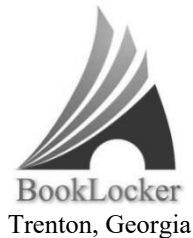


**My Imaginary Conversation
with Joe Rogan
—About—
Christianity, the Supernatural,
and Little Green Men**

*A Survival Guide for Living
in a Post-Christian Culture*

Kevin Cortez



My Imaginary Conversation with Joe Rogan About Christianity, the Supernatural, and Little Green Men: A Survival Guide for Living in a Post-Christian Culture

Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., Trenton, Georgia.

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Print ISBN: 978-1-958889-21-3

Ebook ISBN: 979-8-88531-467-1

For ordering information or special discounts, please contact the Publisher at: BookLocker.com.

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Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Name: Cortez, Kevin

Title: My Imaginary Conversation with Joe Rogan About Christianity, the Supernatural, and Little Green Men: A Survival Guide for Living in a Post-Christian Culture by Kevin Cortez

Categories: REL012120: Christian Living / Spiritual Growth | REL099000: Christian Living / Spiritual Warfare | REL067030: Christian Theology / Apologetics

Identifiers: LCCN 2023905539 | ISBN 978-1-958889-21-3

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Hey, I want to say *thank you*. I really appreciate you taking the time to check out this book.

Typically, this endorsement page targets people considering whether they will purchase *My Imaginary Conversation with Joe Rogan About Christianity, the Supernatural, and Little Green Men: A Survival Guide for Living in a Post-Christian Culture*.

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So that you know, it would mean the world to me to have your feedback (even if it's not five stars). I promise that I will read *every* review with appreciation.

-Kevin

With Gratitude

To my family and friends who have loved me even when they may not have understood why I'm like this. The words "thank you" feel too small, but from the bottom of my heart, I want you to know how grateful I am for you!

I would also like to thank John Bevere and Charles Nieman. Whenever I want to retreat into a corner and not seek the advancement of God's Kingdom, I think of you and find the courage to *stay the course*.

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“A man’s message is no greater than what he lives. There are many who proclaim or teach messages that are well thought out or studied, yet their lives are estranged from it. Their message, at best, will bring information. Those who preach from what they live bring transformation.

I have known Kevin Cortez since 1983, when we served together on the same ministry staff for over four years. We have been friends since... What God reveals to him he lives with all his heart, soul, body and strength.”

— John Bevere
International minister and best-selling author

“I proclaim to you what I myself have seen and heard so that you may have fellowship with the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ.”

— Kevin Cortez
Paraphrasing 1 John 1:3

—1—

Crazy Town

His disciples came privately to where he was sitting and said, “Tell us, when will these things happen? And what sign should we expect to signal your coming and the completion of this age?” Jesus answered, “At that time deception will run rampant. So beware that you are not fooled!

You will hear of wars and revolutions on every side, with more rumors of wars to come. **Don’t panic or give in to your fears, for the breaking apart of the world’s systems is destined to happen.”**

— Matthew 24:3-4, 6 (TPT)

We are all living in crazy town. This unpredictable world is breaking apart at the seams. Everything that can be shaken is shaking.¹ This includes the personal lives of everyone with a heartbeat.

Are you able to feel solid ground beneath your feet?

Everywhere I look, I’m constantly reminded that we are also living amid a story Jesus told over 2,000 years ago. As He concluded His most famous teaching of all time (the Sermon on the Mount), Jesus gave us a powerful insight into His kingdom:

Everyone who hears my teaching and applies it to his life can be compared to a **wise man who built his house on an unshakable foundation**. When the rains fell and the flood came, with fierce winds beating upon his house, it stood firm because of its strong foundation. But everyone who hears my teaching and does not apply it to his life can be compared to a **foolish man who built his house on sand**. When it rained and rained and the flood came, with wind and waves beating upon his house, it collapsed and was swept away. (Matthew 7:24-27 TPT)

In this narrative, the wise man heard the teachings of Jesus and acted on what was being taught. Even though this was hard and time-consuming, he built his life on a rock foundation. By contrast, the fool chose the easier, cheaper, and faster way to build his house. When the storm came, things didn't end well for this guy.

What's the takeaway? It's obvious. We should want to be like the wise man. Since we are all "building," the question becomes: Are we building our lives on the solid rock of God's kingdom, which will stand the test of every storm or shifting sand?

Few things concern me more than watching those I have been in a relationship with build the foundation of their lives *on sand*. And since I've been a Christ follower for over forty years, I have had plenty of time to gather empirical data to know how this will play out.

I have painfully witnessed many friends' once-solid worlds suddenly shift and unravel. Despite their desperate attempts to hold it all together, their lives collapsed. I've watched the crash negatively impact them and everyone around them.

Haven't you seen people "go down left and right" during these unusual times? Perhaps you feel like you're close to this happening to

you. Can you relate to being stuck, scared, sad, ashamed, and searching for answers?

I can.

I remember a time when I was ashamed of my struggles and therefore suffered silently. During that season, I experienced a toxic mixture of significant anxiety, mental stress, and severe depression. Then, on January 16, 2003, I encountered what I can only describe as an emotional meltdown. Basically, I reached the end of myself and flamed out.

Now, let me ask you this question: Have you ever felt like you've been in a train wreck that sailed over a cliff in the middle of a hurricane, only to be struck by lightning as soon as you exited the train?

It was like that.

To make matters worse, this happened during a period in my life when I was the lead pastor of an independent church and ran our family's wholesale beer distribution company in Bishop, California. I had to come to the stark realization that I was burned out.

I had allowed tremendous pressures to build up inside me over the years. Now I felt overwhelmed and suddenly understood why people "snap" and make foolish decisions.

Since I was around many fellow believers at the time, I had no choice but to listen to some of their well-meaning input:

I'm praying for you.

God told me to remind you of this Bible verse.

Trust Jesus—He will work everything out for you.

Blah-blah-blah.

When I received the typical clichéd advice in my vulnerable state, I had to suppress the urge to hit their baby toe with a hammer and tell them to *walk it off*.

As I was going through this shaking, I wrote about how I was processing everything in my journal—which later became a book: *Victory through Brokenness: Finding Purpose in the Midst of Pain*. The punchline of this book was: Jesus went from being my Savior and Lord to becoming *my very Life*.²

I'm incredibly thankful when I reflect on that dark period over twenty years later. Though my foundation in Christ was sure—and I had been serving in Christian ministry for almost two decades—there were many things I had built on top of that foundation that needed to be *shaken* and ultimately *removed*.

Why?

The answer is not complicated: it happened to provide more room for Christ's character to be developed in my life. During this dark wilderness season, the Holy Spirit established in me the type of spiritual strength that cannot be shaken.

This has been “stress tested” over the years. Even during the deep recession due to the 2008 financial crisis, the global coronavirus pandemic, which shut down the world as we knew it, and the raging dumpster fire we are currently experiencing, the peace of God—and joy of the Lord—have remained.

I like how David (the one who took out Goliath) expressed where his stability came from: during a time of great uncertainty in his life, he said: “I have set the Lord continually before me; Because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.”³

Don't Panic

God states that “He changes the times and the seasons.”⁴ We live in one of the most significant times of change the world has ever known. To remain strong during this season of transition, the way we have been living might need some adjustments.

Have you noticed that everyone has been forced to “show their cards” because of what’s transpired? We now know where everyone stands on almost everything.

According to data from a Barna study, the masses are turning from the Christian faith. Their research showed that nearly half of Americans were practicing Christians in 2000. Today, only one in four Americans practice their faith. The question becomes, “Will you remain one of the four?”

I personally believe we are experiencing perhaps the greatest forces of deception the world has ever faced. And the first thing Jesus said about the “completion of this age” was not to be fooled.⁵ Thankfully, as we have seen throughout Scripture and history, we will not be overcome during the most extraordinary times of darkness if we grow in the light of Christ Jesus.

Yes, there is an intensification of deception. Yes, wickedness seems to be getting the upper hand. Yes, the Antichrist system is forming before our eyes. But now is not the time to become fearful or anxious and back off from our faith.

