


Foreword by DAVID KINNAMAN,  
bestselling author of *unChristian* and *You Lost Me*

# MY *Imaginary* JESUS



the spiritual adventures of one man  
searching for the real God

**MATT MIKALATOS**

*“Think Monty Python meets C. S. Lewis. . . .” —Relevant Magazine*

## Praise for *My Imaginary Jesus*

“Startling, contemporary, meaningful. . . . Mixing questions of suffering and free will with a nexus of weirdness, Mikalatos throws Christian fiction into the world of Comic-Con and *Star Wars*.”

*PUBLISHERS WEEKLY*

“Think Monty Python meets C. S. Lewis. . . . Rarely does a book slide so easily from the laugh-out-loud moments to the tender-yet-challenging moments.”

*RELEVANT MAGAZINE*

“Mikalatos’s debut work takes readers on a hilarious ride.”

*CBA RETAILERS + RESOURCES*

“I’ve found my new favorite book, not only for the insights it offered me but for the conversation it’s afforded my church. Mikalatos packages honesty with humor that allows us to ask questions we’d rather not ask, but absolutely should.”

**TONY MYLES**, *YOUTHWORKER JOURNAL*

“Gutsy, irreverent, hilarious, courageous, poignant, eye-opening, bizarre, quirky, mold-breaking—those are a lot of bold adjectives to describe one little book. But *My Imaginary Jesus* deserves every one of them and many more. . . . I’ll take this book over a thousand sermons and a library full of theological tomes on who Jesus is.”

**FAITHFULREADER.COM**

“[A] sharp-witted, mind-bending, faith-challenging excursion. . . . If Mikalatos’s wry wit doesn’t pull you into the book within a couple pages, his action-packed chase of Imaginary Jesus will soon have you flipping pages. But be warned. Beneath the excitement of the adventurous chase and the humor of his comic wit, Mikalatos packs some heavy biblical punches that may send your own imaginary Jesus spinning, leaving you to confront the real One.”

*DC CHRISTIAN FICTION EXAMINER*

“Take the theological forcefulness of Bonhoeffer, combine it with the imaginative whimsy of C. S. Lewis and the wit of Charles Spurgeon, and you get Matt Mikalatos. He is a gifted writer, a true Christian, with

a first-rate mind. *My Imaginary Jesus* is a startlingly original, comedic, and theologically true tour de force. It marks the debut of one of today's most prominent young Christian writers."

**GARY THOMAS**, *AUTHOR OF SACRED MARRIAGE AND PURE PLEASURE*

"Matt Mikalatos writes like a happy-go-lucky C. S. Lewis. *My Imaginary Jesus* is relentlessly funny, with surprisingly profound spiritual insights."

**JOSH D. MCDOWELL**, *AUTHOR AND SPEAKER*

"If there is such a thing as a holy romp, this is it. I laughed, I applauded and cheered, I thanked God. Every Christian I know will want to read this one!"

**PHYLLIS TICKLE**, *AUTHOR OF THE GREAT EMERGENCE*

"Matt Mikalatos has written a funny, surprising, gutsy tale. Through his writing, I recognized many of my own false assumptions and shallow beliefs, and possibly even more importantly, I really enjoyed the journey."

**SHAUNA NIEQUIST**, *AUTHOR OF COLD TANGERINES AND BITTERSWEET*

"Matt Mikalatos has an incredible gift that is highlighted throughout *My Imaginary Jesus*. While this book is hilarious, it will also cause you to stop dead in your tracks and evaluate what you really believe about Jesus. I was convicted over and over at how many times I've created an 'imaginary Jesus' to fit my self-centered, ego-driven, materialistic desires."

**PETE WILSON**, *AUTHOR OF PLAN B AND PASTOR OF CROSS POINT CHURCH IN NASHVILLE*

"I didn't know what I was getting into when I started reading *My Imaginary Jesus* by Matt Mikalatos. By the second page, I was hooked by its humor and challenging insights. Be prepared to have your relationship with Jesus enriched and enlarged by this fun and fascinating look at how we tend to picture Jesus on our own terms."

**TREMPER LONGMAN**, *ROBERT H. GUNDRY PROFESSOR OF BIBLICAL STUDIES AT WESTMONT COLLEGE*

"When I read *My Imaginary Jesus*, I laughed so hard milk came out of my nose . . . and I wasn't even drinking any."

**ADAM SABADOS**, *JUST SOME GUY*

## Praise for *Night of the Living Dead Christian*

“This book is outstanding. We need more totally silly, totally serious theology like Matt gives us. . . . Matt’s books are love letters to the Evangelical community in all our broken mess.”

**RELEVANT MAGAZINE**

“C. S. Lewis’s *The Screwtape Letters* meets the current obsession with paranormal creatures in this thought-provoking quest for individual belief and truth within the framework of society as a whole.”

**LIBRARY JOURNAL**

“One of the best Christian books this year. Not only does it entertain but it informs and challenges. Anyone who reads this book cannot but be transformed.”

**BOOKGATEWAY.COM**

“An in-your-face, hilarious but sobering look at the Christian community and the individual lives that are desperately in need of transformation. Mikalatos has a rare gift . . . this one is for readers who are open-minded and eager to be transformed no matter what it takes, and who appreciate an outrageous sense of humor.”

**BOOKREPORTER.COM**

“Matt Mikalatos gets what the gospel is all about. It’s not about reform or spiritual cosmetology. We’re dead, we’re monstrous, we’re enemies of God. But because of his great mercy, he desires a relationship. He wants us to become like him. What that looks like is beautiful, funny, and tragic, and it’s captured well in this transformational allegory. Have fun as you read. Enjoy the goose bumps, laughs, and tears.”


**CHRIS FABRY, RADIO HOST AND BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF ALMOST HEAVEN**

“Somewhere between classic monster movies and C. S. Lewis is Matt Mikalatos’s inventive sci-fi gospel drama, *Night of the Living Dead Christian*. Zombies, werewolves, vampires, mad scientists, crossbows, and . . . *Jesus*? It’s all there in this endlessly energetic story about how God’s grace can transform every last one of us. But can monsters really teach us about Jesus? Before you laugh at that question, read this wildly creative, surprisingly insightful book.”

**BRETT MCCrackEN, AUTHOR OF HIPSTER CHRISTIANITY: WHEN CHURCH AND COOL COLLIDE**



# MY *Imaginary* JESUS



the spiritual adventures of one man  
searching for the real God

MATT MIKALATOS

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Some Scripture quotations are taken from *The Holy Bible*, King James Version.

