

My Personal Testimony

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“You’re just a Christian because you’re a preacher’s kid who was raised that way in the Bible belt!” That accusation haunts me continuously. Would I still follow Jesus if I had been born in Mongolia? Or Bosnia? Or what if I was raised as a Bedouin tribesman in Saudi Arabia? Would I still devote my life to a Jewish carpenter who walked the earth nearly 2000 years ago; who supposedly came back from the dead and will one day come again to judge humanity and usher in paradise? Would I still buy into the idea that all my wrongdoings and failures could be done away with if I just believe that this carpenter was God himself and that he had paid the penalty for my disobedience by being nailed to a cross like a common criminal? I honestly don’t know. The ‘what if’ game is impossible to play accurately so I’ll have to stick to the ‘what is’ game instead.

What is true is that I was raised in a home where God’s existence was not an idea; it was reality. Prayer was not a ritual; God actually listened. And more than that, he responded. My father was a pastor of a small inner-city church in one of the roughest areas of our city. Crime, drugs and poverty were prevalent in my neighborhood; yet through it all, I constantly saw God provide for his children. Unlike many children raised in Christian homes, faith in God was never forced on me; it was natural. I had no reason to disbelieve in the God whom I talked to every night as I drifted off to sleep and who continuously answered our prayers. No, God’s existence as well as my relationship with him was a given.

My first encounter with unbelief happens to be one of my earliest memories; I was about 3 or 4 at the time. My sister and I were in my room playing; Mom and Dad were in the living room.

“James-Michael,” my Dad said, “Come in here for a minute.”

I got up from whatever game we were playing and walked in to the hall. My parents were sitting on the couch and it looked like they had been talking. My Dad looked at me very calmly but very seriously and said,

“You know, some people don’t believe in God.”

As he said this, I can still remember the look of anticipation on his face of my reaction.

“Okay” I said and walked back into the room to resume my game.

I don’t know what they were expecting, but I think they just wanted to prepare me for the fact that throughout life I would encounter people who didn’t see things the way I did. The reason I wasn’t surprised or shocked, I think, was because somehow I already knew that though God was real, for some reason, a lot of people didn’t believe that.

Now apparently at this part of the story I’m supposed to say that throughout my childhood I began to question my belief in God and that my parents told me to ‘just

believe', or something like that. Then I'm supposed to tell how when I finally left home I realized that my beliefs were just those of my parents and how I went on a personal quest for truth and realized that my parents were just naïve or ignorant because of their faith in Jesus. Well, none of this happened. Whenever I had questions about God or Jesus or the Bible or anything else, my parents listened intently and then answered those questions while encouraging me to verify these answers for myself. Because of this and because of the fact that most of my friends in high school weren't Christians, when I left home my faith had already been challenged and confirmed time and time again.

This process of challenge and confirmation of the message of Jesus continues even today. I constantly come across reasons people give for their unbelief. However, those reasons always seem hollow and never able to stand against the overwhelming amount of reasons to believe. Other religions and worldviews can't seem to answer coherently life's questions: Where do we come from? Where are we going? Why are we here? Where do we get right and wrong? What's more, as I look at the lives of my friends who don't have a relationship with the God who created them, I can't help but notice how directionless they are—constantly searching for truth while at the same time denying truth itself. No, I have no reason to doubt and every reason to believe.

Do I only believe because I was raised that way? No; but it certainly didn't hurt. You see, truth is truth whether we're raised with it or not. The fact that I was raised in a home where Jesus was a reality has no bearing on whether or not Jesus is, in fact, a reality. Likewise, if I were raised in a home in India where Shiva and Vishnu were revered, it would have no bearing on whether or not they exist. This whole line of reasoning is faulty and in my limited experience, is an accusation used to dismiss Christianity without having to deal with the actual person of Christ. This is why I refuse to indulge in the 'what if' game and stick to the 'what is'. For the 'what is' is all that matters for any of us.

So 'what is' the truth? It is this: Jesus was who he said he was—God in the flesh. God's existence should be a given, and for me, it is. The evidence against believing has been examined and been found wanting. I know the Lord not only propositionally, but also personally. Do you? Do you even want to? If not, fine; I can't make you believe. But if any of this has piqued your interest, then I'd love to talk to you. I'd love to hear about where you come from and what you think. I'd most of all love to introduce you to the One your heart longs for. What do you say?