God’s got this:

Above all, you must understand that in the last days, mockers will multiply, chasing after their evil desires... contrary to man’s perspective, the Lord is not late with his promise to return, as some measure lateness. But instead, his “delay” reveals his loving patience toward

you, because he does not want any to perish but all to come to repentance. (2 Peter 3:3, 9 TPT)

There will be times when things look impossible to you. You will face times when everything within you will want to quit but don't surrender to the temptation to give up.

God Sees You

Hopefully, one day we can meet and have an in-depth conversation. But until that day, I don't pretend to know the unique circumstances of your life. But I'm guessing you are being challenged by what is happening in our post-Christian culture.

I would also venture to guess that some gnarly things are vying for your attention. I assume that the mess and stress going on in your life is causing you some anxiety. Never forget that the Bible says that God had intimate knowledge of you before you came into this world.⁶

How can this be?

Because God has invested a unique portion of Himself in you (and He knows Himself) so you may bring an expression of Him into the earth. It perplexes our brain to realize that most of our life is about coming into the knowledge of what God already knew about us before we were born.

This means you are not insignificant.

You are alive to accomplish a particular purpose that God created you to fulfill. You did not show up one day unexpectedly or by accident. According to His counsel, God determined a distinct individual destiny for you and gave you the potential to realize that destiny.⁷

We all carry something from God that is unique to us—that nobody else has. God Himself has distinguished you.

If you are currently going through life void of identity and destiny, making sense of the disconnected pieces of your life will be challenging. When you don't know who you are, you have no choice but to "live out" what others tell you about your life. You have not met your true self yet.

This is NOT good news.

If you constantly reinvent yourself to fit your circumstances or meet others' expectations, you will remain unfulfilled and never fully understand the specific purpose God created you for.

That is what the Scriptures mean when they say, "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him."⁸ But the Bible also tells us that God reveals the deeper things of God to us through the Holy Spirit dwelling in us.⁹

The End Game

In writing this book, my goal is simple. My objective is to be completely open and transparent: I want to lift up the message of Jesus Christ in a way that will help you encounter the God of the Bible.

In my clumsy attempt to do this, my continual prayer has been for the Lord to help me to extend grace in my words and express my thoughts in humility.

Regardless of the accuracy of my take on Christianity or whether you agree with my sometimes-different approach to communicating, the facts are:

1. Christ died for our sins, was buried in a tomb, and rose from the dead on the third day, just as foretold in the Scriptures.
2. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is a provable fact in history and remains foundational to our faith.
3. We become children of God by faith, not by understanding how everything works.

By the time you get to the end of this book, you will see that I'm not this bigshot Christian influencer, nor do I ever want to be. I'm just a normal ordinary believer that's not ashamed of sharing how my relationship with Jesus has touched every area of my life. Nothing would make me happier than for people to see that Jesus has affected me when they meet me.

I want to have said of me what they said of Peter and John (recorded in the Acts of the Apostles): when the people saw their bold courage, they realized they were just ordinary men who never had special religious training. The people's leaders were astonished and noted Jesus's effect on them because they had simply spent time with Him.¹⁰

When I stop and think about it, being put in a position to try and explain what God says about stuff is one of the weirdest things in the world—it strikes me as VERY STRANGE.

Yet, here we are.

Chapter Reflections

What are your thoughts?

1. Have you ever had the bottom drop out of your life, and everything you thought you could depend on disappeared from view?
2. How much of your life are you currently building on the Rock Christ Jesus—compared to building your life’s foundation on shifting sand?
3. Do you believe you are alive to accomplish a particular purpose God created you to fulfill? If not, why not?

I would love for you to share some of your answers to these questions on any of my social media platforms. You can go to “KevinCortez.com” and link to them from there.



Scan the QR code for bonus content.
Or visit KevinCortezBook.com/one

Joe Rogan: [Kevin, what motivated you to write this book highlighting what I think about Christians?] When I say something stupid, I'm not thinking about what I'm going to say before I say it. I'm just saying it. If you say you disagree with me, I probably disagree with me too. I disagree with me all the time. I'm not a doctor; I'm a fu****g moron. And I'm a cage-fighting commentator who's a dirty stand-up comedian. I'm drunk most of the time, I do testosterone, and I smoke a lot of weed. I'm not a respected source of information.

— Joe Rogan Experience #1642

Kevin Cortez: [Joe, I wrote this book to build a bridge to those who may be open to the truth of Jesus Christ but have been overwhelmed by our anti-Christian culture.] If anyone wants an idea of what is happening in our American culture, they only need to listen to what the most popular comedians are saying. Their influence is undeniable and profound. [And Joe, you are more influential than all of them.]

Splinter in My Mind

God, give me grace to guard my lips from speaking
what is wrong.

— Psalms 141:3 (TPT)

I love Joe Rogan! Ever since I heard him talk about Mixed Martial Arts in the early 2000s, I felt a connection to him. Like Rogan, I competed in Karate tournaments when I was young and later fell in love with Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu. Fun fact: one of his main Jiu-Jitsu instructors was Jean Jacques Machado—the younger brother of my Jiu-Jitsu instructor, Carlos Machado. Also, Joe Rogan and I even have the same middle name and are the same height.

If you are like several of my friends, you may not be familiar with Joe Rogan—I'm kinda surprised. In addition to being a stand-up comedian and Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) color commentator, he is one of the most influential people in the media. He hosts the world's #1 podcast, "*The Joe Rogan Experience*." It is estimated that Rogan has over 11 million listeners per episode, nearly four times as many people who watch the top prime-time cable TV hosts on Fox News Channel, CNN, and MSNBC—combined.

Everyone is scratching their heads, wondering how Rogan has completely disrupted the old, increasingly irrelevant legacy media gatekeepers of information.

What is Rogan's appeal?

Simple.

I have come to believe it's because he doesn't lie, talk down to his audience, or intentionally manipulate people for his own advantage. Not to mention he doesn't appear to be controlled by outside interests. Millions of people, including me, find this refreshing. His openness to discussing the things he's interested in has captured my attention several times.

I have never met Joseph James Rogan, seen any of his "blue style comedy" shows, or watched any 144 TV episodes of Fear Factor he has hosted. Even though he doesn't seem to care about God's role in the world, I'm fascinated by how he has become such a big part of shaping the cultural landscape—and how this relates to my Judeo-Christian worldview.

It's been said that if a person wants to know what is happening in culture, they need only look at what popular comedians are saying. In this internet world, this is true, now more than ever. Because of the media and technological disruption, comedians have taken on the role of our public intellectuals.

Many people now look to established comedians not just for them to make fun of the world but to make sense of it (and maybe even help to fix it). Culturally influential comedians act not just as joke-tellers but as truth-tellers and guides through our cultural debates.

Over 5,000 hours of Rogan's podcasting are spread across over 2,000 episodes featuring over 1,000 guests. Did you know that it would take about seven months if you started listening to every single episode of The Joe Rogan Experience non-stop? (I guess you could

always listen to the podcast at 2x speed to cut that in half.) That is a lot of interesting conversations about current events, comedy, politics, philosophy, science, and hobbies with a diverse range of personalities.

His guests are usually entertainers and celebrities. Some guests are athletes, doctors, prominent atheists, scientists, and those knowledgeable about aliens' possible existence. They discuss different issues which may or may not be related to their expertise. Part of the appeal has been listening to these guests talk about topics in an authentic way—unscripted and without being thoroughly edited.

Admittedly, I have only listened to a tiny fraction of his online content, but the important thing is that I do know what Rogan thinks about Christianity. I believe it's a mirror reflection of what transpires in millions of people's hearts and minds. And, more importantly, what is NOT taking place in those hearts and minds.

What I find most incredible is that there has not been one podcast guest who is a mature Christian. By “mature,” I mean a follower of Christ that can properly engage in the argument and articulate their faith when their beliefs are challenged.

Isn't this interesting? As I write this (early 2023), there has NOT BEEN ONE in-depth conversation about Christianity and the supernatural that accurately reflects what most Christians I know believe.