Some names, characters, places, and incidents in this book are the product of the author's imagination. In fact, that's a major plot point of the book. Others are based on the author's memory of events and experiences, though he has changed these when it pleased him or the story demanded it. Sometimes it's hard to tell which is which. Hint: the talking donkey is made up.

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**TO THE HATE CLUB—**  
the most bitter,  
vicious, mean-spirited,  
poorly tempered,  
merciless friends  
a guy could ever  
hope to find.

Keep up the excellent work.






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## FOREWORD

The truth is, I didn't finish writing this foreword early—or even on time. I was very late.

Still, somehow perhaps I knew my friend Tim would e-mail me yesterday—totally out of the blue—about the book you are holding. He wrote, “*My Imaginary Jesus* was one of my favorite things to read in the last year.” I asked him why.

“Because it took me by surprise.”

“What does that mean?” I sent back.

“Well, I didn't know anything about the book before I read it. So the idea and the story really snuck up on me.”

“It's amazing timing that you e-mailed me,” I told him. “I'm writing a foreword for a new edition of *My Imaginary Jesus*. What should I say about it to help readers?”

“Be sure to tell them not to read too much about what other people say. If they want, they can come back to that later. Tell them to prepare to be surprised by the book. And tell them to just go read it—*right now*.” (Tim is very meddling like that,

always telling people what to do. I should know; he was my roommate in college.)

Since *My Imaginary Jesus* is far from a fact-driven book, Tim also wondered why Barna Group had been involved in it at all. “Aren’t you Barna types only interested in stats?”

I explained that being a research company is more than collecting and distributing facts. “We try to capture people’s reason *and* often their imagination, too. That’s why we put our efforts behind this book.”

You might be wondering, “Why would a research company try to appeal to both reason and imagination?” Good question. C. S. Lewis believed that these two things had distinct, but related roles. Reason has to do with truths. Imagination is where we find meaning. As Lewis put it, “Imagination, producing new metaphors or revivifying old, is not the cause of truth, but its condition.” In other words, without the right imaginative conditions in our hearts and minds, truth cannot take hold.

Working at Barna Group for seventeen years, I’ve had the privilege of studying hundreds of thousands of Americans’ opinions and beliefs, including their thoughts on Jesus. As human beings, our understanding of Jesus has been covered with decades of cultural and personal residue—that is, the things society says about Jesus and the things we think we believe about him. As a matter of fact, when I wrote the book *unChristian*, that was one of my most significant observations: whether we call ourselves Christians or not, everyone thinks they know what Jesus is really like.

Wait, I can just hear the friendly intrusion of my roommate again. My memories of our conversations together are echoing

in my head at this very moment, telling me to stop trying to explain everything. So, I will simply suggest that you follow Tim's advice and read the book—*right now*.

*David Kinnaman*

Author, *unChristian* and *You Lost Me*

President, Barna Group



## CHAPTER ZERO

# AT THE RED AND BLACK

Jesus and I sometimes grab lunch at the Red and Black Café on Twelfth and Oak. It's decorated in revolutionary black and red, with posters and pictures of uprisings on the walls. The menu is vegan, which means that there are no animal products in the food. No meat, in other words. No honey, for that matter, because we don't want to steal from the hardworking bees.

The employees run the restaurant like a commune. There's no manager, and no one's in charge. I like to pick up the books and zines they sell and pretend to be a hard-core Portlander. Jesus likes the funky Portland vibe, and he thinks the socialist ethic that runs it is cute. He also likes the painting of Bruce Springsteen next to the counter, which has the caption, "The Only Boss We Listen To." He laughs at that every single time.

I was sitting by the round table with the chessboard painted on it, and Jesus was sitting across from me, his legs crossed and one sandaled foot bouncing to the music. I had my Bible open in front of me but sort of pushed behind a notebook so no one could see it. If someone figured out it wasn't a copy of Marx, I was pretty sure I might get stoned, and not from the



secondhand smoke. Jesus had just put his earbuds in when the waitress brought me my vegan chili. This is the price you pay to be cool in this town. I took a bite, wished it had some meat in it, and poured as much Tapatio into it as I could stand. As I stirred the taste into my food, I realized that the worst possible thing had happened. They had forgotten my chips.

“They forgot my tortilla chips.”

Jesus tossed his hair back and pulled an earbud out. “What was that?”

“They forgot my tortilla chips.”

“I thought that might happen.” He smiled.

“I’m going to ask them to bring some out.”

Jesus smiled that same serene, knowing smile and shook his head. He does that sometimes. He doesn’t overtly disagree with my actions, but I still get the feeling he’s unhappy with me. Which annoys me. I took another bite of chili, and around my (meatless) mouthful I said, “What? What’s wrong with asking for my tortilla chips?”

“Leave the poor communists alone,” he said. “So they forgot your chips, so what? Show them how a nice Christian doesn’t throw a fit when he’s wronged.”

“Humph.” Under my breath I added, “Maybe you could turn my napkin into some tortilla chips.”

“Then how would you wipe the chili off your chin?”

He was right. Chili was dripping off my chin. I wiped it off with my sleeve, just to teach him a lesson. He smiled and replaced his earbuds, and I turned my attention back to my Bible, which was weird with him sitting right across the table. It was like giving him a chance to talk when here I was, talking to him.

“You seem cranky today,” Jesus said. “Are you angry with me?”

“You should know, Mr. Omniscience.”

“I’d like you to tell me,” he answered kindly.

“You know why I’m upset with you,” I said darkly, not liking the turn this conversation had taken. I tried to find something to distract me, which is always easy at the good ol’ Red and Black.

The best thing about the Red and Black is the customers. I worked at a comic book store back in the day, and I miss the steady stream of weirdos, misfits, and losers tromping through to talk about Dr. Doom. No one at the Red and Black wants to talk about Dr. Doom. That childish comic-book villain has been replaced by whomever happens to be president of the United States at any given moment. I sometimes hope that a future president will become fiercely disfigured and choose to wear a scowling metal mask to disguise his acid-scarred face. It would add a little melodrama to the Portland political scene.

The other best thing, if I could be allowed two best things, is that no one notices Jesus when we’re at the restaurant together. He sits there with his iPod, smiling to himself, and no one notices the way he’s dressed or the shiny glow of his halo getting all over everything.

A commotion at the counter broke my concentration. Commotion at the counter is part of life at the Red and Black, and to be honest, this is the third thing that is best: I often get distracted from my Bible and see something exciting. The most common source of commotion is the fact that the Red and Black refuses to take credit cards. To add to the insult, they will allow you to get money from your bank account by typing

your ATM code into a pad connected to the cash register. After charging you a monstrous fee, they hand you cash out of the register. Why you can't use the same ATM pad to merely make a purchase is unclear. The downtown Suits who eat here get bent out of shape because the Red and Black doesn't participate in our financial system the way Big Business requires.

