

Chapter 1 : The Churchgoing Atheist

The Churchgoing Atheist Robert Jensen is a self-described "Christian atheist" who just published a for Christian and secular folks alike-to become a member of a local Presbyterian church.

What follows is how it happened for me. History My family is highly religious. The Miessler lineage is German; we came here as missionaries to the Chippewah Indians in Michigan in , and up to my grandfather every male in the family has been a Lutheran pastor. My grandfather was a school teacher after returning home from WWII and my grandmother was a nurse before becoming a full-time mother. Their children were raised in a classic Lutheran household: Luckily for me, my father did not pass down the indoctrination that he received as a child. He actually strongly dislikes church likely due to how forcefully it was pushed on him and prefers to study religion privately using the Bible alone. He feels that most churches are glorified, feel-good social gatherings where someone on top takes advantage of weak people. It was very clear to me that he was a Christian. When I asked about it or just casually showed interest, he would sometimes go into this or that concept with me. Children are pliable in the extreme, and they without fail emulate those they respect. My father was a Christian, so I became one as well. Realize what I mean by that: As a child, if someone you respect tells you that something is true " or even just illustrates that they believe it to be true " it becomes absolute. There is no choice in these matters for a human until much later in life. I met a friend in 7th grade who introduced me not only to role-playing, but also to the notion that God was a complete fantasy. Andrew and I would debate the issue back and forth for hours, and this went on for years. His objections to my faith were not very advanced as he was, after all, just a kid as well. But then again, most major debate points would not have worked on me anyway because my faith was quite unorthodox. Alas, he never succeeded in changing my mind for the six years we were together. So, being unsure of which ideas to believe I simply compared the source, and Andrew was unable to win that competition. My Faith As I mentioned, my faith was quite different from any traditional sect of Christianity. And the evil that I did know about I attributed to errors introduced by man. I focused on the overall message as I saw it based on little knowledge of the Bible , and I built the specifics as I saw fit. Now that I think back on it, I did not focus much Jesus. This is not to say that I disliked the idea of him or anything, I simply developed a dialog with God rather than with other go-betweens. I think this is because I was given very little Christianity to go on. Here were my basic beliefs: God made everything God is extremely kind God will listen to you and answer prayers From there I pretty much developed my own methods of worship. Now that I think about it I wonder if I could have ever been called a Christian at all. It just really never came up. I never accepted Jesus Christ as my savior. I never prayed to him. I guess that would have made me more of a Jew than a Christian. This is an interesting idea " one that I never realized until now. At any rate, I was quite religious in my own right. Perhaps most interesting was my method of prayer. I found the standard way of praying to be rather hollow and weak. To believe that would make these two things basically equal: God, please help Jimmy pass his spelling test. God, please eliminate all hunger in the world. Ultimately, is the second really harder for an omnipotent being? Is it harder for me to ask for? So where is the meaning in these prayers? I built what I think is a better prayer system: Take from me and give to them. That may seem trivial, but think about it. I never prayed for anything without offering something that I cared about as an exchange. And I matched the offerings to the request. The power of the prayer is limited by the selfishness of the person making it. As a testament to that selfishness, I have made hundreds of these prayers for others and I have never once offered my life, my overall happiness, or anything else that I cherished too greatly. I did, however, on one particular occasion offer to not be overly successful at whatever I do. I offered away all the power and money that I desperately wanted later in life for this particular cause. But the idea stands; I absolutely freely offered those things away, fully accepting that they be taken for my entire lifetime in exchange for what it was that the other person got. They lived in the Sierra Nevada foothills, so the journey to the lake was down a series of steep paved hills. My cousin was very young " like maybe six or seven while I was a teenager " and he was taking extreme risks on his bike and the hill. He would gather tons of speed going down the hill, while barely in control, and then would somehow regain control only to do