That's right. Not even one. But Rogan has had several people on his podcast who reject and ridicule Christianity—individuals like Sam Harris, Richard Dawkins, Sean Carrol, and Michael Shermer.

Why hasn't he given a Christian who can explain our beliefs coherently a fair shot on his podcast?

That is what I will endeavor to explain in this book. And as you will find out, there are only a few reasons for this...

The Stubborn Splinter

The catalyst of this book stems from a 6-minute, 46-second video clip that showed up in one of my social media feeds as I was scrolling. It was an excerpt from one of Joe Rogan's podcasts, and he was talking about Christianity with Brian Redban, a fellow comedian. As I was listening, something immediately started to stir within me.

It got me thinking...

How would I respond to what he was saying if I sat across from Rogan? I imagined what I would like to share with him that would accurately reflect my beliefs as they pertained to Christianity.

How would this conversation go?

Whether you are a Christ follower or not, what goes through your mind when you read a few of Rogan's comments from that day?

Christianity, at the end of the day, with no proof, everything is mythology. Everything. With no proof. With proof, then you examine the proof. It's super simple. And anybody that argues against that is just biased. You have your own ideas.

If you have some proof that there was a God, that this God had one son, and he made this son come down and get the f***k beat out of him and nailed to a board so that we could all have no sin. Can you show me some studies? Do you have a box of evidence that you could pull out, and we can examine all the different pieces that points to the undeniable conclusion that it's true? Because if you don't, then it's a myth...

It doesn't mean [Christianity] is not real. But if you put all your fu****g eggs in that basket, and you don't have

any proof at all, you're entering into this weird world where you don't pay attention to s**t...

That's not thinking. [Christianity] is like a convenient cookie-holder placement of ideas. It's not thinking. Because if you're thinking, you can't accept it. If you're thinking, you go, "Wait, what? He came back from the dead? Has anybody ever done that? Three days? He came back from the dead? I don't think he can do that..." (Joe Rogan Experience #703)

Whoa. Rogan's comments actually got a lot more colorful and "spicy" as he continued.

What do you think of Rogan's opinions about Christianity? Maybe you agree with his take. Perhaps you disagree. There may be some of you that could care less.

The answer to this question became a **splinter in my mind...**

When I woke up, I thought about a conversation I would like to have with someone who believed like Rogan. While working out, I imagined what I would say to Joe about my faith. When I mowed my yard, I pictured how a conversation would go if my faith were challenged by an influential person who thought like him.

You get the picture.

My First Thought

The first time I listened to this video clip of Rogan's rant mocking Christianity, I appreciated his honesty. Then I immediately thought about the Apostle Paul's first letter to the Christians living in the influential seaport city of Corinth. (Paul the Apostle is one of the most influential Christian figures in all of church history.)

I remembered how Paul wrote this letter encouraging those struggling with a still relevant question: “How do Christ’s followers fit into a prosperous, powerful, and secular culture that thinks Christians are completely nuts?”

Part of Paul’s introduction to these believers reads as follows:

To preach the message of the cross **seems like sheer nonsense to those who are on their way to destruction**, but to us who are being saved, it is the mighty power of God released within us. For it is written: “I will dismantle the wisdom of the wise and I will invalidate the intelligence of the scholars.”

So where is the wise philosopher who understands? Where is the expert scholar who comprehends? And where is the skilled debater of our time who could win a debate with God? Hasn’t God demonstrated that the wisdom of this world system is utter foolishness?

For in his wisdom God designed that all the world’s wisdom would be insufficient to lead people to the discovery of himself. He took great delight in baffling the wisdom of the world by using the simplicity of preaching the story of the cross in order to save those who believe it. (1 Corinthians 1:18-21 TPT)

The *splinter in my mind* began to lodge itself deep into my heart as the weeks and months went by. I could not shake the uneasiness I felt whenever I thought about the millions upon millions of people that have never heard a proper defense for the good news gospel of Jesus Christ, especially after hearing such a sure-sounding negative opinion about Christianity from such an influential person like Joe Rogan.

Because there has never been a guest to talk about these things with Rogan (to date), the record has yet to be set straight. And as Proverbs

explains: “There are two sides to every story. The first one to speak sounds true until you hear the other side, and they set the record straight.”¹

I couldn't stop thinking about the multitude of Christians who have walked away from the faith, having felt the sledgehammer of the so-called New Atheist movement (while not even knowing this movement existed). It bothered me greatly that they had built their lives upon *shifting sand* and, in so doing, couldn't withstand the persecution that inevitably comes with being a follower of Jesus.

Far too many Christians have a faith that is disconnected from their lives. They have intellectual beliefs about God, but when their faith comes under intense intellectual scrutiny, it can break down if it isn't grounded in a personal encounter with God. Knowing God is NOT just knowing about Him—it's experiencing Him intimately.

The only thing I could find to relieve some of the pressure I was feeling in my soul was rereading some old books that had anchored my faith years ago. As I reread these books, I underlined sentences, highlighted paragraphs, wrote things in the book's margins, looked up Scriptures in the Bible... and then wrote down thoughts in my journal. Soon I was ordering new Christian books that seemed interesting to add to my library. This is the only thing that addressed the burden I felt in my heart and soul.

After several months, I realized the documentation of my journey could be an essential “survival guide” for believers living in this post-Christian culture. I also noticed that what I had written down provided answers to anyone asking foundational questions about the God of the Bible.

Notice how I said what I have written is for those asking foundational questions. I'm well aware that if someone is not asking questions, they are probably not open to hearing what I have to say. Or

maybe they are open to a discussion but don't know what questions they should even be asking.

Do you know what the most asked question on Google was last year (2022)?

Guess. I'll wait.

It was "what to watch." This question was asked over 9,140,000 times, which should tell us something about what people think is important. Can I point out that Netflix will not provide the answers you need to survive what's going on in this nutty world?

Hopefully, you are asking more substantive questions, like:

What's God's role in what is going on in our world?

Why are people losing their minds and doing unimaginable things?

If God is good, why does He allow bad things to happen?

Why do we seem to live in an upside-down society where people call evil good and good evil?

Can I trust what the Bible says?

How do I defend my faith when it's attacked?

How can I experience the supernatural power of God in my life?

Don't lose hope. Read on, and let's be encouraged by what God says about all this.

Chapter Reflections

What are your thoughts?

1. What went through your mind when you read what Rogan had to say about Christianity?
2. How would you have responded to Joe if he had talked to you about his opinions?
3. Have you cared enough about Christianity to educate yourself enough to coherently explain why you believe what you do to others who might not share your point of view?

I would love for you to share some of your answers to these questions on any of my social media platforms. You can go to “KevinCortez.com” and link to them from there.



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Or visit KevinCortezBook.com/two

Joe Rogan: [Kevin, religion] is just silly... You're imposing all your bulls**t on other people... When are we going to get past this? When are we going to stop and say, “no one knows?” No one knows. You don't know. Don't say, “you know.” You can't say, “you know.” If you say, “you know,” you're crazy. Tell me your experiences. Tell me what happened. Throw it in the pile. Let's sort this all out.

— 2010 Podcast with Joey Diaz and Brian Redban

Kevin Cortez: [Joe, I know it sounds crazy] Christianity is entirely different from all other religions. It's the only religion (a particular system of beliefs) that teaches that God sent His Son to die on a cross in our place for our sins and then raised Him from the dead. We believe those who trust the God of the Bible can have a personal relationship with Him through Jesus. What I wrote in this book is me *throwing my experiences into the pile* so we can “sort this all out.”

Cultural Observation

Most importantly, I want to remind you that in the last days scoffers will come, **mocking the truth and following their own desires.**

— 2 Peter 3:3

I don't believe Joe Rogan is “technically” an *atheist*—I haven't heard him outright declare that God doesn't exist. I'm also not sure that he is an *agnostic* (one who says they don't know whether God exists or not). Perhaps he comes closer to fitting the description of an *apatheist*—someone indifferent to God's role in the world and doesn't really care.