But the problem today came from a big-boned man, knotted with muscle, his black beard streaked with gray and spilling onto his wide chest. He wore dirty work jeans and a dark blue shirt that strained to contain him. "What do you mean 'no salmon'? This is the Pacific Northwest." He leaned in close to the woman taking his order, who gave him a look so weighted with disdain it could barely make it the seven inches from her eyes to his.

"We're vegan," she said. "*Vegan*. No meat. No animal products. *Fish* are *animals*."

The man looked like his eyes were going to bulge out of his head and slap her, but he took a deep breath and leaned back. "No fish. Okay. I'll get a glass of water and think about it." He walked to the side of the counter and poured himself a cup, then, to my chagrin, looked over and caught me staring. His eyes darted to my table, saw my Bible, and a wide grin broke out on his face. *Oh, great*. He was a Christian.

There aren't a lot of Christians in Portland, which means that when we see each other there's an obligatory minority dance that goes on. At the very least you have to raise your eyebrows and tip your chin up at one another. Some genres of Christian require that you talk about how hard life is in Portland (which it isn't). Some want to sit down and talk about their favorite book or the latest thing they learned

on The KROS. That's our radio station. It's like a Christian ghetto on the airwaves. Safe for young people, positive words, okay music.

"Jesus," I hissed. "Keep that guy from coming over here."

Jesus looked over at the guy, who was only a few steps away now, and rolled his eyes. "Oh, man. Not him." He stood up. "Listen, I'm going to go check the parking meter."

I almost spilled my chili. "*What?* You can't leave me here with him."

Jesus looked at me sternly. "You prayed not to get a ticket while parked illegally in front of the café."

"I also prayed that there would be some quarters squirreled away in my car and *someone* didn't provide."

Jesus pointed his finger at me. "Watch it, Mikalatos. You know I don't care for your back talk." Then he stood up, and with a swirl of his robes he walked out the door, just as the hairy bear of a Christian man squeezed himself in at my table.

"Pete Jonason." He held out a powerful hand as wide as my plate. I shook it, doing my best to look incredibly busy. I could tell he worked the docks or something. A pungent smell of salt, fish, and ocean hung around him.

"Matt," I said.

He took a drink of his water, made a face, and spit it back into his cup. "They put some sort of chemicals in the drink."

He was right. The water had a weird taste. "I think it's rose water or something. They're completely organic here. I assume they wouldn't use chemicals."

Pete leaned back, his dark eyes staring at me with an unblinking ferocity that made me uncomfortable. I took another bite of chili. "You make a lot of assumptions, Matt."

He forgot about the water, took another sip, grunted, and spit it into his cup. He nodded in the direction of the door. Jesus stood out there, talking to a traffic cop who appeared to be writing a ticket for my truck. “I see that Jesus is wearing the traditional robes and powder blue sash today.”

I choked on my chili. “You can *see* him?” Pete cracked his enormous knuckles. “Sure. Just like anybody who’s paying attention.” He scratched behind his head with one big hand, the other resting lightly on the table. “Can I ask you a question?”

I sighed and closed my Bible. “Yeah.”

“Why does your Jesus still wear a robe?”

“What do you mean?” I looked at Jesus, who had reentered the café. He flashed me a quick grin, which I took to mean he had taken care of the parking ticket, and sat down at a table across the café, by the window. Meaning I was stuck here with Pete the Christian.

“What I mean is, here’s God, the creator of the universe. He becomes a human being and lives on Earth for thirty-three years. He completely assimilates to human culture. Wears our clothes. Wears a body like ours. Eats our food. But here he is, two thousand years later, and he’s still wearing robes and a sash. Seems like he might put on a pair of jeans every once in a while. They’re a great invention, jeans.”

I watched Jesus thoughtfully. “That *is* weird. I guess I never thought about it.”

Pete leaned in close, and I could smell the overpowering aroma on his breath when he said, “Let’s go ask him about it.”

I sighed. “Okay.” We stood and walked over to him. Jesus smiled and offered me the chair across from him, and Pete

towered over us, his arms crossed over his barrel chest. “This is Pete,” I said.

“We’ve met.” Jesus nodded.

“I don’t recall,” Pete said.

“We were just talking,” I said, “and Pete asked me why you still wear two-thousand-year-old clothing. We were talking about the innovation of jeans, and we thought you might like them.”

Jesus laughed. “It’s just that these robes are so comfortable.”

Pete looked outside. “Pretty rainy out there. You’re wearing desert clothes. Aren’t you cold?”

“Ha ha,” Jesus said. “You need to read your Bible more, Pete. You may recall where it says, ‘I, the Lord, do not change.’”

An excellent point, and straight out of the Bible. Score one for Jesus. I looked to Pete, who was scowling. “That verse doesn’t refer to changing clothes,” Pete said.

Jesus studied his fingernails, pretending to look for dirt. “Why don’t you let me do the Scripture interpretation, Pete.”

“Matt, let me ask you something,” Pete said. “Is this guy better than you at anything?”

I thought carefully. “He’s certainly nicer than me. And he has this way of expressing disapproval without actually saying anything. I’ve never been able to do that.” I examined Jesus’ face for a minute, his blue eyes shining merrily. “He has better hair. Mine is so fine and thin, and his is thick and silky.”

“You’re not the real Jesus.” Pete grabbed a chair from another table and scooted in close, practically in Jesus’ face. I put a hand on his arm and told him to calm down, but he ignored me and said, “What exactly do you want from my friend Matt here?”

Jesus stared at him. “I have plans to prosper him, plans for peace. I want him to be happy and rich. If he follows my instructions, that’s exactly what will—”

Pete punched Jesus hard, in the face, causing his head to snap to the right and bounce off the window. I jumped up to intervene. Pete dragged Jesus from the table, and Jesus kicked over his chair, feet flailing. Pete had him in a bear hug, and Jesus elbowed him in the stomach. Pete lost his grip, grabbed Jesus by the hair, and slammed him to the ground. I shoved Pete with all my strength and he stumbled backward, flipping over a table and shattering a chair on the way down.

I helped Jesus up. “Are you okay? You should have called down some angels to protect you.”

With a guttural roar, Pete launched himself across the table, straight for Jesus’ head. Jesus sidestepped, turned, and ran out the door. Pete shook himself off and rose to go after him, but before he could leave, I picked up a leg from the broken chair and clocked him as hard as I could right in the back of the head. That didn’t stop him, but it did slow him down enough for Jesus to get a good head start. I watched as he gathered his robes in his hands and ran like crazy, his white legs flashing out, his sandals eating the pavement like a dog licking ice cream.