it again. So there he went again, gaining even more speed than last time, only this time he started wobbling fiercely and it was clear to me that he was going down. I made an offering to God, as if to a ultra-powerful friend: I had been quite enthused about this upcoming fishing trip for a very long time, and it was a big deal for me to catch something. So to me it was a major sacrifice, despite what it sounds like today. The point is that I took the one thing that I wanted at the moment – the one thing that I was currently obsessed with – and offered it away as an exchange. What I still remember, though, is being quite sure when I made the prayer that this time he was going to fall. Losing My Faith I maintained this same faith and same prayer system all through high school and into the Army when I joined at As time went on, however, my faith began to waiver. The questions in my mind many of which were planted by Andrew back home were multiplying and I was having increasing difficulty with rationalizing them. The biggest issues were the obvious ones: These were all questions that I had. In addition, the utterly insane faiths of others were chipping away at my own. I would start by saying their faith is stupid because of a, b, and c. But my faith is different because of x, y, and z. That sustained me for quite some time until I realized later that it was really the same. Just as they had no tangible grounds on which to base their beliefs, I had none to base mine on either. It was simply a matter of personal belief, with no way of externally verifying any of it, which troubled me. So I learned all the different ranks, insignia, planes, vehicles, etc. I also became the group linguist because I was fluent in Spanish. It was a good time; I actually got to converse in a rudimentary way with real Bedouins on a number of occasions. As such, we were able to travel. I was able to see the great pyramids and go to Israel. I jumped at the chance to see Israel mostly because I wanted to see the Holy Land. It did no such thing. If anything it drastically damaged my faith, although it could be argued that it was already slipping away anyway, and that absent the return of Christ during my visit I was going to see the trip as a letdown. It was a wholly negative experience pun intended. Given my non-experiences in the Holy Land my doubts were sharpened and I decided to consult the most powerful source I could think of to help my faith – the Bible. I was stationed on top of one of the tallest mountains in all of the Sinai peninsula. And my favorite duty position I would make deals to get extra time there was in a lonely, metal guard shack that was perhaps 25 feet above the ground on the northeastern edge of the cliff our base was on. The wind could get downright deafening at times, and at night you could see Bedouin fires burning miles away. Straight west I could see the Gulf of Aquaba, then Jordan. Slightly to the south was Saudi Arabia, and all the way up to the north along the gulf was Eilat, Israel, which was just out of sight. So, with my binoculars, my SAW machine gun with live ammunition, and my Bible, I set out reading for hours and hours. I remember the moment it happened – the moment I realized I no longer believed. I was reading a story about Moses going into a town to spread the word of God. They became quite terse with Moses, as I remember, and invoked the anger of God. In a fit of rage, God proceeded to set fire to the town. As I was reading this, with all of these doubts and questions in my mind already, I was dumbfounded. Setting fire to a town? A town full of humans he created? Was he surprised at their non-belief? How could he be if he created each one of them from scratch as an omnipotent and omniscient being?

Chapter 2 : Should We Be More Church-Going?

But part of the Churchgoing Atheist project is giving everyone an equal fair shake, so here goes. The building has piqued my curiosity ever since I briefly lived on the same street. It is an imposing structure: square, domed, fronted by Greek columns.

Bookmark I am not a particularly religious person. I have been taking my kids to our local Unitarian Universalist church in the hopes that they will get a broad religious education and some of that good ole love-your-neighbor doctrine instilled in their blood. Turns out that I should be hoping they get something different: I was raised Presbyterian by an engaged-but-skeptical father and a totally atheist mother. But however I got it, research shows that my spirituality is probably a key cause of much of my happiness. Theories abound about why this might be: Advertisement X A three-course professional certificate series that teaches you the what, why, and how of increasing happiness at work. But what constitutes "spirituality? When you are worried or have a problem, how often do you depend on your religion or spirituality to help you? They also assessed four different dimensions of spirituality: What strikes me is that inspiring spirituality in our children, as defined by the researchers, really means helping them feel awe, elevation, and faith—three positive emotions. Positive emotions ARE a form of happiness in my mind. And spirituality, as they define it, includes those things that we already know foster happiness: After all, the world is amazing. It is full of magic and love and mystical things that are so much bigger than ourselves. And what better time of year to inspire awe in children—good deeds are everywhere. Here are two stories to tell your children, one about a kid who helps Santa , and the other about a man who hated Christmas, but his family made it meaningful to him. And there is, of course, also Santa: Cheers to embracing the magic. Become a fan of Raising Happiness on Facebook. Greater Good wants to know: Do you think this article will influence your opinions or behavior?

This is a list of notable converts to Christianity who were not theists before their conversion. See Nontheism for specifics of what encompasses nontheism. All names should be sourced and the source should indicate they had not been a theist, not merely non-churchgoing, before conversion.

