that Jesus often used hyperbole."

"Do you have to believe in the resurrection to be an orthodox Christian? I think the answer is clearly yes. But do you first have to believe in the resurrection to become a follower of Jesus? The answer would seem to be no, simply because the first followers of Jesus described in the New Testament knew nothing about his eventual resurrection when they decided to become his followers."

"This is just one of many reasons why I have come to prefer the phrase a "follower of Jesus" rather than the label "Christian."

"Personally, I am increasingly uncomfortable with popular language about 'being saved' or 'being born again' precisely because these words are often used so imprecisely and so glibly."

Also, there's a very nice [quite humanistic] turn on the Sermon on the Mount that would make most, or at least many, Christians reflect in humility.

Anyhow, a bit of an anthropic principle, some teleological argument, and some moral universalism, an unveiled admission of a bias to confirm his faith, and that's where he is.

I googled for book reviews and was utterly shocked. I mean, doctrinally, the guy's a heretic per orthodox theology of major branches of Christianity. But the Christian reviews were all quite positive. I was shocked. Talk about a confirmation bias. I mean the guy is a gentle-spirited, comforting television personality "confessing" his "faith." But is that all the standard Christian reader gets out of it? Don't they know "heresy" when they see it?

I guess not.

In a briefest of brief conversations, I asked my wife if she liked the book. She said she did. She said she appreciated his honest and kind-hearted style. She also stated that he seemed to have a "weak faith."

I thought *to myself*, "Weak faith? Fideist." But no. That was the end of the conversation.

Tell me about it. Before coming out to anybody I was terrified that I would get automatic attacks on my moral character. The whole evangelical worldview causes

questioning and questioning of oneself. All questioning is directed back at oneself and often specifically at one's [pretty much generally guaranteed to be less-than-perfect] moral character.

I had expected lots of attacks.

They haven't come.

At least not yet.

I'm mean... I live a pretty square life.

My wife even said [in partially attributed to emotional outburst], "I wish you'd had an affair."

Even Thomas and his wife made this dismissing comment about "your age."

Anyway, it seems I've gotten pretty much everything short of, "Why can you just go have an affair like everybody else[/the rest of us???]"

I've noticed when flipping channels on the radio dial, I can identify whether or not the station is broadcasting religious programming within seconds, without even knowing the context of what is being said. It is purely the ponderous, "reverent", almost sing-song intonation that clues me in.

I had a very similar, eerie experience on a business trip in India. Jet lagged, and the television is on early in the morning before work. Every channel has some sort of religious programming - various flavours of Hindu gurus, an Islamic mullah, a local pentecostal, and then imported Joyce Meyer and Binny Hinn. Amazing the parallels in voice patterns and gesticulation. Something about teaching propositional "truth."

Ran a 5K this morning. About 150 people. Placed 6th overall and 1st in age group. Fell short of my goal time by four seconds though.

Running provides wonderful benefits of stress management as well as for meditation. Running has had a profound role in my deconversion. I've only been a runner less than 3 years.

No news, no discussions on the home front.

On one hand, I've just had the most wonderful month of my life. Mentally I feel so free. I haven't even read at all in the last two weeks. I workout and am grinning. I work and I am grinning. I go to church and I am grinning. I am more comfortable with me and with knowing myself in a way that I think few ever have to face or get to experience.

On the other hand, my wife and I haven't talked about anything meaningful about religion in almost a month now. I go to church and am very comfortable with that.

I think my wife just really needs all the comforts and consistency and feeling of safety of tradition.

Incrementally I think IRL I am easing my way back into the closet.

Truthfully and surprisingly it feels fine so far. All in all incredibly well.

Yet despite this, in many regards I do feel as though I have lost my "soulmate" and there is a sadness there. Not a resentment, but a sadness that I can't share this part of my life, and more importantly this *freedom*, with her.

You may be missing lots of stories in my life. I however am enjoying few stories in my life.

Anyhow as a sample of what's going in my life...

My wife and I are doing fine.

I'm not asking any deep questions. Not countering any stupidity. I go to church.

Sometimes my wife asks me to pray over a meal. There for a while I had a streak of blessing "all living matter on the planet so nobody has to ever get sick from any microbes or anything like that and that the antioxidants in everything be increased. Somehow."

She didn't like that.

I told her her faith was weak (with a big grin however).

I did it more.

She still didn't like it. More.

So the next time she asked me to pray, I prayed for blessing on our food and our food only and nobody else and nobody else's food and that our food on this table now and nobody else's would be blessed with removal of all bacterial agents from our food only and nobody else's and that our antioxidants would be doubled and nobody else's.

And of course this too was with a big grinning smile of mine and with eyes closed too.

And when I opened my eyes, she was smiling and the kids were grinning and snickering.

What more could I possibly want?

It's been like, what, six weeks? And life has been peacefully good. Not just with others, but most importantly, with myself.

All is well. Not having any conversations with my wife. Seems to be going OK.

Just got back from a two-week business trip to India. Almost my 50th time out of the US of A, seventh time to India. Second time out of the country post deconversion, first time to that most religious of all countries, India, post-deconversion.

Trip was associated with a client visit to our offshore offices. People who never talk about religion automatically talk about religion when exposed to a population of devotees of another religion.

For my one client, I discovered he was a quite conservative Christian. Other than a weekend trip to Mexico, this was his first time outside the US.

In reaction to going out on a tour on an off-day and visiting a Hindu temple, he shrinks to a comfort zone and a self-defense of his worldview. (Been there, done that.)