Pete stood up, rubbing his head. He glared at me and then at the rapidly retreating Jesus. “Damn it,” he said and kicked the table.

“You shouldn’t curse.”

“Sometimes a curse is called for. That—” Pete pointed out the window at the racing back of my Lord—“that was an imaginary Jesus, my friend. I choose my words carefully, and I said what I meant. And now that we’re onto him, he’s going to run.”

I crossed my arms and frowned. “I’ve known Jesus for a long time. What makes you think that you know him better than I do?”

“Because,” Pete said, headed for the door, “I’m the apostle Peter.”





# Acknowledgments

A book is not written in a vacuum. This is because one cannot breathe in a vacuum, and space suits are expensive. Since I had to write in the atmosphere, all these people kept influencing me and deserve my thanks. Observe:

This book would not exist in its present form if Wes Yoder (agent and friend) hadn't declined to represent the original sugarcoated collection of Sunday school lessons by saying something along the lines of, "This is no good," and graciously reading the next draft. Many thanks to him and all the fine folks at Ambassador Literary Agency.

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The Lord Jesus Christ is at least partially to blame for my sense of humor, and I sincerely hope he's laughing along with me, or I'm in big trouble. I love you, thanks for everything, and I mean everything.

And, lastly, please write your name here:



# Reader Discussion Guide for *My Imaginary Jesus*

Snap on these codes with your smartphone or visit the link below each code for an enhanced discussion guide experience, featuring insights from author Matt Mikalatos. Some videos may contain spoilers!



[www.tyndal.es/MJ1](http://www.tyndal.es/MJ1)

## CHAPTERS 0–2

1. When showing Matt that his Jesus is imaginary, Pete starts by picking on Jesus' clothes. Do you think it matters whether a modern-day Jesus wears a robe rather than jeans and a T-shirt?
2. What was it about Imaginary Jesus' speech that caused Pete to punch him?
3. Pete says in chapter 0 that he chooses his words carefully. Are you surprised by anything he says? If he's choosing his words so carefully, why does he sometimes use coarse language when speaking to Matt?

### **MATT WASHES HIS MOUTH OUT WITH SOAP**

*The absurd thing on the topic of “offensive language” in this book is that I never curse. You know how some people will curse, but only when they hit their thumb with a hammer? I usually say something like NNNGH! instead. In this book, I worked hard to use all these words appropriately.*

*There are different classes of “bad” words, and for some reason we get all bent out of shape about the wrong ones.*

*First we have vulgarities—the word vulgar comes from Latin and refers to the common people. Vulgarities are words that the “lower classes” would use; it’s class warfare stuff. Most “four-letter words” are vulgarities—impolite, common, and offensive only because cultured people don’t talk that way.*

*Then we have profanities. To profane something is to take a holy thing and use it as a common object—to pervert it in some way. This should be by far the more serious misuse of language. Texting OMG should be more offensive than a four-letter word, if you think about it. Invoking God because “tim iz rllly going to the movie with Julie” is worse than being crass, if you ask me.*

*And then there’s cursing, which is what Pete does at the end of chapter 0. When he says damn he is using the word in its proper, biblical sense. My false Jesus should, in fact, be destroyed in hell if at all possible. (See what Paul says in Galatians 1:8-9 for an example of this kind of thing.)*

—MM

4. Have you ever prayed for a parking space or that you wouldn’t get a parking ticket? Where do you rate “inability

to fix my parking tickets” on the scale of whether your God is worth following?

5. How do you feel about Pete buying alcohol? Did it surprise you? Why alcohol instead of grape juice or something else? How does that compare to Matt’s comments about alcohol at the beginning of chapter 2?

**TAKE A SHOT EVERY TIME MATT POINTS  
OUT THAT HE DOESN’T DRINK**

*If anyone gets mad at me for the alcohol in this story, I might die from the irony. I lived in a coed dorm in college, and since I don’t drink, I spent Friday nights walking the hall and cleaning up after my drunken friends. I mopped up vomit, I carried unconscious girls back to their rooms and locked them safely inside, and I earned the nickname of “Floor Mom.” Also, there was this one guy who could still school me in Super Mario Brothers even when he was drunk. He would say, “I’m drunk right now, and I’m beating you. Pathetic.”*

*Honestly, most people who aren’t still caught up in trying to bring back Prohibition will admit that the Last Supper involved actual wine. Not to say that it must be wine. For instance, one time I was in Asia and a friend of ours couldn’t drink wine at all because of his past history with alcohol. We hit the streets to find some grape juice, but with our limited language skills and the reality of that culture we could only find blueberry juice and grape punch. This left us wondering which was the most respectful liquid to use for our time of Communion. . . .*

—MM

6. What do you think about Matt’s description of how to follow Jesus in chapter 2? How would you answer Pete’s

challenge to describe in less than five minutes how to follow Jesus?

7. In this chapter, Pete says he is not imaginary. What do you think he means by that?

## CHAPTERS 3–6

1. In chapter 3 Pete says that Matt is afraid of his imagination. What does Pete mean by that? Are there reasons to be afraid of one's imagination? Are there positive uses for it?

### **IMAGINE THAT JOHN LENNON HAD NOT COMPLETELY CO-OPTED THE WORD *IMAGINE***

*A vivid imagination can cause terror as well as entertainment. I remember as a child being absolutely certain that the floor around my bed had turned into an ocean and that (of course) sharks were circling. And I had to go to the bathroom so badly.*

*I've met plenty of people who are afraid of their imagination. They are concerned that their imagination will take them to unpleasant or unhealthy places. And certainly that is a danger. In fact, in My Imaginary Jesus we see that my own crazy imagination has brought to life some dangerous characters. On the other hand, my imagination also brought this book to life, which from my point of view is a positive thing.*

*The most baffling thing is when Christians are against the imagination. It seems to me that they would be the most apt to embrace this wonderful "what if" mechanism God provided us. And if Jesus truly died on the cross to redeem human beings, then not only our bodies, not only our spirits, but also our imaginations can be redeemed. There is no reason not to use it to explore our relationship with God, just like John Bunyan,*



*C. S. Lewis, G. K. Chesterton, and many others have done.*

—MM

2. Have you ever had an invitation to follow someone, like Sam's invitation from Ruth in chapter 3? If so, what did you decide? Was it a difficult decision? Why or why not?
3. Chapter 4 portrays Y'shua as an ugly little man who was hunched over. How did you feel about that? Would it change anything in your perception of Jesus if this was true?
4. The story of Jesus healing Peter's mother-in-law comes from the Bible, in Luke chapter 4. Why do you think Luke would include this story? Why is this story significant?
5. What do you think about Daisy's definition of a disciple in chapter 6?
6. Given Pete's limited knowledge of Jesus at the time of the miraculous catch of fish, are you surprised that he chose to follow him? If you hadn't heard his promise of eternal life, would you choose to follow Jesus?
7. Where are some places that your imaginary Jesus would never go?