New Atheism has lost its battle for the cultural high ground. But everyone else has long since passed them by. The New Atheists accomplished the seemingly impossible task of alienating a society that agreed with them about everything. And yet in the bubble where nobody believes in God and everyone worries full-time about sexual minorities and Trump, you get less grief for being a Catholic than a Dawkins fan. How did the New Atheists become so loathed so quickly? The second article presents a theory: It has something to do with a litany of grievances against the believoisie so rote that it might well or ironically be styled a catechism. These New Atheists and their many fellow travelers all share an unpleasant obsessive tic: This repetition-compulsion seems to be baked right into their dogma. Soren Kierkegaard, the great enemy of all pedants, offers a story that might shed considerable light. In his Concluding Unscientific Postscript, he describes a psychiatric patient who escapes from the asylum, climbing out a window and running through the gardens to rejoin the world at large. But the madman worries: We watched [Neil de Grasse] Tyson doing exactly the same thing, and instead of hiding him away from society where nobody would have to hear such pointless nonsense, thousands cheer him on for fighting for truth and objectivity against the forces of backwardness. We do the same when Richard Dawkins valiantly fights for the theory of evolution against the last hopeless stragglers of the creationist movement, with their dinky fiberglass dinosaurs munching leaves in a museum-piece Garden of Eden. So the problem with New Atheism was that its whole shtick was repeating obviously true things that everyone already knew? This is a surprising number of people disagreeing with a thing that everybody already knows. I could be misreading the article. The article could be wrong. This is my intuitive feeling of what was wrong with New Atheism as well. Just that they were right in a loud, boring, and pointless way. They were coming into educated urban liberal spaces, saying things that educated urban liberals already believed, and demanding social credit for it. If New Atheists were preaching evolution in social circles like mine, they were wasting their time. This seems like an accurate criticism of New Atheism, one that earns them all the condescension they have since received. But the New Atheist still ought to feel betrayed. While the atheists were going around saying there was no God, the environmentalists were going around saying climate change was real. The feminists were going around saying sexism was bad. And the Democrats were going around saying Donald Trump was an awful person. All of these statements might be controversial somewhere, but meet basically zero resistance in educated urban liberal spaces. All get repeated day-in and day-out by groups of people who make entire careers out of repeating them. And all get said in the same condescending way, a sort of society-wide plague of Voxsplaining. Conservatives make fun of this incessantly, and they are right to do so. Think of one of those corrupt kleptocracies where the dictator takes bribes, all his ministers take bribes, all their assistants take bribes, the anti-corruption task force takes bribes, etc. And what did New Atheism do to get on their bad side? Maybe New Atheism failed to make the case that it was socially important. But the climate change people seem better at sounding like they care about the people involved, compared to atheists usually sounding more concerned with Truth For Its Own Sake and bringing in the other stuff as a justification. Trump resistance always has new tweets to keep its attention. Social justice always has a new sexist celebrity to be angry about. Sure, a few New Atheists tried to keep up with the latest secretly-gay televangelist, but most of them kept going about intricacies of the kalam argument that had been done to death by AD. This is just an example – maybe there are other asymmetries that are more important? At some point there was a cultural fissure between Acela Corridor thinkfluencers with humanities degrees and Silicon Valley bloggers with STEM degrees, and the former got a head start on hating the latter while the latter still thought everybody was on the same anti-Republican side. There are more church-goers in educated liberal circles than Trump supporters, climate deniers, or self-identified racists. The whole problem is so strange. Then it cast New Atheism into the outer darkness while totally failing to generalize that experience to anything else. Why

would it do that? Could it happen again? Please can it happen again?

Chapter 4 : How Did New Atheism Fail So Miserably? | Slate Star Codex

This is a Guest video by Rachel Oates, where she explains how she lost faith in god and religion. Rachel's channel: www.nxgvision.com