I could be wrong. If so, I would love for him to correct me.

Even though Rogan has friends that are part of the New Atheist crowd, he's not a “bully” regarding his beliefs. He's even defended a Christian friend when they were wrongly attacked. I was greatly encouraged when Rogan said this:

Chris Pratt gets in trouble because he's Christian. He's one of the nicest guys I've ever met in my life—he's done nothing. He's so nice. He's kind of outside of the lines in terms of his ideology: he's a Christian and pretty open about it. Because of that, they attack him.

It's something so simple, like, he just believes in Jesus, and he likes to be a good person.”¹

Like so many people, Rogan doesn't appear to have delved into the subject of Christianity too deeply. Although I have a feeling Rogan may disagree with me, his mind seems to be already made up—he would most likely refer to himself as a *skeptic*, *humanist*, or *free thinker*.

In the end, labels don't matter since the bottom line is: if you live as though God doesn't exist, **you are a de facto atheist** (this includes those “believers” whose Christianity does not matter to them). Remember, God doesn't grade on a curve. How we treat people shouldn't change based on how they sin differently than us: “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”²

When I hear someone like Joe Rogan bash Christianity, I don't feel like they are stepping on my toes, and I don't become the least bit defensive. Why? Because my faith is not being threatened, I just become curious about why they view God the way they do. In Joe Rogan's case, I can understand why he feels the way he does about religion (especially the Catholic religion).

Joe's abusive biological father insisted he attend a catholic school at six. This introduction to religion—spiritually speaking—caused significant damage. Rogan has said:

My parents were splitting up at the time, so it was very confusing; I wanted things to have order... I wanted God to make sense because I was a little kid dealing with my parents splitting up, and there didn't seem to be any order in the world. And I was very nervous.

So finally, I was happy because I was gonna go to Catholic school. But then, as I experienced it at six, I said this is ridiculous; it doesn't make any sense. First

of all, these people are so mean and nasty. They are not comforting and loving. And when I compared them with the way my grandmother was, or my mother was, I felt these ladies are nasty. [Do] they represent God? This is crazy."³

So naturally, Rogan will not be a big fan of religion. His problem is that he conflates his religious experience as a young boy with Christianity. Then, over all these years, he seems to have built his beliefs about Christianity on the foundation of this awful 9-month experience. Could it be that the pain and anger he experienced from his parent's divorce was transferred to religion? Just a question.

Rogan's Got a Point

My initial thoughts concerning Joe Rogan's smackdown of Christianity included, "I can see his point." Honestly, I couldn't fault Rogan for thinking Christianity is "total nonsense." Since he's not a Christian, he can only go by his observations. And even though Rogan doesn't get Christianity, I'm sure he understands how followers of Jesus should act.

Apparently, Rogan watching how we conduct ourselves—and listening to our tone with others—has not led him towards Christ.

American Christianity has become such a misrepresentation of who Jesus is. That is why those outside the faith completely misunderstand His love and what He came to do.

I dare say that today's Christians generally have not done an excellent job of differentiating themselves from those outside the faith. The world is squabbling about virtually everything these days, and sadly, we Christians do the same all too often. We have dropped the ball regarding extending compassion, not being critical, responding to gossip, and judging others.

The word *Christian* comes from the Greek word “Christianós,” which means *little Christs*. It was a derogatory term used for the believers in the Turkish city of Antioch because they were so different from the rest of the culture.

As we live out our faith, we should carry out that tradition as being referred to as “Christlike.” Others should be able to see attributes like mercy, compassion, and selflessness in us. When we profess Christ and deny Him through our lifestyle, it’s understandable that an unbelieving world will find us nauseating.

Note: Early Jewish followers of Jesus called themselves “The Way,” probably coming from Isaiah 40:3, “prepare *the way* of the Lord.” Or maybe it was when Jesus said, “I am *the way*, the truth, and the life.”⁴ It was only later that they started being called Christians. Eventually, “Christ follower,” rather than “Christian,” became the preferred self-designation for people associated with the emerging church.

Flashback

As I was thinking about all this, in light of Rogan’s views, I was reminded of a specific season in my walk with Christ...

In 2006, things were going well: God had increased my influence beyond my small hometown community through speaking engagements; The two Christian books I’d authored had been distributed in over thirty countries; Some ministry leaders were looking to me for spiritual oversight; And the church I was pastoring had finally stabilized after going through some “drama” a few years earlier, some of which was caused by my own immaturity.

Of course, there were the typical challenges that a husband, father, business owner, friend, and pastor encounters. It’s called *life*. But as far as my Christian walk was concerned, I felt strong in my faith, and it was evident that God’s grace was upon my life. I even had

friendships with some of the most influential leaders in my branch of Christendom.

This was the context of what was going on in my life when God led me to resign from the church, turn the family business over to my younger brother, and move my wife and teenage children from California to Texas. I had no established plan and only had enough finances for a few months.

Did I find it challenging to step away from the business my grandfather had started in 1946? You bet I did. I had envisioned owning this company from the time I was a young boy playing on the forklifts.

Was I nervous about leaving the church I thought I would be pastoring for decades? Of course, it didn't make sense. Who does that? I knew no other 46-year-old who left an established ministry and walked away from a multi-million-dollar business with only God's leading.

Was I aware this move looked like an unwise decision? Absolutely. Moving 1,500 miles away from our family support system sounded crazy, especially since everything seemed to be going so well.

So why did God lead us to do this? Over the years, the answer to this question continues to unfold...

Initially, I could see God using the move to bless my family, especially regarding our teenagers. Compared to California, the schools and culture in Texas are more in line with our values. Most importantly, the children no longer had to deal with all the baloney others projected onto a PK (preacher's kid).

As for my Christian life, I could see God working also. We had become a part of a new church plant in the north Dallas suburb of Frisco, and I found it refreshing to serve wherever needed. Since I never brought it up, nobody in the congregation knew about my

previous ministry background. This removed any preconceived ideas that would mess up the new relationships I was building with the pastor and other men in the church.

Some Context Before I Make My Point

I'm unsure why, but I had become an insider in some visible ministry circles. I was privy to the good, the bad, the ugly, and the unmentionable that goes along with prominent Christian ministry. This included holding a key administrative position in one of the most influential media ministries in the world. At the time, I knew of only one ministry larger. Once people were aware of this, many seemed to relate to me differently.

When I moved to Texas, I intentionally disconnected from that Christian subculture. And boy, I didn't miss it one bit. Over the years, I had become sick and tired of hearing about what was happening behind the curtain of several large Christian organizations.

I loved simply volunteering as an usher on Sunday mornings and didn't pay attention to all the other behind-the-scenes stuff. At that time, I had no idea what was happening in the major-league Christian complex, and my ignorance felt wonderful.

As our young church plant in Frisco grew, I was hired part-time to manage the financial side of the organization, and I felt like God was positioning me to go on staff full-time eventually. After all, we had just finished building our new church building, and over 1,000 people were now attending. We were on the national watchlist of several church growth experts, pointing to us as a future megachurch.⁵

Then in 2010, our pastor (and my friend) Blaine Bartel resigned from the church because of moral failure. Yes, the same Blaine Bartel that hosted the nationally televised program in the 1990s called *Fire by Nite* (think of Saturday Night Live for the younger Christian masses). Yes, the same guy who spoke at the most prominent Christian

events in the nation, authored several best-selling books, and was at one time the leader of the largest weekly student gathering in America—attracting 3,000 young people every Wednesday night.

Yes, that Blaine Bartel.

Praise Report: I am thankful for all God has done—and is doing—in Blaine’s life since his horrific “fall.” God truly is a Redeemer. I would encourage every man to read his book: *Death by A Thousand Lies: My cover up, my crash and my resurrection from sexual addiction*.

When I read this book for the first time, I was encouraged to see my name included at the beginning, thanking those who helped him “remove the grave clothes.” Then, tears streamed down my face when I read the following and saw my name:

There was a certain empathy I began to feel for the lepers I read about in scripture. Untouchable. Discarded. Even though I knew I had brought every bit of this on myself, I felt powerless in stopping the bitterness from seeping into my soul. It was during this time that God brought some people into my life that I never counted on...