#### CHAPTERS 7–11

1. In chapter 7, Matt relates the story of accidentally picking up a prostitute. Discuss briefly how Matt is a complete idiot. Now answer this question: what would you do in that situation?

2. Have you ever interacted with a Jesus like Magic 8 Ball Jesus, Testosterone Jesus, Perpetually Angry Jesus, Harley Jesus, or Legalist Jesus? If so, share a story about that interaction. If not . . . make one up!

**MORE IMAGINARY JESUSES THAN YOU  
CAN SHAKE A STICK AT**

*I was talking with a friend once about Jesus, and she said that since he had never sinned, he was clearly a vegetarian. I pointed out that the Bible says he ate fish, at least, and she snapped, “Then he was a murderer.”*

*Pretty much every misconception of Jesus in this book comes from my own experience. I spent a long time with Legalist Jesus in my life; in fact, it wasn’t until college that he was smashed to bits only to be replaced by a Jesus who couldn’t care less whether I ever sinned (maybe we would call him Libertine Jesus). In high school my Imaginary Jesus spent a ridiculous amount of time obsessing over whether I was dating the right girl or not.*

*I had to cut a lot of imaginary Jesuses out of this book simply because the sheer number of my own misconceptions about Jesus started to overwhelm the story. In a strange way, this is encouraging, because as we identify imaginary Jesuses in our lives we are moving toward understanding who the real Jesus is. In other words, when I finally come to the realization that Jesus’ number one concern about my life is not whether I am listening to hard rock or easy-listening contemporary Christian on the radio, I am taking a step toward getting to know the real Jesus.*

*In 1 John 3:2 we read that when Jesus appears we will become like him, because we will see him as he really is. This tells us that everyone who claims to follow Jesus—from the apostle John all the way down through*

*the centuries to you and me—has had misunderstandings about who Jesus is. Anyone who tells you that they know every little thing about who Jesus is and what he would do in every situation is either deceived or selling something. At the same time, we know that everyone who is hoping for the day when Jesus comes back will be working to make themselves and the world around them as ready as possible so that when he comes they'll be as pure as they can get without being in his physical presence.*

—MM

3. Does Sandy's story in chapter 9 change your opinion of her previous vocation? Do you think her story is a common or uncommon one?
4. What does Sandy mean by "we were all whores before we met him"?
5. What is the author's point in highlighting the way that King James Jesus talks? What has been your experience with different translations of Scripture?

#### **THY TRANSLATION CAUSETH A SORE PATE**

*As it happens, I'm a fan of the King James translation. It has beautiful language in it, much like other great works of Elizabethan English, like Shakespeare's plays.*

*Unlike Shakespeare's plays, however, the Bible is not solely a work of art. The whole point of translating something is to make it accessible to an audience that speaks another language. Like it or not, Elizabethan English requires translation for most modern audiences. There are a lot of words that have shifted meanings subtly or completely in the last four hundred years.*

*All of that to say, my personal belief is that it's best to read multiple translations of the Bible so you don't get misconceptions about meaning based on translations. Or we could take the advice of my Muslim friend Imraan, who said, "If you Christians are so certain the Bible is the Word of God, shouldn't you just learn Greek and Hebrew?"*

—MM

## CHAPTERS 12–16

1. Have you ever made a deal with God or Bargain Jesus? What was the deal? In retrospect, do you think it was a good thing or bad thing to do?
2. Share your thoughts about the conflicts that could come about between Liberal Social Services Jesus and Conservative Truth-Telling Jesus.
3. In chapter 12, Political Jesus says that “some imaginary Jesuses are better than others.” Discuss.
4. Political Jesus gives a compelling speech about political influence and the possibilities to create social change. Are there places that you think his plan and the plan of the real Jesus overlap? From what you know of the real Jesus, how does he effect societal transformation?
5. Followers of Christian Nation Jesus share a vision of a Christian utopia. Do you believe it's possible to have a truly Christian nation? What would that look like? Are there historical examples of this (or attempts at it)?
6. In chapter 14 Daisy says that societal transformation only comes through personal revolution. Do you agree or



[www.tyndal.es/MIJ2](http://www.tyndal.es/MIJ2)

disagree? What are the personal and political ramifications of your position on this question?

7. Why does Matt's headache go away when Televangelist Jesus smacks him in the forehead?
8. Why does Matt become so angry at Televangelist Jesus' assertion that those who truly have faith will never be sick again?
9. It can be hard to distinguish story from autobiography in this book. Do you think the healing in the bedroom in chapter 16 actually happened, or is it an invented incident for the sake of the book?

#### **THE TRUTH ABOUT MATTS AND DOGS**

*When my good friend Tifah finished reading an early draft of My Imaginary Jesus, she called me and demanded to know, "Is it true?" Pretty much everyone who has read the book has asked me about various events and characters in the book, wanting to know if this or that thing was true.*

*And the answer, of course, is that yes, this entire book is true.*

*That's not to say that it's all true in the same way. For instance, the guitar/weeping/Motorcycle Guy story is an unexaggerated, unaltered, unvarnished account of something that actually happened. I did not, on the other hand, get transported to the first century where I interacted with a talking donkey.*

*So in what sense is it true when I write several chapters about walking around in first-century Judea? In the sense that these are real lessons I've learned, insights that have been given to me, questions I've asked and pondered as I've looked at the stories of Jesus (primarily in reading the book of Luke).*

*Sometimes I had to alter things a bit here and there to make the story flow better. An example of this would be that Sandy isn't the one who introduced me to the PSU atheist club; that was actually my friend Shasta Kramer. But it was confusing (and thus seemed less true to readers) to introduce a new character at that point in the book. You might notice that I never mention my job in the book (though I assure you that I have one). I never do dishes or hang out with my family, though I do those things often in real life. That's because the book is a selective slice of my life, designed to best reflect the truth of my journey to wrestle through very specific issues I've had with Jesus.*

*My friend Robert Darden told me once that truly good satire has to be both true and funny. It can't be one or the other; it has to be both. I worked hard to make sure that I never sacrificed truth for the sake of a joke in this book. And if it is absolutely killing you that you don't know if this or that event in the book really happened, just drop me an e-mail or invite me out to your book club or something. I would love to tell you more stories, if you'll tell me some of your stories too.*

—MM

10. Why would Matt be angry at God for healing his wife's hands?



[www.tyndal.es/MIJ3](http://www.tyndal.es/MIJ3)

## CHAPTERS 17–20

1. In chapter 17 Matt shares a story of God generously answering prayer by providing a trashed guitar and a mysterious stranger to play it. Do you think that God would bother with something like this?