But Yogurt, what is this place? What is it that you do here? Where the real money from the movie is made. This has become a hobby of mine. This drives my wife nuts, but she humors me, partly for the sake of the blog and partly because she is just nice and tolerant to a fault. I do think it bothers her, though, that I have Christian radio stations on my preset and I listen to them with our infant daughter in the car. So one of my favorite stations is run by Calvary Chapel, which is apparently a nationwide network of churches that could be generally classified as evangelical. I can discern no traditional denomination from either their radio broadcast or the bulletin from church this week. I like the Calvary Chapel radio because they have a lot of preaching, often focused on Biblical passages, rather than the almost exclusively pro-life propaganda that one gets from Catholic radio a blog entry on that later, for sure. Calvary radio preaching is pretty humorous. I recently learned that demons are real. Not in some metaphorical or symbolic way, but actually real. And they are out to harm me every minute of every day. But that is good news! Because the only relationship I want to have with a demon is for it to be my enemy. And there is more good news: Therefore, the forces of evil cannot win. It is a mathematical certainty. Yes, this is my entertainment on the way to work in the morning. So when I heard that this radio station has local churches affiliated with it, I had my next church with which to resume the blog project. There were many Calvary churches in the area to choose from. Mine happened to be located in a strip mall. It is a former supermarket, now selling food for the soul. Man does not live by bread alone, after all. Attendees of this church need no awe-inspiring architecture, no ornate sculpture, symbolic iconography, or even a nostalgic feeling of walking into a church building. In a sense, they are not subject to the persuasive power of those traditional church elements. So is it more about the substance of the message? The place was full. Not packed, but full enough. I continue to be surprised at the success of the evangelical movement, even in a liberal community like mine. Unimpressive from the outside, this church was pretty smooth on the inside. The sanctuary is adjacent to a Christian bookstore and Christian coffeeshop. In the anteroom there is a large, flat-screen television showing a feed from the sanctuary. I must have walked by ten greeters, all of whom were wearing matching polo shirts. That made me all fuzzy inside. Typical elements of an evangelical service: The bulletin had a rough outline of a few items, including music, sermon, and collection, but nothing resembling traditional prayers or readings. There were no hymnals and no organ, just a projection screen with lyrics and an acoustic guitar. They sang 3 or 4 songs in a row to begin the service. For all the popularity of contemporary Christian music, this was pretty boring. One thing traditional churches have going for them: Bach was no slouch. A focus on the Bible. The sermon was based on a specific passage, and the pastor encouraged everyone to read along. This is consistent with the evangelical belief that each individual can experience God directly; no intercessor necessary. A focus on the spirit. Evangelicals place way more emphasis on the holy spirit than other Christians. This is the third piece of the trinity, and frankly, I never understood why it needed to be separate from God or Jesus. But the New Testament, particularly the book of Acts, places much importance on it, and evangelicals use it as a foundational aspect of their worship. God should be felt in the soul, and each individual should be moved to worship or act on his own, as the spirit dictates. Just a tad bit of crazy. I think he was totally serious. Nobody else in the room let out a chuckle. I had to disguise mine as a cough. The emphasis on the Holy Spirit is a huge factor in the success of evangelicalism and one of its defining characteristics. Also, if you put your hand in the air, you feel it even more strongly but not as strongly as those people who put two hands in the air. It is a powerful message. But this Americanized brand of evangelicalism is flourishing. The radio station, the flat-screen TV, the matching polo shirts, the heavenly smell of God-sponsored coffee? Slightly tastier than secular Starbucks, no doubt. Is this why people go? The message must have something to do with it. Seems to me that underneath it all, the same mushy feel-goodery underlies it all. Evangelicalism has watered down the intellectualism of the old denominations, replacing it with just feeling the spirit. But it was mostly pseudo-intellectualism to begin with. Really can one have an

intellectual assessment of demons or supernatural realms or why God makes tsunamis? Evangelicalism has simply repackaged the old messages, given them some modern pizzazz, some American flashiness to answer that stuffy European curmudgeonry. A spit-shine certainly can make junk look good. This postulate is taken from Revelation I think most preachers on the radio expect their audiences to be stupid. Of course, if you are listening to a radio preacher, you probably are.

Chapter 5 : Atheists Urge Pizza Parlor to End Discounts for Churchgoing Patrons | Christian News Network

Yeah, a churchgoing atheist is a tough concept, but thankfully the most recent post is someone who's similar to me. I did a [pretty extensive].