Then there was one of the many tennis games with my friend Kevin Cortez. Kevin was a leader in our church who was a former pastor and became a trusted confidante in my attempts to rebuild my life. Tennis with him was therapeutic. I remember him being ahead of me 5-0 in one game. One more game and the set was his.

Normally, I would throw away the last game and live for another day. Not today. I dug deep and was determined to bid for a comeback, and I ended up

winning 7-5. Kevin walked over at the end of our match and asserted, “Blaine, you’re a champion. Any time you feel any different, remember this day. Comebacks are in your blood.”

What a friend he has been.⁶

I don’t remember that particular day (I probably blocked it out of my mind since I lost our tennis match). But I do remember many moments hanging out with Blaine during this horrible time in his life.

One particular day stands out: the day I helped him move into an apartment in downtown Dallas: When I arrived to unload the mover’s truck and take his belongings to his apartment, I saw our friend Michael. Soon we were joined by Blaine’s son and his son’s friend to help. As we started moving, intense righteous indignation began to well up in my heart.

I became furious with “people.” No one in particular. Just Christians in general. I wasn’t proud of the ugly thoughts going through my mind, but I felt justified:

Only two friends here to help Blaine—Seriously?

Where are the hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of Christians who have had their lives and families positively impacted by Blaine’s obedience to Christ? How pathetic.

Where were those people our church had helped over the last few years? Oh, that’s right: our church community was told not to contact Blaine by the famous pastor who just took over our brand-new church campus. Ridiculous.

It seems pretty clear how to act in this situation: “*Dear brothers and sisters, if another believer is overcome by*

some sin, you who are godly should gently and humbly help that person back onto the right path. And be careful not to fall into the same temptation yourself.”⁷

What about that?

Granted, some unhealthy animosity towards such an event had built up over the years. This was the third time I watched someone close to me—that was world-renowned in the Body of Christ—be fed to the wolves when they were in need.

I can totally understand being disappointed with a Christian leader and no longer looking to them for spiritual guidance. But I will never understand shunning a fellow believer who has crashed and burned, especially if they had been a blessing in my life.

Here was my friend, who had helped countless people over the years, now being splashed across Christian media and having his name dragged through the mud by the evangelical community. I could understand why the Dallas Morning News would run a front-page article featuring the infidelity of a local pastor. They are unbelievers and love pointing out Christian hypocrisy. But when I watch other Christians attacking and spreading gossip just like those outside the faith, THAT’S NOT COOL.

Blaine’s only identity came from a famous expert who told him he was “the poster child for sexual addiction in America.” To add insult to his injured heart, many of his preacher friends were now amplifying that assessment. Correction. *Former* preacher friends.

Not me!

At the beginning of Blaine’s restoration process, he put together a support group. He asked me if I would be part of his team and explained how I could help him with some accountability. I was honored but told him, “I’d rather not.” I believed that as he continued

to navigate his path forward, his having my total commitment and unwavering support as a *friend* would be more critical.

Naturally, I wanted to grab my Bible, roll up my sleeves, and restore a friend who had gone off the rails. But I had first-hand experience observing the fallout of other prominent Christian leaders who had been disgraced. I knew Blaine needed a good friend more than anything else at that point in his life, especially since I knew what the road ahead looked like for him.

Admittedly, I also knew there were many more qualified people than me to jump into the situation and walk with him through the nitty-gritty. I was committed to being a “normal” Christian friend that would be there for him come hell or high water. I thought it would be more helpful to show up in his life and continue loving him with absolutely no expectations (sometimes even letting him win in tennis).

The reality was that I had no idea if he was ever going to recover from this or not. As Blaine himself concluded: “Here’s the bottom line. If I really wanted restoration, it wasn’t up to some team to provide it for me. I had to be hungry enough to want it and be relentless in finding resurrection in my life.”⁸

Now Here’s My Point

Please hear what I’m saying, and don’t hear what I’m not saying. I was not dismissing the horrendous hurt and scorched trail of destruction that accompanies the fall of a Christian leader. Nor am I minimizing the pain of everyone involved.

The whole thing sucked—BIG TIME. Believe me.

The last thing I wanted to do was to try and explain what just went down to my young adult children. They were struggling with their own walk of faith and trying to explain how a church pastor could commit the same sins as everybody else would not cut it with my kids. They

had already seen the “underbelly of the church world” when they were pre-teens, and their dad was a pastor.

I could have tried to be super-spiritual when talking with my teenagers and point out the Bible verses that surrounded Blaine’s actions... Or I could have given them all the reasons as to why this was not God’s will for his life and family... Or I could have thrown out some Christian cliché like: “Sin will take you farther than you ever thought you’d go, it will keep you there longer than you ever intended to stay, and it will cost you more than you ever expected to pay.”

Maybe I was wrong. I merely believed it was much more important for my children to watch how I related to Blaine as a friend and brother in Christ. They may not have understood why I continued to spend time with him, but they did notice I was acting differently towards him than other people in our church. I was trying to apply this Scripture to the situation: “Most important of all, continue to show deep love for each other, for love covers a multitude of sins.”⁹

This is the point I am hoping to make: Many of my fellow Christians are misreading culture and trying to live out their faith in a world that no longer exists. I believe the world is watching how we act when other believers don’t get it right in their personal lives. Since many people carry a tremendous burden of guilt and shame, **they want to see how a Christian would respond to them** if their dirty laundry were suddenly exposed.

Those not open to Christianity may not understand our beliefs, but they instinctively know Christians should NOT throw someone under the bus when their life gets jacked up. Jesus said His true followers should be different from unbelievers:

For when you demonstrate the same love I have for you by loving one another, everyone will know that you’re my true followers. (John 13:35 TPT)

I thought about all the times' Joe Rogan must have watched Christians react wrongly toward others. When he observes how Christians constantly point out what they don't agree with—and then feel free to criticize and pass judgment—I'm sure he takes note.

Not only does this empower someone like Rogan to do the same, but I bet he also thinks he knows how we would respond to him if we became aware of some of the junk he is most likely struggling with. Sadly, he's probably right.

This begs the question, has Rogan or his fans ever seen the love and grace of God accurately displayed? It's no wonder millions upon millions of people listening to him agree with his admonishing Christians to just “shut the f**k up.”

I Stand Corrected

Understandably, many people blew out of our fellowship after Pastor Blaine's unwise choices. Our young church was traumatized and in shock. Since I was responsible for the finances on the administrative side of the ministry, I was hired to help merge our church into one of the extension campuses of a notable multicampus church based in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex.

I made a promise to myself not to overreact to what was going on. I committed to attending this well-known church for at least two years before I would consider leaving. I continued attending church with more than 40,000 other people each weekend and bit my tongue until it bled. I didn't fault anybody but was disappointed with how everything went down.

I hung in there for two years, and then, again, I disconnected from all that was happening in the Christian subculture. I didn't follow any ministries on social media platforms, didn't read any Christian publications, or watch or listen to any Christian media.

To avoid being completely isolated, I continued to meet with half a dozen Christian men every Friday morning at a friend's house for Bible Study (as I had for the last ten years). I also occasionally attended other local churches with friends. Oh, and I was smart enough not to stop reading my Bible.

Was this the best thing for me to do? Probably not. But I had one primary goal: I didn't want to become cynical after all I had witnessed in big-time Christianity. I'm not sure I succeeded in this effort. As you can probably perceive, I'm still struggling a bit with cynicism. Pray for me.

At that time in my walk with Christ, I truly believed it was a matter of survival. Over the next few years, I put my head down and focused on building my digital marketing agency. I tried to apply the following truth to my life:

Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life: You should mind your own business... so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody. (1 Thessalonians 4:11-12 NIV)

By 2019, everything seemed to be going great: My company had over 400 businesses on our digital platforms; My agency was helping several clients grow their revenues; I had just published my book, *The Entrepreneur Detour: What They Can't Teach You in Business School*; And I was even featured in Voyage Dallas Magazine as one of "Dallas's most inspiring entrepreneurs."