**GUITAR GOD!**

*Some people have asked, “Why would God bother to answer the prayer of a sobbing kid walking through a neighborhood at night by providing an out-of-tune guitar in the garbage right as he prayed for a guitar, and then follow that up with some guy who would play it for him?”*

*Answer: I just don’t know.*

*Also, you might think that if God were to do something like, for instance, give a guy a guitar when he prayed for it, that the guy would then have the decency to learn to play guitar.*

*But he never did.*

**THE END**

—MM

2. In chapter 18 Matt says that hospitals are a “testimony to the fact that death exists.” What do you think of that description? Is it accurate or unfair? What is your experience with hospitals?
3. In chapter 19 Matt begins to deal with the loss of his child and wrestles with the question, “If God is both good and powerful, why would he allow my child to die?” What would you say to Matt at a time like this?
4. Matt takes the position that God is both good and powerful, which leaves him with an inability to comprehend God’s inaction when his child dies. If God truly cares for human beings and has the power to intervene, what possible motivations could he have to allow pain, suffering, and death in this life?



[www.tyndal.es/MJ4](http://www.tyndal.es/MJ4)

5. Matt meets three possible “answers” to this question on the top of Mount Hood. Just from their names, which one is your favorite to win the inner-tube race?
6. Is it disrespectful for the author to approach this theological question in the guise of an inner-tube competition? Is there a different way you’d prefer to explore a question like this?

## CHAPTERS 21–24

### **LAUREL AND HARDY MEET THE AUTHOR**

*Elders Laurel and Hardy are real. Those aren’t their real names, though. Not sure about their first names, as they would not reveal them to me.*

*Anyway, our conversations are nearly verbatim (though edited of course—we talked about a lot more than what is in the book). They were good guys, and I enjoyed our conversations. I have to say I prefer them to the replacement guys in our neighborhood right now.*

*Gents, if you ever see this book, I sincerely hope that your journey to find the true Christ will be richly rewarded. Drop by and see me sometime (you know where I live).*

—MM

1. Based on their own descriptions, would you choose Meticulous Jesus, Free Will Jesus, or Can’t-See-the-Future-Because-It’s-Unknowable Jesus?
2. Motorcycle Guy says he was hoping Matt would come down the mountain alone. What does he mean by this?



3. Which is more palatable to you: that God *chooses* our sufferings or that God *allows* our sufferings? Which do you think is true?
4. Imaginary Jesus says that when Matt prays without waiting for God's response, he is praying to himself. Have you ever felt that you were praying to yourself instead of to God? Have you ever felt that you prayed and God didn't hear you?
5. Elder Hardy says that he doesn't drink certain beverages because they are bad for his health, but he gladly scarfs down a chimichanga. Can you think of similar inconsistencies in your belief system or the beliefs of someone you know?



[www.tyndal.es/MIJ5](http://www.tyndal.es/MIJ5)

#### CHAPTERS 25–29

1. Do you think that God wrote the Bible? How about the Book of Mormon? Why or why not?
2. Have you ever felt cornered into a strange position (like Elder Hardy's contention that God made grammar mistakes) to keep your beliefs consistent?
3. Matt references the Nicene Creed, which says that Jesus was both completely man and completely God. What does this mean? Do you think this is true?
4. In chapter 26 Matt realizes that the Jesus at the atheist Bible study was not imaginary at all. Did this surprise you? What did you think about this Bible study?



[www.tyndal.es/MIJ6](http://www.tyndal.es/MIJ6)

5. Sandy and Matt talk about how Shane (the atheist) seems to be trying to follow Christ before believing in him. Pete says similar things earlier in the book. Do you think it's possible to be a follower of Christ before becoming a Christian?
6. The atheists seem to think that if they saw miracles, they would believe, but Matt thinks that miracles are not enough. What do you think? Would miracles help you to believe in God?
7. In chapter 27 some similarities between the origins of Islam and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are pointed out. Why do you think these similarities exist between these two very different religions? Can any conclusions be drawn from this?
8. What was the point of the parable of the cars? How about the parable of Zombie Boy and Werewolf Boy?

#### **A PARABLE ABOUT PARABLES**

*Once upon a time a certain man approached a certain author of a certain book and said, "I don't understand the parable you have written concerning the three cars."*

*The author looked at the man wisely and said, "The three cars are three concepts of Jesus. The car made of stone is completely erroneous, merely approximating the look of Jesus. The car made of wood looks far more like Jesus and even functions somewhat like him, but it is also a poor approximation. The third car is a real car, like the real Jesus. And the point is this: a man who owns a wooden car cannot judge a man with a stone car, for both are insufficient for driving to the market. That is why*

*I write in parables, so that you will be ever seeing but never understanding.”*

*The man thought about this and then said, “Another possibility is that you are a lousy writer, which is why no one knows what in the world you are talking about.”*

*“Touché,” the author replied.*

—MM

## CHAPTERS 30–33

1. Portland Jesus and Shane disagree about why Jesus died on the cross and whether it has anything to do with taking someone else’s punishment. Do you think Jesus took someone else’s punishment when he was killed?

### **YOUR OWN CULTURAL JESUS**

*A little cultural difference goes a long way toward creating misunderstandings. For instance, when Krista and I were first married she had a habit of saying things like, “We need to take the garbage out soon.” Which to me translated as, “Either she or I need to eventually take out the trash,” but which she meant to convey, “You. Take out the garbage. Now.” The difference had more to do with our cultural differences—what we had been taught, where we grew up, things like that—than with actual differences between us.*

*People’s ideas about Jesus (and many other people and things) are also heavily influenced by culture. My wife met someone in Asia, for instance, who had been taught that Jesus was a legendary, quasi-historical character like Robin Hood. This person looked at a world history timeline and saw Jesus’ birthday on there and said, “Wait a minute . . . he was an actual person?”*

*In the 1950s in the USA Jesus was thought to be impassive, meaning he showed very little emotion. (You may have seen the picture of Jesus staring up into heaven serenely praying right before being brutally murdered.) In the 1970s, Jesus was the Love Man, the revolutionist who came to set us all free in a variety of ways. And today our perceptions of Jesus reflect our cultural values in other ways.*

*I think that if we're ever going to see the real Jesus, we need to talk to people from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and religious beliefs and compare what they say to what we know and can discover about him—so that we can see our own cultural biases and remove those cultural lenses when we look at the real Jesus. This will enable us to better see him for who he really is.*

—MM

2. Shane seems to think that a church has to be multicultural to be the church as Jesus intended. Do you think he's right or wrong? Why?
3. Shane also thinks that the renewed interest in service projects in Africa and elsewhere is a reflection of our current American culture rather than Christian theology. What do you think? Is that an overstatement or understatement?
4. Did you recognize any of the imaginary Jesuses from chapter 31? If you were writing this chapter, what imaginary Jesuses might you add to the list?
5. Why does Pete make Matt take his shoes off when he enters the labyrinth?