Formal affiliation[edit] Most presidents have been formal members of a particular church or religious body, and a specific affiliation can be assigned to every president from James A. For many earlier presidents, however, formal church membership was forestalled until they left office; and in several cases a president never joined any church. Conversely, though every president from George Washington to John Quincy Adams can be definitely assigned membership in an Anglican or Unitarian body, the significance of these affiliations is often downplayed as unrepresentative of their true beliefs. The Episcopal Church has been much larger previously, with its decline in membership occurring only in more recent decades. Unitarians are also overrepresented, reflecting the importance of those colonial churches. Conversely, Baptists are underrepresented, a reflection of their quite recent expansion in numbers; there has been only one Catholic president, although they are currently the largest single denomination, and there have been no Adventist , Anabaptist , Lutheran , Orthodox , Pentecostal , or Latter Day Saint presidents. Biographers usually doubt these, though the baptism of James K. Polk is well documented. While some presidents have been relatively voluble about religion, many have been reticent to the point of complete obscurity. Researchers have tried to draw conclusions from patterns of churchgoing or religious references in political speeches. When explicit statements are absent, it is difficult to assess whether the presidents in question were irreligious, were unorthodox in their beliefs, or simply believed that religion was not a matter for public revelation. James Buchanan , for instance, held himself allied with the Presbyterian church, but refrained from joining it until he left office. Thomas Jefferson became a deist in later life, and Washington, James Madison , James Monroe , and John Tyler are often identified as having some degree of deistic beliefs. Unitarians fall outside of Trinitarian Christianity, and the question arises as to the degree to which the presidents themselves held Christian precepts. The information is generally available in the statements of the presidents themselves; for example, John Quincy Adams left detailed statements of his beliefs. William Howard Taft, a Unitarian, is noted to have said in a letter to a friend, "I am interested in the spread of Christian civilization , but to go into a dogmatic discussion of creed I will not do whether I am defeated or not. If the American electorate is so narrow as not to elect a Unitarian, well and good. I can stand it. Quakerism is, by its nature, not circumscribed by doctrines, but even so it is hard to determine whether either Hoover or Nixon had much adherence even to Quaker practice. For instance, it is common among Quakers to refuse to swear oaths; however, recordings show that Nixon did swear the oath of office in the conventional manner in all cases, and while the matter is clouded for Hoover, there is newspaper and circumstantial evidence that he did likewise. During his time in office, he had numerous meetings with Quakers and had investigated a supposed Quaker ancestry. Eisenhower himself was baptized in the Presbyterian church shortly after assuming the presidency, the only president thus far to undergo such a rite while in office; and his attendance at West Point was in sharp opposition to the tenets of the groups to which his parents belonged. As with claims of deism , these identifications are not without controversy. No president has declared himself to be atheist. In at least two cases, Presidents saw fit to issue denials that they were atheists. At the same time, this was tempered, especially in early years, by a strong commitment to disestablishment. Several Presidents especially stand out as exponents of this. Consideration of this has become increasingly contentious as topics such as civil rights and human sexuality have increasingly put churches at odds with each other and with the government. Studies of presidential religion[edit] Presidential biographers have often been brought to consider the issue of presidential religion. In the case of certain key figures particularly Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln , they have devoted considerable attention to the subject. Holmes New York, Oxford University Press USA, , which examines the views of some early presidents as well as other political figures of the period.

Chapter 6 : As the Christian Church Crumbles, is Humanism Ready to Step Up? â€¢ Foundation Beyond E

They became quite terse with Moses, as I remember, and invoked the anger of God. In a fit of rage, God proceeded to set fire to the town. As I was reading this, with all of these doubts and questions in my mind already, I was dumbfounded.

Baptists, Methodists, Catholics, Presbyterians, Episcopalian--heretics all! Only in the Church of Christ did you at least have a shot at the pearly gates, and then only if you were baptized for precisely the right reasons, went to church every time the doors were open "not forsaking the assembling of the saints" , tried your damndest not to sin every waking moment, prayed to God through Christ each and every time you became aware of one of your sins, so on and so forth. During my teenage years, I became close friends with our youth minister who was only five years or so older than me, and fresh out of Bible college at Freed-Hardeman University in Henderson, TN. The Church of Christ in general was big on "Christian Apologetics"--inculcating their members with what they believed to be polemics that were scripture-validated and serving as intellectual juggernauts to pulverize the ridiculous argument of morally bankrupt evolutionists who sought to deny God lest they be forced to accept His higher standards of living. John was even more passionate in his war on evolution, atheism, Baptists and instrumental church music, and--liking debate--I was instantly galvanized by his teachings. Mind you, none of this had the least bearing on my actual behaviors as a teenager, other than to convince me beyond any doubt that Jesus was going to damn my soul to hell forever for behaving like a normal year-old boy and being physically intimate with my girlfriend. But it was nice to pretend that, at least on paper, my religion was the only correct one of many. About a year after graduating high school, and fresh out of basic training for the Marine Reserves 13 weeks on Parris Island , I myself packed my bags and headed out for the bastion of scriptural correctness otherwise known as Freed-Hardeman University to major in Bible. Within a semester, I was headed back home, being suspended for "unauthorized visitation" i. The following spring, about three weeks before heading to Camp Lejeune, NC to undergo Marine Combat Training and School of Infantry for the summer, I met a girl who kept coming in to the drugstore where I worked and subtly, shyly flirting with me. She and her grandmother invited me to church with them, and--being completely enamored by the cuteness and apparent pristine nature of this young redhead--I obliged them. I got off work too late to make the Sunday evening services at my home church, but theirs started an hour later, so I could make it just in time. Thus began my dealings with Fellowship Baptist Church--a congregation and K school of the independent, fundamental think: Bob Jones University variety. In the few weeks prior to my shipping out for training, I became very close with this family, and they would have me over for dinner, let me stay extremely late, allow their daughter and I to go places together with their nod of approval. While I was at training that summer, they showered me with care packages, and--when I was able to come home for a few of the weekends--they allowed me to crash at their house. Things changed instantly and dramatically at the end of the summer, when I came home for good, upon their pastor learning that I--a church-of-christer who was a few years older than the redhead--was dating one of the nice, young Baptist girls who went to his school. Immediately he ordered her parents to have her break up with me. My only option--and the one that I of course took--was to convert to their religion, finding the true light of Jesus in the teachings of Pastor Ron Blackburn of Fellowship Baptist Church and formally denouncing, upon baptism again and in front of their entire congregation the teachings of the Church of Christ. Tomorrow is the first meeting of my small church group.

