

## “Mi”, Ex-Christian, USA

(part 1 of 3)



*“In my mind, there was nothing wrong with Christianity. I was perfectly fine with it. I had questions and had not been feeling the same fervor I once experienced as a teenager but I just had to shake it off, pray, and continue to be faithful in the hopes that my change would come. My pursuit of education changed this view.”*

I pray that whoever reads my story; whatever faith a person may practice, I pray that the overall theme conveyed here is submission to the will of God and to be in constant pursuit of knowledge. Amen.

Shouting, speaking in tongues, a choir accompanied by a Hammond B3, pianos, and drums among other things were a part of my religious upbringing. The louder the sounds were, it seemed to me, the more pleasing to God it was. I was raised to see these acts as normal. It was how my church grew to become. My father was and still is a southern Baptist preacher. At seven, I dedicated my life to Christ and was baptized by my father at his church. My sister and brother-in-law are ministers of music at the church my mother and I went to after my parent’s divorce. As a teenager, I was full of fervor and reverence for God. And thus I wanted to live a good Christian lifestyle in which I strived to be like Christ as we were taught. I would attempt to share my beliefs with others in the hopes to get them to become saved; asking Jesus into their hearts so that his ultimate sacrifice could wash away their sins, and thus, they would return to him. In my mind, there was nothing wrong with Christianity. I was perfectly fine with it. I had questions and had not been feeling the same fervor I once experienced as a teenager but I just had to shake it off, pray, and continue to be faithful in the hopes that my change would come. My pursuit of education changed this view.

My sister led my mother and I to this new church which became our home church after my parent’s divorce. We loved it. The music was awesome, the preacher had a degree in divinity, and we had a youth choir! Even more importantly, these groups of people were mostly black, had microphones which

made the music and preaching really loud, and were welcoming each Sunday. At 16, on a visit with my father in the mountains, a young white preacher friend of my dad's stopped by his house. I met him, shook his hand and went on about doing whatever I was doing. He and my dad were speaking in the kitchen. The preacher asked if I was saved and my father told him I was. The man asked to speak with me and called me into the kitchen. The man began to prophesy (a practice of reporting information from God communicated to one person to tell someone else). He stated that I was going to be a minister, and that I would begin to speak in tongues more fervently, and that he would find a lady in my church that would be a mentor to me. He completed his message with a prayer over me and that was it. My father and I discussed it later as we typically had always discussed spiritual matters. When I returned home, I prayed and asked God to show me who this woman was, I asked him for the gift of speaking in tongues, and for the courage to approach my new pastor and to ask him if I could be a minister. Eventually, two out of three things happened. I would attend what we called "intercessory prayer" in which we felt we were praying for those whom we did not know, in an unknown but godly language. It can only be described to the outsider as sounding like gibberish (not to offend anyone.) I worked up the courage to speak to the pastor and he allowed me into the class. I was among one or two teenagers present in the class. I was very proud. In one assignment, we had to construct a sermon, which I presented to the pastor he said I did an exceptional job!

At 17, the ministers training class had been postponed or pushed back so much so, that my high school graduation came and went and I was off to college. I still had hopes of being obedient to God while in college. The pastor prayed over us that we would hold true to our values and morals and sent us on our way. College was a blur. There were no wild intimate encounters; I stayed away from the football team as they were the ones who were looking for wild encounters, and I did not do any drugs. I joined the marching band, attended church, worked and studied. I met and dated two different guys at two different times. In both relationships, we discussed marriage as was the custom according to our teachings but sadly our relationships ended. In all honesty, I was heartbroken by both relationships.

One relationship actually went to the point of an engagement. However the breakup, triggered in me a deep sorrow that I was unable to shake off. I graduated, worked in the area for another year and moved 6 hours away to wait to get married. Once I broke off the engagement, I was so angry at God. I felt that I did everything he asked me to do. I trusted my gut feeling which I interpreted as God leading me and this is what happened! (Looking back, relationships were complex but it worsens the situation when you have poor communication skills and do not listen to others. And that was just me.) I lay in bed crying for several hours. When I felt I could not cry anymore, I found my bottle of sleeping pills took a handful and tried to go to sleep

indefinitely. The next thing I remember after becoming sick, is calling my mother and her telling me that she bought me a ticket to fly home.

### (part 2 of 3)

A few months went by and I was still feeling down. I saw a cousin who referred me to a therapist who later diagnosed me with Major Depressive Disorder and Attention Deficit Disorder. She prescribed me medicines and talk therapy which helped a great deal with my mood. As more time passed I was ready to return to the Church, get back into the ministers training class and complete what I started. However in the five years that I was away, they reconstructed the program. An associate minister was in charge. I approached the associate minister asking if I would be able to re-enter the class. He told me that there were some other things I had to do first. At that moment, I had a flashback to when I was in school and attempted the ministers training there, I was given the same exact answer. No one ever mentioned what this “other stuff” was. I waited...and waited yet no one informed me of anything. Several of my friends had entered the program once I was back in town, which confused me.