## CHAPTERS 34–39

1. Daisy tells Matt that he doesn't hear from God because his head is full of static. What causes static in your life?
2. Mary and Pete share briefly about the first Communion for those who had lived life with Jesus. What sorts of things do you think Peter shared at his first Communion? How about the apostle John? If you are a follower of Christ, how could you have a more significant time of remembrance at the next opportunity for Communion?
3. Why would the president of the United States bother to clean your bathroom? How would you feel if something like that happened to you? Does that change the way you look at the story of Jesus washing the disciples' feet?
4. When Matt takes Communion at the center of the labyrinth, he sees a "procession of the ages." What is the author implying about the nature of Communion?
5. In the face of his encounter with Jesus in the labyrinth, Matt sets aside his question about the death of his baby. Did you find this satisfying or frustrating? What was it about this encounter that gave him peace about his question?
6. What is the significance of the apostle John being described as having papery, ink-covered skin?
7. Matt tries to create several art projects to express his experience in the labyrinth. How would you express profound experiences? Through the written word? art? song? some act of service? something completely different?

8. What is the difference between someone who follows Jesus for what Jesus has done in the past and someone who follows Jesus because of his past, present, and future actions?

### **FAMILY MATTERS**

*Of all the people in the book, I suppose Krista could be pitied the most. Not only do I do things like invite the president over to dinner (not that he's ever actually come . . . although you are very welcome in our home, sir), but I also have the nerve to talk about personal things from our life: the miscarriage, the healing of her hands, that time when she put the grapes on her eyes, etc., etc.*

*You might be asking, "How does Krista feel about being paraded out for your book?" Well, as a matter of fact, she doesn't mind. We talk about what things I'm allowed to discuss publicly. Our miscarriage is a good example. We talked about it and decided that if it helped someone else know they weren't alone in dealing with their grief and loss, then it would be a good thing to share. Krista has a high value on being honest about her own experiences as well as helping people around her. We shared about the miscarriage on my blog when it happened, and with our friends and coworkers as well. In fact, the greatest disservice this book does to Krista is that she was by far one of the most pivotal figures in dealing with my own loss, grief, and theological questions—much more than is represented in this book. She is the most important person in my life.*

*And as for the children . . . Well, they don't even know they're in the book. Maybe when they're in their thirties I will give them each a copy.*

—MM

9. In the final chapter, Houdini Dog appears, which seems to be a big deal. In fact, Houdini Dog is mentioned consistently throughout the book. Is there a theme or metaphor being woven into the story through the use of Houdini Dog?



[www.tyndal.es/MIJ7](http://www.tyndal.es/MIJ7)

**NOW THAT YOU'VE FINISHED THE BOOK:**

1. Matt suggests several times that our imaginary Jesuses are reflections of our own culture, upbringing, or teaching. Are there things about your idea of who Jesus is that could be attributed to this?
2. There appear to be three types of people in the book: real people (Matt, Shane, Sandy, the elders), imaginary people (various forms of Jesus), and people who are real but “complicated” (Daisy, Pete, Motorcycle Guy, John). What clues do we have about the nature of this third category of people? Why can some real people see them, while others can't?
3. This book never lays out a systematic “Here's how to know the real Jesus.” What hints do we get in the book of how to know the real Jesus? What are some actions you could take to remove imaginary Jesuses in your life and find the real one?
4. The last two words of the text reveal a new stage of life for Matt and his family. What do you suppose is his reaction to this? Does it change his previous search for answers about his wife's miscarriage? Would this revelation alter his understanding of who Jesus is?

5. What was your favorite moment in the book? What was your least favorite? Were there parts that made no sense to you? Were you offended by anything in the book? Did you get any new insights into yourself, Jesus, God, or the world?



[www.tyndal.es/MIJ8](http://www.tyndal.es/MIJ8)

**ALL MY HOPES AND DREAMS**

*My editors have asked me a couple of times about my hopes for this book. I think my hopes for this book are the same as any author's. I hope that the book grows up, gets a good education, maybe finds a nice girl, and settles down and starts writing books of its own.*

*Okay, seriously, here's what I really hope for this book: I hope that people will enjoy themselves while they're thinking about God. I hope that people will have big belly laughs while they interact with their friends and people whose religious beliefs they strenuously disagree with, and that they can talk about it with good humor and enjoy themselves. I hope that someone gets stomach cramps from laughing and then decides that they want to give a copy to their friends and discuss together who they think Jesus is. I hope that someone will have their world shaken and they'll realize that Jesus isn't who they thought he was, and they'll grab their friends and go figure it out together.*

—MM

6. With whom would you like to discuss the concepts in this book? Can you think of others who would enjoy reading it? How can you start a conversation with them about *My Imaginary Jesus*?



7. If you could ask the author one question, what would it be?



[www.tyndal.es/MIJ9](http://www.tyndal.es/MIJ9)



**Q & A**  
**with *My Imaginary Jesus* Author**  
**Matt Mikalatos**

**Q: Define an “imaginary Jesus.” Where do they come from?**

**A:** An imaginary Jesus is a misconception or misrepresentation of Jesus that we interact with in our own lives. They can come from a lot of places: from our own misunderstandings of Scripture, from our preferences, from theological errors we’ve been taught, or purely from a desire to have Jesus fit into our lives more conveniently. Sometimes an imaginary Jesus can even come from a good doctrinal position that has been overemphasized to become the “main characteristic” of Jesus rather than a piece of who he is.