Chapter 7 : Churchgoing is good for you (even if you don't believe in God) | The Spectator

There would be many reasons why people become atheists. I consider it obvious that over 90% of religious devotees are so because of infant brainwashing and such was the reason that I was a Baptist. Infant baptism was scripturally wrong and I was even warned against marrying a Catholic.

We are by definition people who go our own way. People believe the church is doing good, and some are, of course. Are these atheists using churchgoing for protective cover? I have a nephew in Little Rock, Ark. Persecuted is a very strong word for what happens in this country, but I lost a job once. I had been teaching in a private school, but not a religious one. We had a new director, a really vocal Christian. He started prayer meetings, voluntary, before work on Wednesday mornings. The school was failing and it was time for layoffs, and I was among the first. I grew up in a very religious home. My mother was a Salvation Army officer before she married. That was in Enid, Okla. I call it the whipping strop of the Bible Belt. I loved the church; I taught a Sunday school class. My first job out of college was as a social worker in South-Central L. I met people of other religions. I had always been told that those people were just superstitious. That was a little disconcerting. I had always had what Christians call the problem of evil. I had never doubted the existence of a god, but I thought God was terribly cruel, and then I felt very guilty because I was judging God. And I realized that the God that I had grown up believing [in] could not exist. I have to use the metaphor -- was it a Saul-on-the-road-to-Damascus moment for you? What I came to was more practical: And what would make me think that a god who was that cruel, and would punish me eternally for my honest beliefs, would reward me for trying to make myself believe? And that was the final moment. Most atheists have happy, full lives; have great families. I found my late husband at Atheists United, and my daughter met her husband at Atheists United. We care about the larger community. We are a free-thought community. I am an agnostic. How do atheists celebrate the solstice? We do most of the holiday observances that other people do. What do you sing?

The Western World is becoming atheist. In the space of three generations churchgoing and religious belief have become alien to millions. We are in the midst of one of humankind's great cultural changes.