One of the things I've noticed post deconversion is that conservative Protestants always go back to their church, to their pastor in conversation and a hope and a desire for sharing in-speak with another to bolster and reaffirm their own faith.

"We had a guest speaker at our church who ministered to the poor here in India."

Asking an Indian colleague of my company, "What's the name of the lowest caste?"

...

"Yeah them. He ministers to the poorest and neediest."

I say something like, "Christianity is, and many of the teachings of Jesus are, definitely a democratizing religion in many regards and offers a hope unlike some of the social aspects of Hinduism which clearly help enforce ancient established hierarchies."

My Indian colleague, a young, handsome, well-educated professional says something like, "there seems to be an inverse correlation between intelligence/**status** and need for religion and God in one's daily life."

He's tipped his hand to me. I know he's a free thinker. Wow, I think. A dozen questions I'd love to ask him. I bet his parents are devout Hindus. But I can't. I'm sitting here with my way-out-of-his-comfort-zone fundie client.

My client continues with the standard issue "stumbling block" argument with minimal ability to quote Paul in his anti-Greek, anti-rational rhetoric in a tradition established long, long ago. He concludes with something like, "atheists are far and few between."

I'm thinking, you may have two right here in the car with you buddy!

But no, I can't. After all, I'm hoping for eight digits worth of business from this client.

Things are going well with my wife. Certainly well enough. So far it seems, there's three things she needs me concerning her faith.

1. Me to take my turn to pray over meals.
2. Me to sing out loud and strong in praise and worship in church.
3. Me to call myself a Christian if asked.

What I actually believe, any sort of certainty of belief, any sort of specific beliefs are more or less irrelevant. Has little to do with actually creed, canon, and doctrine. Has much to do with bonding, with in-group, with identity, and with comfort.

OK, so I spent three months more or less back in the closet with people I know. Albeit with a HUGE peace in my life almost to the point of being able to cope with anything. (BTW, in response to the as-I-can-imagine-baritone-voiced "well done, good and faithful servant" thoughts, I have settled that well and quite a ways back. And that's why I think I do have the peace. "God, if you exist, and if you are a he, and if you are that He, you know, that El/JHWH/Abba Father He, and if I do my best to live a life based in responsibility, reciprocity, generocity, and altruism but can't affirm a single point of the Nicene Creed or even really attest to your existence, and you wanna give me eternal torture - hell, fire, and brimstone - for that, well then, I guess you need to do what you need to do." Already took care of that months back.)

However, Sunday I had the first conversation with my wife in a few months about religion, doctrine, theology and stuff like that.

Our church (remember, Pastor Ted Haggard's church), just nominated a new pastor to fill the lead spot. Curious bugger that I am, I googled the guy as much as I could find and then I listened to all of his sermons online. Will be quite a change for New Life. Pastor Ted was actually not all that "fundamental" depending upon how one actually uses the word. How does God work in the lives of people? Pastor Ted more or less taught (regardless of how Biblical it is), people surrender their lives to God including through prayer, God then affects the hearts and minds of people, then people then change the world. Somehow more swallowable in an increasingly scientific and rational age when consciousness and the mind still retain a lot of mystery. I could go on with lots and lots of more stuff. Anyhow, the new candidate is give-me-that-old-time-religion gospel-hour AofG heritage. Blech, I'm thinking... This is going to be harder. Plus his hermaneutics are completely random to support the point at hand and there are revelatory anachronisms left and right - David believing in demons, pre-crucifixion disciplines with fully developed orthodox Christology, and on and on.

After making it through the new guy's online sermons and researching the Biblical scholarship on a couple of them, I'm just like... Ugh, this is going to be tough.

I bring up the subject with my wife and as carefully as possible bring up a couple examples.

"Does doctrine and theology not matter?" I ask.

"How much does it matter?"

"Does it matter more than personality?"

"Am I the only one who cares about this stuff?"

I give a couple more examples where what the implications of what this guy teaches seemed to possibly have the solo fide and *anti-semetic* consequences that a Martin Luther would have been proud of. (New Life has taught more in the lines of faith + works and has greatly reached over in an ecumenical way across the Protestant/Jewish chasm.)

"I'm to the point now, where I'd be open to looking for a different church. This is only because the research I've done, but would you possibly be open to a different church?"

"Yeah, maybe I think so," I get in reply.

Given I have years to sort this all out, I consider this a small, possibly significant, possibly inconsequential development.

But being able to talk about freedom about which church and to do so I context of theology and doctrine is not too far away from epistemology and a whole lot of good stuff to discuss.

Anyhow, singing out loud and strong in praise and worship is a minor concession. I have this peace now it seems that I never really seemed to have before. And that my love for my wife exceeds my need for intellectual honesty and that I did my very best to come out to her and to share my soul with her in the most honest of ways and completely blotched that...

Well, I can live with this.

A while back I was saying, day at a time. Now, maybe, more week at a time or even month at a time.

Patience is good.

Yesterday I finished Armstrong's *A History of God*. Incredible knowledge base.

I've said several times on here, I do live a modern, American, Protestant, Evangelical Christian life. [Whether or not that is "Biblical" is another matter.]

Anyhow, last week I got an email from one pastor (who doesn't know of my apostasy), "Oh that more congregants had your heart for theology and depth of Bible knowledge." And another pastor who's a friend, who I've known well for 20 years, who knows of my apostasy, looked me in the eye and called me a "good man."

Very good, very sincere compliments.

I wonder if I'm a better "Christian" as a freethinker.

[...]

There is no "sacrifice" and there is no compromise in keeping the peace. Simply, I adore my wife and my love for her exceeds my need for intellectual honesty. What can I say... I fell in love.