And then BAM!!

The COVID-19 virus was unleashed into our world, and everything began to unravel. Since I had spent the last several years leveraging my business into the hospitality industry, my business was immediately impacted as the restaurants and hotels I was serving began to struggle.

I had a hard time wrapping my brain around what was transpiring.

As the nightmare continued to grind on, it got a lot worse. All I could do was press into God for wisdom and guidance. I'm grateful to report that my business made it through the pandemic... but I became greatly burdened during this time. A lot of the businesses I interacted with didn't survive. When I thought about those who were devastated, it was crushing.

In the middle of watching so many people become overwhelmed, defeated, and exhausted, I heard God clearly speak to me through His Word. More accurately, I heard Him gently *correct me* as I was reading Proverbs:

Why would you stand back and watch them stagger to their death? And why would you say, "But it's none of my business"? The one who knows you completely and judges your every motive is also the keeper of souls—and not just yours! He sees through your excuses and holds you responsible for failing to help those whose lives are threatened. (Pr. 24:11-12 TPT)

God showed me that when I "disconnected" from all the lunacy in the Christian world, I had also detached from being a part of building His kingdom. I should have known that any excuse I gave God didn't fly with Him. After all, advancing the rule and reign of Christ on the earth is what it's all about.

God's kingdom is the hope of all the world.

I suddenly realized that my priorities were all messed up. Focusing on helping other business owners generate more revenue for their company should not have been my main thing. Business success without God is the ultimate business failure. Read that again, **"Business success without God is the ultimate business failure."**

I had not been stewarding the grace on my life correctly. Now here I was, watching all of these business owners stagger, and I knew their only hope was to align themselves with God’s kingdom. But I was out of alignment. It wasn’t like I was ashamed of being a Christian around anybody; I had just become a passive observer.

How terrible.

I repented of being a *Lone Ranger Christian* and reengaged with what was going on in Christianity. God did a miraculous work in my heart—even to the point that whenever I see the Christian circus on full display, I don’t want to take my shoe off and throw it at somebody. Although, at times, I must stop myself as I’m untying my shoelaces.

I started paying attention to the food fights happening on Christian social media channels for the first time in my life. Soon I was enjoying the content of Christian Podcasters like Tim Ross and watching various YouTubers like Jon McCray and Ruslan Karaoglanov. I even began enjoying having my doctrine challenged by Christian YouTubers like Allen Parr and Mike Winger (who I believe have a right heart).

This is how I came across the Joe Rogan video clip of him expressing his views on Christianity—which became this book’s genesis.

God is super sneaky.

He had led me to a place where I would be open to putting myself out there again. This helped me be willing to write the book you are hopefully enjoying. This has been an extremely difficult process because I know the tremendous backlash that comes with publicly expressing counter-culture beliefs.

While typing this, I can almost hear, “Release the hounds.” Please keep me in your prayers... Pray that my heart is protected from all the slander and criticism that comes from taking a stand for Christ.

My prayer is:

O God, from my youth you have taught me, and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds. So even to old age and gray hairs, O God, do not forsake me, until I proclaim your might to another generation, your power to all those to come. (Psalm 71:17-18 ESV)

Chapter Reflections

What are your thoughts?

1. Do you consider yourself a Christian, an atheist, an agnostic, an apatheist, a skeptic, or something else?
2. How have you responded when you've become aware of a notable Christian leader missing the mark and embarrassing the Body of Christ?
3. Are there any believers in your life that you can trust to help you if things go sideways in your walk with Jesus?

I would love for you to share some of your answers to these questions on any of my social media platforms. You can go to “KevinCortez.com” and link to them from there.



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Or visit KevinCortezBook.com/three

Joe Rogan: [Kevin, seriously] Christianity, at the end of the day, with no proof, everything is mythology. Everything. With no proof. With proof, then you examine the proof. It's super simple. And anybody that argues against that is just biased. You have your own ideas.

— Joe Rogan Experience #703

Kevin Cortez: [I hear what you're saying, Joe, but] Christianity, at the end of the day, is real. If you are a fair inquirer, you will have sought some available legal-historical proof that is not hard to find. A tremendous amount of undeniable proof backs everything up, and anybody who argues against that proof is biased. Their ideas are ignorant—I mean, their ideas lack information.

First-Hand Testimony

They [Christians] overcame him [Satan] by the blood of the Lamb [what Jesus did at the cross] and **by the word of their testimony** [give evidence as a witness to what Jesus has done for them], and they did not love their lives to the death.

— Revelation 12:11 (NKJV)

Because I am secure in my faith, Joe Rogan’s opinion about my Lord and Savior could never sway me to embrace his way of thinking. He’s too late for me. Time and again, I have experienced God’s power on display. If I wrote down all the miraculous things God has supernaturally done in my life, it would take up the rest of this book (and then some).

Dear Christian reader, I have no idea where you are on your faith journey, but the most profound proof that Christianity is real can be found in the fact that your relationship with Jesus has affected your life. As you will soon be reading, ample historical proof exists to undergird your faith. But, more importantly, your transformation proves the validity of the resurrected, living Christ.

Remind yourself—and tell others when the opportunity presents itself—about what Jesus has done for you.

No One Can Tell Your Story Like You Can

If I were to meet Joe Rogan, I would hopefully be ready to explain why I believe the way I do. Just as Scripture points out: “If anyone asks about the hope living within you, **always be ready to explain your faith** with gentleness and respect” (1 Peter 3:15-16 TPT).

In 1983, I was preparing to graduate from California Polytechnic State University in San Luis Obispo. In a few weeks, my life would transition into the real world, and I would not attend school in the fall for the first time since I was five years old.

I’d planned to spend the summer with my friend Alan, who lived in London and then work somewhere fun for a year before getting a real job. That meant I could enjoy my last few months of freedom in Europe and then move to Hawaii to goof off for a year. That plan was my college graduation gift to myself.

I had it all figured out: since I was a Certified United States Tennis Academy Teaching Professional and a Black Belt Karate Instructor, I’d teach tennis at a nice resort during the day, and, at night, I’d teach Karate. I thought working at a resort would help in my pursuit of one day owning a health club. And teaching Karate would give me extra cash because I knew the cost of living in Hawaii was high.

During this time in my life, I was not only obsessed with martial arts but equally preoccupied with wanting to improve myself. These two passions definitely worked together. Martial arts philosophy focuses on the essence of self-control and a positive perspective to strive for the best in life. It also emphasizes the fortification of the mind, body, and spirit.

Because this ancient method of self-defense is traditionally based on Eastern philosophies or religions, I was naturally exposed to Taoism and Zen Buddhism. This led to a curiosity about different

cultures and their related belief systems, and I began reading other books to bring together my own set of principles or tenets.

I desperately wanted to form the basis of my spiritual philosophy and moral code.

The book that had the most influence up until that time in my life was written by Richard Bach. The book has a little blue feather on the cover and is titled, “*Illusions: The Adventures of a Reluctant Messiah.*” Bach said the book came to him as "a visionesque spooky thing."

This was Bach’s follow-up to his 1970’s book “Jonathan Livingston Seagull”—about a seagull named Jonathan who was taken to a "higher plane of existence." There was no heaven on this plane... but a better world could be found through the perfection of knowledge.

The book, *Illusions* revolves around Donald Shimoda, who is a messiah. He had quit his messiah job after deciding that people only wanted to be entertained by the showbiz-like performance of miracles. They weren’t that interested in understanding the message behind the miracles. Shimoda ends up going into the business of providing short rides in a vintage biplane to passengers for a few dollars each.

During his travels, he meets Richard, a fellow barnstorming pilot in a field in the Midwestern United States. The two men enter into a teacher-student relationship whereby Donald passes on his knowledge and explains to Richard the concept that the world we inhabit is based on illusions, as well as expounding upon the underlying reality behind it. Eventually, Donald’s teachings enable Richard to go beyond practicing low-level “cloud-vaporizing” to performing actual miracles of his own.