I took to more prayer thinking perhaps I heard God incorrectly. Maybe my calling to be a minister was not the most obvious. So I attended church faithfully even though my faith began to wane a little. There was interest expressed in starting a dance ministry and when I came home from school after it was established, I “auditioned” to join the dance ministry. I loved it! I felt that my movement communicated to God what I could not say. It was the way to communicate a message of salvation through dance. As a principle, it is never attractive or godly to be arrogant or prideful but I was skilled for someone who had no training. People would remark about how blessed they were when they saw me dance. The most appropriate response was always, “Praise God.” This had to be the ministry that God was speaking about. I loved it, people responded to it, the team members were not catty and did not do much backbiting. Perfect. But one Sunday, as I was attentively listening to a sermon, I had this question regarding God’s nature, the actions of Adam and Eve, and reason. It stuck with me into the work week. I started researching this line of questioning but it bothered me terribly. *Because if God were all knowing and knew that we would sin, why would he put the tree there to basically tempt us and by His nature he doesn’t tempt humans: He allows it. And let’s say that was the Divine plan, why would He not just forgive Adam and Eve? Furthermore, why would He require a blood sacrifice to blind Himself from our sin, which I was taught in support of Jesus’ death as atonement for sins. How does this blood do anything for God?* One question led to another. These few were among a couple of pages of questions I wrote down to try to find answers. In a series of sessions on the internet looking up the origins of Christianity, I stopped attending church. I had never done a great

job of hiding my feelings and was not about to start with hiding them from God.

It was about this time when I decided to attend graduate school. I had gotten married, had a baby and was floating along through life. Up until this point, I had attended predominantly black schools and churches. I started out in one discipline, but switched to another which mostly had classes on the main campus. In my first class, I observed the people around the room: Whites, Blacks, an Asian, Middle Easterners, and Africans. I was the only Black American. Moreover, there were two Muslim girls sitting near each other. One was pregnant and bubbly; the other was seemingly quiet and scholarly. Prior to this my only experiences with Muslims was in high school - a couple of guys who were a part of the 'Nation of Islam', and two girls who wore the headscarf, but at that time I had not paid any attention to them.

### (part 3 of 3)

On one particular night of paying half attention to my instructor and the other half to the relentless thoughts I had regarding faith and religion, I began to write down my thoughts and questions. There was an African sister who had married interracially and was Christian sitting to my near left. I knew she was proud of being a Christian and it brought her that same joy I used to have. I passed her the piece of paper for her to attempt to answer. On a restroom break, she tried to answer questions about the trinity, sin and atonement but for some reason, the precepts she was speaking I knew of but now did not understand. The scholarly, quiet Muslim girl was sitting behind the Christian girl. I passed her the same note. To my surprise, she wrote down answers that were so clear and concrete. Her body language was subtle; she was not leaning in writing frantically trying to convert me to her faith whereas the other sister did. She wrote down some websites I would be able to visit which had more explanation. WHAT JUST HAPPENED? Why did I even ask the Muslim girl? Did I just throw a wrench yet again into my whole identity? With the clear answers she provided, if I were a minister, how could I share the gospel with her and convert her? Since she was from another country originally, she had no concept of atonement or of a triune God.

Once home after writing papers and when my husband had gone to work, I would visit websites about Islam. Most of the sites had consistent information. The sites that seemed spooky, calling *Salat* contact prayer for example, were obviously not what I was looking for. Praise be unto Allah, looking back, it was only me searching for these answers with no one to interpret what I was reading and I could cipher through what wasn't Islam. I looked up everything I could find. I had become obsessed with religion and the search for what felt right. I came to the conclusion that there had to be only one God. I considered atheism but the natural world, the human body, the force within us that makes us who we are were too intricate to be some cosmic coincidence or accident. It came down to Judaism or Islam.

Meanwhile, as semesters went by, my personal life began to unravel. I presented the findings I had on Islam to my husband. He did not like it one bit. He didn't speak to me for 2 days. When he was ready to talk, he stated that he didn't understand where all of this was coming from or why I wanted to spend so much time at school or with school friends. With his complete disapproval and the knowledge that he would not convert, I studied in secret. With two babies, a constant tugging on my heart, and a similar gut feeling about the matters at hand, I had to make some decisions. One night, I was online witnessing a person take *shahada* or their declaration of faith. I began to cry uncontrollably and I still till this day do not know why nor can I explain what I was feeling. A few days later I took mine all alone. I even did it on three different occasions to make certain.

During my search, there were many opinions regarding religion and faith. Most of the people who were atheists, agnostics, or apostates of Islam had seen injustice or experienced some hardship they placed on God. I made sure not to do this. I made sure to consider all arguments, to retract my blasphemous statements to God when I was angry with Him and trusted that any action I committed based on some feeling of faith was not any fault of God. I have heard arguments about how people whose faith is low are more susceptible to having someone be able to convert them. I don't believe that this was the case for me. I would rather take the position that I was always searching for what God wanted me to do. Did He want these bodily actions of worship: the louder the better? Did He intend for us to be segregated by color or culture? Despite having clinical depression and questions, I feel that I owed it to myself to make the most coherent, sound, clear decision. I would love to say that life became easier, that there were butterflies and rainbows and I lived happily ever after but that is not the case. My marriage ended and I am the only Muslim in my family of course. I struggle with the prayers since my concept of worship was completely different. Many reverts disclose how they've attained so much peace through prayer or how they've felt this tug in their hearts but that was a struggle for me. My personal conflicts as a Muslim deal with culture versus the faith, and the feeling of simply standing all alone donned in hijab for the sake of my beliefs. However, the most beautiful thing to me after becoming a Muslim is that finally, I have answered prayers and questions. This brings me a great deal of peace and makes my struggle minute in comparison to the benefits I've gained.