Anonymous Apologetics has never been anything but pseudo-philosophy and an exercise in logical absurdities and fallacies. The only option there might be 2. Skeptic I think what we can do is give them a place to be. For a long time young people left or abstained from church but they drifted back a later because there was no place for them to find a new community to thrive in. That is what is becoming different now. Things are getting better and non belief is slowly becoming ok if not fully accepted. Anonymous Even if atheists never wrote another book or blog post, young people will continue to fall away from Christianity. Hmmm, maybe, to a point. However leaving the church is only the first step in the road away from religion. So people who drift away from the church need to find a community that values rationality highly and is happy to welcome newcomers. Politics is really where it began for me. When I tried to dig deeper and see if there was any way that I could make my religion work in a way that I found acceptable, I realized that it was a whole lot of hog-wash. I think that it is often a gradual realization that things are not as they have been told. I would be willing to bet that for many of us it started with sex. Xanthe Wyse the ones that stay remain in their insulated bubble where they think science, the internet etc are evil. I was never cajoled or proselytized. I, for one, plan to model his friendship and help others I know who may questioning their Xianity. JamesB Just getting up the nerve to leave in the first place can be frightening enough. I know because I have been there. First para especially, so very well said! This may be the case in urban and suburban areas, but in rural communities I see a new trend: Well, it gets them away from mainstream religion which is a good first step. Newavocation Being a former longtime UU, it seemed at least in my case, that they want to stand for everything which equates to standing for nothing. Sort of a polite form of cruelty. Manâ€¦ this place is like a breath of fresh air after trying to have a conversation over at Pharyngula. The author of this book has presumably presented a very realistic and thoughtful explanation to the declining enrollment of American youths within the Christian church community. As an atheist I found it to be an immensely positive step for Christians to reevaluate their community in such a way. I feel as though the article should be praising this rather than what I see as nitpicking and gloating. Introspective evaluations like this will ultimately nudge people in the right direction and we should do more to encourage this behavior. I believe that this is also the most prevalent issue for a younger generation, because being honest, we are a little more than slightly shallow. The no sex issue is also probably one of the larger drivers as well if I were to venture guess. I can appreciate how the reasons listed might push people away from church if they were taken their by family members. The church being insular, irrelevant, anti-science, sex negative and against questioning and doubt might well push people in the church away and prevent those outside the church from becoming interested. Even those Alpha courses of the mid naughties were aimed at those who had already decided to give the church a go. Ah well, all the better for society if they do fail to keep and fail to attract members.

Chapter 9 : How I Became an Atheist - Daniel Miessler

I met with religion when I was around 10 years old. Some guy on the street gave me children version of Bible. And since I am a human after all, I got into it and talk with my parents about it, even prayed, as the book was saying. It stayed with me few weeks, perhaps months. Few years after that I.

This is true notwithstanding the current political resurgence of the religious right, which demographics show to be a cultural stab from the grave. Three million fewer Americans are attending church each year, driving the religiously unaffiliated from 8 percent to 23 percent in a generation. For millennials, that number jumps to 35 percent. And early reports of Generation Z, those currently in high school and younger, show that traditional religious identity is on the demographic cusp of vanishing as a significant cultural presence. Europe is ahead of the secularizing curve. Millennials in Europe are now majority nonreligious, and not just in Scandinavian countries. But even as we celebrate the coming decline of a toxic cultural influence, there is cause for concern. Because for all the negatives, the Christian church has some positive and culturally important achievements to its credit. As the temple falls, those of us on the outside must quickly learn how to achieve those things just as well without the negatives. Rescuing Philanthropy One great success of the Christian church has been the creation of an effective culture of philanthropic giving. Still the deflections come from our side of the aisle: We just grab at any opportunity to deflect that statistic. But it has nothing to do with virtue, or even guilt, exactly. I was a churchgoing atheist for twenty years, and when I stopped going to church, my charitable giving fell off a cliff. So either I suddenly became a bad person, or my generosity was being tapped less often and less effectively. Imagine an experiment designed to determine how best to motivate individual giving. One group attends a weekly inspirational talk. They hear about the needs of those less fortunate and are urged to rise to the highest aspirations of their worldview by meeting that need. Then a shiny plate is passed, full of the generous donations of their friends and neighbors. Each person makes a choice—add to that plate or pass it on without contributing—fifty-two or more times per year. A control group attends no such meetings. Run the experiment for a year, then try to contain your surprise when the first group turns out to have given two to three times as much as the second. This experiment has been going on for centuries. Churches have created a giving culture so effective that most religious adherents see charitable giving as a direct expression of their worldview. So, once we get past the finger-pointing and back-patting about the giving gap, we can finally get to a worthwhile question: As the church crumbles and takes that system with it, can an equally effective, systematic giving culture be created among the nonreligious? This is a challenge and an opportunity for philanthropy. Only about 20 percent of Americans now attend church regularly. If creating a giving culture is something churches do well, and people are exiting that system in droves, we need to ask how we can create the same or greater success without the religious context. Foundation Beyond Belief FBB , the systematic giving program for the nonreligious I founded and of which I am currently a board member , is one attempt to do that. Members sign up for an automatic monthly donation in the amount of their choice and distribute their funds however they wish among a changing slate of featured charities. We spend each quarter telling the stories of these organizations and connecting their work to the humanist imperatives of mutual care and responsibility. Over time, FBB added a network of humanist volunteer teams working in their communities, a humanist disaster recovery program, and an international humanist service corps. For example, in , when our disaster response program was new, we signed on to a White House initiative coordinating the response of US NGOs to a devastating drought and famine in the Horn of Africa that was mostly off the media radar. Foundation Beyond Belief pulled together powerful infographics highlighting the millions of people displaced, tens of thousands of children traveling alone to refugee centers, and mortality at one point topping people per day. It was not the impact we were hoping for. To see what went wrong, we dug into the research on mobilizing disaster relief donors and quickly found two problems. Hurricanes, earthquakes, tsunamis, and other sudden calamities tend to elicit a strong empathetic giving response. The crisis in the Horn of Africa was devastating but slow-moving. But the other problem was on us: What drives people to give is the story of the one. CCF was founded in and had always been relatively small. In the s they hired an ad agency to help them

