

As I've indicated, my last class of the semester in my Introduction to the New Testament course is optional. In it I explain to anyone who wants to come what I really believe and why I believe it. The way I do it is by telling my life story, from childhood till today. That takes about twenty or twenty-five minutes, and then I answer any questions for the rest of the time. The questions could go on for hours - students have a lot of them - and some of the questions are very personal. But I try to answer them as directly and honestly as I can.

The story I tell starts with me as a church-going Episcopalian as a child, committed to the church, saying the Creed, confessing my sins, believing in God and Christ, serving as an altar boy. And then in high school, I had a religious transformation. I started attending a Campus Life Youth for Christ meeting that involved a social event every week and ended with a spiritual lesson of some sort, always geared toward having kids turn to Christ as their Lord and Savior and "ask Jesus into their heart."

I already had a religious streak, but this seemed to me to be Christianity on steroids, and I was drawn to it. In part that was because the events seemed very wholesome (unlike some of the other stuff I was up to on weekends...), there were lots of interesting and popular kids there, and I liked the combination of social fun and spiritual truth. But it put me in a rather funny situation. I was a church-going, deeply believing Episcopalian, but I was being told that I had to "become a Christian." And I unreflectively assumed that the leader of the group, a twenty-something named Bruce, was right. There was a step I had to take in order "really" to be a Christian. Not sure what I thought I was \*before\* that.

After some months I ...

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