I was intrigued when I read about Richard’s first miracle, creating a blue feather to appear out of his imagination. Hence the blue feather on the book cover. The feather was not an actual feather but a picture of a *blue feather* on a carton of milk... the feather was next to some

small print that read *Packaged for Scott Dairies by **Blue Feather Farms**, Bryan, Ohio.*

I went to bed that night thinking about what I had just read...

What if it didn't matter what my current circumstances were?

If I imagined something better for myself, could I create it?

What if a person really could have power over the illusions of this world... because they knew the reality behind them?

CAUTION! Prepare to have your mind wrinkled.

The following day, I got up and went to take a shower. As I pulled back the shower curtain to turn on the water, what did I see sitting on the upper edge of the bathtub?

Yep—a tiny *blue feather*.

What the what?

Not a picture. An actual little blue feather.

Mind blown.

This experience definitely got my attention and opened my mind to the possibility of the supernatural. I would later learn what had actually happened from a Biblical perspective: I came face-to-face with the spiritual forces of fallen angels exercising their authority—yes, I'm talking about demons.¹

I know how this sounds to unbelievers... but PLEASE don't check out on me. I will explain more about what I mean later. I promise you it is not as weird as it may sound. For now, know that I believe my "blue feather experience" was simply a demonic attempt to prevent me

from receiving the message of Jesus Christ and accepting salvation through His gift of grace.

The supernatural is real. As a Christ follower, miraculous signs should be a normal part of our life. Jesus told His disciples about supernatural miracles after His resurrection, just before He ascended into heaven.

You may want to put a helmet on before you read what Jesus said in the following verse:

And he said to them, “As you go into all the world, preach openly the wonderful news of the gospel to the entire human race!

Whoever believes the good news and is baptized will be saved, and whoever does not believe the good news will be condemned.

And these miracle signs will accompany those who believe: They will drive out demons in the power of my name. They will speak in tongues. They will be supernaturally protected from snakes and from drinking anything poisonous. And they will lay hands on the sick and heal them.” (Mark 16:15-18 TPT)

Bible mic drop.

I recently learned something interesting about this portion of Scripture: Since most believers don't have to be too concerned about snakes and poison, it was pointed out that some scholars believe that this verse in the Bible contains two Aramaic idioms. *Protection from snakes* could be a picture of overcoming one's enemies (“snakes”), and *drinking poison* may be dealing with attacks on one's character (poisonous words).²

A Defining Moment

While lying in bed on May 17th (shortly after my blue feather encounter), my plans for the immediate future dramatically changed. I woke up to the voice of Ruth Carter Stapleton, the sister of former president Jimmy Carter, being interviewed on a TV show. She was talking about her battle with pancreatic cancer, and the doctors had given her only a few months to live.

I remember her saying, “To find happiness, you must be at peace with one’s self and at peace with the Lord.”

What captured me was that this unbelievable lady was at total peace with her situation. I wondered *how in the world can this woman handle what she was going through with such courage*. Suddenly, touring Europe for the summer and spending a year improving the tennis game of pretty ladies in a tropical paradise seemed selfish and small-minded.

Lying there in my college apartment bed that morning, I had a radical conversation with myself. Allow me to share some of my thoughts with you:

I have peace with myself and am very happy, but I am not “at peace with the Lord.”

“To be or not to be?” That is not the question. “Am I going to be who God created me to be?” That is the question.

What if I went ahead and went to visit my friend Alan in London but didn’t go to Hawaii? What would I do instead?

What if I spent that year focusing on learning how to be a better person instead of having fun? What would that look like? How would I pull that off?

Remember, this was the early 1980s—before self-help icon Tony Robbins and the personal development movement (or self-savior complex) had taken hold of our culture. This was before everybody ran around quoting the German philosopher and atheist Frederick Nietzsche, who once said, “He who has a *why* to live for can bear almost any *how*.”³ He’s not my favorite thinker, but even those we don’t like can occasionally come up with good thoughts.

Our “*why*” is the thing that motivates us to get up every morning and work a little harder to get a little better. Most people know how to focus on *what* they have to do, and some people know *how* they need to do it. But few people understand *why* they do what they do.

Do you know what it is that has the ability to push you, even on the days when all you want to do is pull the covers over your head and retreat from the world?

At twenty-three, I sure didn’t know my *why*. I had no idea what purpose, cause, or belief inspired me to do anything. I didn’t know what it was that I wanted to do or who it was that I wanted to be. I just knew that if I started moving in a direction, I might be given some answers.

Incidentally, Mrs. Stapleton died four months later. To this day, it still fascinates me how one person’s courage and openness about their faith can completely alter someone else’s life in less than five minutes.

God Still Speaks

In hindsight, I can see how my openness toward God, and a willingness to consider His plan for my life, stemmed from a blind date I had with a girl named Tyra just a few days earlier. Our mutual friend, Connie, asked Tyra if she would attend my Lambda Chi Alpha fraternity’s end-of-year event with me. Fortunately for me, Tyra ended up being an unapologetic Christian.

When I met Tyra, she told me her immediate thought when Connie asked her was, *I don't even date—so the answer is “no way.”* But she ended up agreeing to go with me on a date. So, what changed her mind? She told me God had spoken to her heart and told her to go.

We went to my event, and Tyra ended up talking about her relationship with Christ the entire time. I had never met a Christian like her. As I listened, I felt something was definitely taking place in my heart and soul. By the end of the evening, I was open to what Tyra had to say.

The following Sunday, Tyra invited me to church with her. She especially wanted to introduce me to Tim, her pastor. I didn't know what to expect. All I knew was that she was the first Christ follower I'd ever met that seemed to have an authentic personal relationship with God.

I was not expecting what was about to happen...

During the praise and worship portion of the church service, I freely opened my entire heart to the Lord. Suddenly, right in the middle of a song, I felt like I heard God “speak” to me. I don't know how else to explain it exactly, but I heard the voice of God in my heart.

Since I already believed in the supernatural because of my *blue feather* experience, it just made sense that God could speak to me if He wanted to.

What did He say?

I felt strongly that I heard God tell me that after graduating from Cal Poly, “He wanted me to go to Bible College in Dallas, TX, and learn His will for my life by studying the Bible.” Was this an audible voice I heard? Not sure. But I heard it nonetheless. I now know that Jesus said, “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me” (John 10:27 NKJV).

Note: The most crucial thing to never forget when you believe God is speaking to you is this: what He says will NEVER contradict what the Bible says. This is why it is so vital to spend time studying Scripture.

I'm so thankful He still speaks to us.

[See SURVIVAL GUIDE: Discerning His Voice]

Let's Do This

When I confessed Jesus Christ as my personal Lord, according to Scripture, it changed who I was on the inside. I became a new person and began a new life.⁴ Then came the adventure of trying to understand and live out what that even began to mean.

After graduating *Magna Thank Laude* from college and spending my summer in England (thank you, Alan), I planned to attend a Leadership and Bible Institute for one year and then decide on a career path. I packed everything I owned into my 1976 Chevrolet Monza 2+2 hatchback and moved from California to Dallas, Texas.

Everyone that knew me thought I'd gone off the reservation. I can't blame them.

This was the first major decision I'd ever made that was not based on what others thought I should do. Understandably, this didn't go over too well with my mom and dad, but they supported my decision nonetheless. Oh man, I am so thankful to have them as my parents.

Immediately upon arriving in Dallas, I was hired by the International Christian Ministry and Outreach Center, which the Bible College was a part of. While all my friends were advancing in their chosen careers, I was studying subjects such as *Practical Christian Living*, *Demonology*, *Issues of the Heart*, and *Character Development*.

When I talked to my buddies, they'd tell me about the new cars they were driving and the nice places they lived. That wasn't my reality. I was learning about *Wisdom and Guidance*, *Financial Stewardship*, *Divine Healing*, and *Interpersonal Relationships*.