grow. One of the creatives on the project, a man named Perry Mitchell, suggested that CCF was telling stories that were too large and unfocused. Instead of talking about the needs of millions of children in developing countries, he suggested they focus on one child at a time, both in their advertising and their donation model. So, for later disaster drives, we switched to a storytelling model that focused on individual impact. Later that same year we were able to overcome donor fatigue and mount an even stronger drive for the Philippines after Typhoon Haiyan. The question now is whether we can scale it up. We have to, especially as the bottom falls out of the American church. Building Meaningful Human Community The other thing that religion does really well is more abstract in a way, but also very real: At first that sounds like nonsense. We think of religion as something obviously centered on shared beliefs. That may have once been a bigger part of the motivation. But sociologists are discovering that religious identity and churchgoing are now less about beliefs and more about human connection. But sociologists from Harvard and the University of Wisconsin decided to drill down below that claim to see if anything else was going on. And sure enough, they found something big. At the top of the scale in life satisfaction are churchgoers with many friends in the congregation. And below them are churchgoers who have no close friends in the church. Churchgoers with at least ten close friends in the church had more than double the life satisfaction of someone sitting next to them who had no close friends there. People are more satisfied with their lives when they go to church because they build a social network in the congregation. Subsequent studies have strengthened the conclusion. Churches have arguably done better at providing a sense of community and identity than any other institution in our culture. Yes, a lot of toxic nonsense has come along with that, but the fact remains that as churches continue to bleed members, building a similar tangible sense of community has been too far down the list of priorities for us. More often than not, we are science-minded introverts with less than the average need for the social connection that religion provides. But as nonreligious identity has grown, we often make the mistake of thinking that all those fellow nonbelievers—40 million, 60 million and growing as the church crumbles—are just like us. At the same time, they share a certain social identity—The sense of belonging seems to be the key to the relationship between church attendance and life satisfaction. Many expressed outrage at the very question. They said it brings to mind tribalism, division, us vs. It sounds like a question from a religious parent! Leave all that toxic parochialism behind. This is the dream. This is a big issue for us. We really struggle with this. How can I help my kids feel a positive sense of belonging? How can I help them find a meaningful identity without labeling them or indoctrinating them? For most of my life, belonging has been a non-issue. I felt this in a painful way during my first weeks as a freshman at UC Berkeley. I was one of 32, undergraduates, miles from home, and I felt lost. Think of the way that word is used in religious terms, and you can start to see the human needs under the surface. The feeling of isolation was paralyzing, and I actually considered going home. But I joined the Cal Band, an organization with a century of history and traditions and this deep sense of belonging and shared purpose. I had been really active in my high school band, and I basically transferred that sense of belonging to the college setting. I was one of people with whom I shared a purpose. I got together with a group of close friends on a regular basis and participated in certain activities that were meaningful to the group. It was my tribe. I had an identity, a tribal connection. People are social, tribal animals, and belonging to some graspable corner of the human community can be really helpful. I needed an identity within that whole. Church community provides that special corner, but it can also be a shared interest, such as hiking or volunteering or making music. It can be a matter of geography or fans of the home football team. It can revolve around stated values, like the Seven UU Principles. Or it can be the connection and support of a close, caring family. His solution was to get very serious about his Jewish identity, and his crisis of belonging evaporated. I asked him what it was about that identity that did the trick for him. My people have been around as a unique identified group for 4, years, despite being targeted for eradication more times than any people on Earth. That alone creates value for me. I am tied to history, and I hope my son and his children will have that same feeling of being part of a people, an identity, greater than themselves. I can go anywhere in the world where there are Jews and find something familiar and people who will accept me as a brother. So, I asked, was it that sense of belonging that led him to God?