I'll admit, talking to my friends stung a bit, especially since my starting wage was \$4.50 an hour. I survived by working as much overtime as possible and eating ninety-nine-cent tacos at Jack in the Box every other day (that's one unhealthy way to lose twenty pounds). But I believed what I was doing would help me in the long run.

This was an awesome experience. I soon realized that you don't have to go to a Bible College to learn about the more profound things of God. I learned much more by serving others in the church and being around great men and women of God. Incidentally, listening to other believers' real-life stories and watching how they lived out their faith was much more beneficial to my walk with Christ than a degree in Practical Theology.

What started out as my one-year experiment to better understand God and life in general, turned into eight years.

Lights, Camera, Action

During this season of my life, I was a part of something truly incredible. The Christian organization I was a part of went from approximately 300 employees when I started working there to becoming one of the most influential media ministries in the world (I knew of only one other ministry larger). At its peak, this organization was keeping over 2,000 people employed.

Being behind the scenes was priceless.

This ministry had over 2,000 churches connected to it through a Satellite Dish Network. Remember, these were the days before the internet. The church connected to the ministry would hold a four-night

“Satellite Seminar” every month, and these meetings were broadcast to the affiliate churches. The top Christian speakers in the world would come to Dallas and teach during these seminars.

Some of the same teachers would also come and teach in the Bible College. Since the school was broadcast into the affiliate churches, tens of thousands of students took these classes. However, this is just an estimate because not all were officially enrolled. The school was set up so the famous teachers would only need to come for two days and teach their 13 lessons for broadcast later.

The cool thing for me was that I got to sit next to the center camera and hold up time cards as they taught their classes. It was just the center cameraman and me in the room with these great men and women of God. That was it. Then, I would listen to the lessons again while attending classes.

It was incredible.

I got to know some of these well-known Christian leaders by interacting with them when the cameras were turned off. When they were changing clothes for the next class session, I would sneak a look at their notes and Bible. I would especially pay attention to how they would discuss the things of God with others who were around. And best of all, I could ask them questions if it seemed appropriate.

These experiences significantly increased my desire to know God more intimately.

During my employment, I had all kinds of different job functions. One exciting job I found myself in was managing the Phone Ministry Center. This department received over 75,000 ministry calls a month from the daily international television program. I had 21 direct reports who managed over 200 full-time “Prayer Ministers” (Counselors). When I think back, it still freaks me out since I was only in my twenties.

My last position, Special Projects Coordinator, was by far the most enjoyable. I felt like everything I'd ever learned came into play. Whatever special project our visionary pastor and leader thought up that was “outside the ordinary,” it was my job to figure out how to garner the resources and make it happen.

When asked what my job entailed, I'd say *I help build rocket ships as they take off from the launching pad*. It was the typical “Fire—Ready—Aim” stuff. I have so many wonderful memories. However, it was stressful, especially when I had no idea what I was doing.

Sheesh.

For those eight years, I served this ministry and saw incredible miracles happen daily. If you were to walk into my office, I could point to ten 2-inch binders documenting hundreds of provable miracles that people had received from this Christian organization's ministry outreach.

I also received an important bonus during this time in my life. I had the opportunity to spend time studying the Bible every day. Again, I'm really, **really** thankful for the spiritual foundation I was able to build.

As I look back, I can honestly say that giving up most of my twenties to focus on understanding why my life unfolds in the way it does—not to mention deepening my relationship with God—has been one of the best decisions I've ever made.

Even though, on the surface, it looked as if I'd fallen off my rocker and become a “Jesus freak,” it has been a tremendous advantage in several areas of my life. Especially when it comes to my overall spiritual and mental health.

Unfortunately, the entire ministry organization began to implode two weeks after I moved back to California to take over my family's

beverage service and distribution business. Yes, a lot of crazy things took place surrounding this crash. Truthfully, I'm VERY thankful I wasn't there to experience the collapse.

That was in 1991, and to this day, people are still discussing—and criticizing—the epic downfall of this church, ministry, and Christian leader. Even after all these years, my heart still hurts when I think about the devastating effect and trauma this had on so many lives.

To be clear, I will always honor the man who was stewarding this ministry. God showed me a long time ago that my friend will give an account for the light God showed him to walk in during this season. I will never judge him according to the light I think he should have walked in. “The Lord knows those who are his” (2 Timothy 2:19 NIV).

Anyway, who am I to judge?

All I know is that I desperately need God's grace and forgiveness. I never want to ignore what Jesus said concerning this:

Refuse to be a critic full of bias toward others, and you will not be judged. For you'll be judged by the same standard that you've used to judge others. The measurement you use on them will be used on you.

Why would you focus on the flaw in someone else's life and fail to notice the glaring flaws of your own? How could you say to your friend, “Let me show you where you're wrong,” when you're guilty of even more?

You're being hypercritical and a hypocrite! First acknowledge and deal with your own “blind spots,” and then you'll be capable of dealing with the “blind spot” of your friend. (Matthew 7:1-5 TPT)



“

**Always be ready to explain
your faith to others with
respect.**

Chapter Reflections

What are your thoughts?

1. Have you ever experienced something that can be attributed to the demonic realm?
2. If you are a Christian, have you thought deeply about what God has done in your life, and can you share that testimony with others?
3. Who are some of the people who have influenced you the most regarding your faith and worldview?

I would love for you to share some of your answers to these questions on any of my social media platforms. You can go to “KevinCortez.com” and link to them from there.



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About the Author

Kevin Cortez is an accomplished entrepreneur, speaker, and author. He has been featured in Voyage Dallas Magazine as one of “*Dallas’s most inspiring entrepreneurs.*” Kevin brings a level of business acumen to entrepreneurship that is rare in the emerging media landscape.

Prior to starting his interactive marketing agency in Texas, Kevin had a twenty-year track record of success in ministry and business, including running his family’s wholesale distribution company in California for fifteen years.

During this season in California, Kevin was also the lead pastor of a non-denominational church for eleven years. While pastoring, Cortez wrote two Christian books that were distributed in over 30 countries.

Before this period in his life, Cortez was a “key” administrator for the second-largest media ministry in the world (at that time). This gave him insight into the good, the bad, the ugly, and the unmentionable that goes along with prominent Christian organizations.

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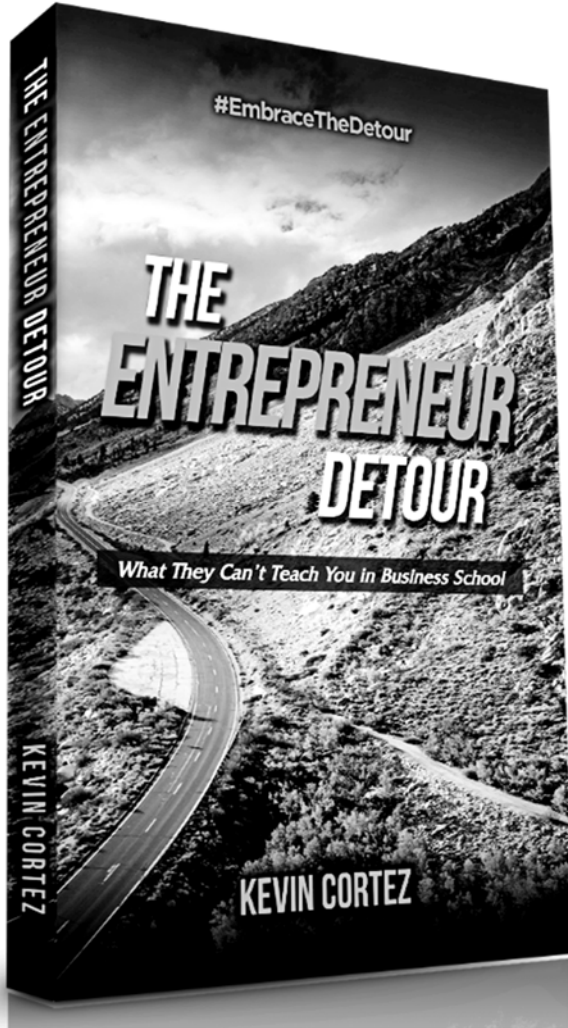
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