**Q: This book is a “sort-of-true” story. Answer true or false to the following questions:**

1. Your name, like the lead character’s, really is Matt Mikalatos. TRUE! Technically Matthew.

2. **You describe real events from your life and faith journey.**  
Also TRUE!
3. **You really have traveled to first-century Judea with a talking donkey.** Trick question! I don't answer trick questions.
4. **So, the real question: Why did you choose to star in your own novel?**

**A:** A lot of the themes I deal with in *My Imaginary Jesus* are intensely personal, and I had the choice either to invent a fictional person who dealt with the same themes or to eliminate all that work by inserting myself into the story. Actually, the book started as personal essays, and in talking with my agent, Wes Yoder, we decided it needed a stronger narrative. As we talked about what that might look like, I was reminded of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, where Dante is the main character and has a series of guides who walk him through a spiritual landscape. So I like to compare *My Imaginary Jesus* to Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Because it makes me sound really smart.

**Q: In the book, the character Matt Mikalatos is a Christian. Yet he is accompanied by an imaginary Jesus. Isn't that a contradiction?**

**A:** I don't think so. First John 3 tells us that when Christ appears we will be like him because we will see him as he really is. Which implies that we don't know him completely now. So on this side of heaven we're constantly growing in our knowledge of him. We all have misconceptions of who he is and places where we're getting to know him better. In fact,

the most troubling response I've gotten to the book has been when people tell me, "I don't have an imaginary Jesus at all."

**Q: Magic 8 Ball Jesus, who only answers questions with one of several stock answers ("It is certain!" "Ask again later!"), is already a favorite with readers. Are there any imaginary Jesuses that have shown up more than others in your own life?**

**A:** I've been surprised by how many people love Magic 8 Ball Jesus. He's definitely the number one beloved representation of Jesus I hear about. For me personally, Legalist Jesus has been a lifelong problem. He has often snuck into my life, and sometimes when I've thought I had dealt with him, he shows up again in a different way. When I was single, there was a Jesus who was completely preoccupied with knowing who I would one day marry. He spent a lot of time fretting over whether I was with the right girl or not. And the sort of mainstream Christian culture Jesus (who I think of as Hollywood Jesus, based on all the Easter movies I've seen) has this way of being a default Jesus—the mild-mannered nice guy who never raises his voice and always has that knowing twinkle in his eye.

**Q: In the book, Matt desperately wants to know why God allowed something terrible to happen to him and his wife. Why is hearing the real Jesus' answer to this question so important?**

**A:** In a lot of ways the entire book is structured around the story of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. The first questions

we come to in times of loss are “Is God really good?” and “Is God really powerful?” because it seems that if God really loves us and he is truly good and truly powerful, then he wouldn’t allow this to happen. I see this summed up in Mary and Martha’s question to Jesus: “Where were you? If you had been here, our brother would not have died.” Even in this question you see an assumption that Jesus loves them, a certainty that he had the power to overcome Lazarus’s sickness, but also confusion over why he didn’t intervene. For us, in our time of loss, it was very comforting to look at Jesus’ response in this Scripture. He empathized with them, was genuinely moved by their loss, and reminded them of the truth that he is the resurrection and the life. I realized finally that the theological constructs to explain evil in the world didn’t make me feel any better. . . . I wanted God to show up and remind me he was present in my life and loved me.

**Q: Why is it a problem to have an imaginary Jesus?**

**A:** Regardless of where they are spiritually, most people desire to find truth. No one wants to believe a lie. To have an imaginary Jesus means that you’ve abandoned what is true in order to follow your own construct. And that’s a problem because this construct now prevents you from interacting with the real Jesus. It creates a barrier between you and the real Jesus. And even if you’re not a Christian and you have a false idea of Jesus, then that prevents you from having true knowledge about something. No one wants that. We all want the truth.

**Q: How do you know that you're interacting with the real Jesus and not an imaginary one?**

**A:** We have Scripture, which is a great guide because it's essentially Jesus' autobiography. We can look at that and see what Jesus says about himself. If some Jesus I'm interacting with doesn't match up with the Jesus in Scripture, that's not the real Jesus. So the most objective way is to look at Scripture ourselves or in church and discover what is true about Jesus.

But it's not just about ancient writings; we can also get to know Jesus personally. He is alive and real. So as I pray to him, as he says things to me, whether he is speaking through Scripture or in the midst of prayer or through the words of someone near me, I can get to know who he is that way too. I should pay attention and make sure that those things aren't in conflict with Scripture, but personal interaction can help me get to know him. Like Scripture says, "The sheep know the voice of the shepherd." And as I get to know his voice better and recognize it, I can be increasingly certain that I recognize his voice when he speaks.

It is interesting to study the words used to describe people's responses to Jesus in Scripture: awe, amazement, terror, anger, etc. When's the last time Jesus terrified me? And where in Scripture does it talk about people having "mild good feelings" when interacting with Jesus? The real Jesus can be enormously frustrating, frightening, or unexpectedly lavish with his love, and he says things I simply don't want to hear. If your Jesus doesn't fit that description, you really have to wonder whether he's the real one or not.

**Q: So if I read the book and I discover that I've been following an imaginary Jesus, it doesn't mean that I'm not really a Christian?**

**A:** Not necessarily. Everyone has misconceptions about Jesus, and it may be that you're simply in the process of getting to know him better. I've been married for over ten years, and I'm still learning new things about my wife. That doesn't mean I'm not married to her.

At the same time, just believing the right things doesn't mean that you're in a relationship with Jesus. I've met people who go to church and "believe" in Jesus, but they're not actually following him. Jesus talks about both things in Scripture—believing in him and following him. If you've read the book and discovered you're following an imaginary Jesus, you're faced with the question of whether you are willing to ditch your imaginary Jesus and follow the real one. And following the real Jesus can be a really amazing, life-changing, sometimes frightening experience. You can talk with a pastor, a Christian friend, or a spiritual mentor you trust about all this, or feel free to send me a note on Facebook if you want to know more.

**Q: How can Christians use this book to start conversations about faith?**

**A:** If you can say it honestly, tell people, "This book showed me that I had some misconceptions about Jesus." People aren't used to hearing that from Christians. Then tell them you want them to read it so you can discuss it together. Also, tell them it's funny. They won't believe you. If you can get them



to read the first chapter, though, I think you're on your way to a good conversation. I've had atheists read and enjoy the book, so I think it really can be for anyone. It's not a preachy book, so if your friends can deal with the question, "Who is Jesus, really?" they're going to enjoy themselves. People like to be asked their opinion, so be sure to let them talk about the book; don't just share your own thoughts. Also, the author of the book (that's me) likes to hear from readers and LOVES to hear from non-Christian readers. So feel free to connect them to me if that would be helpful in your conversations. People the author does not like to hear from: empty-handed pizza delivery boys, his health plan (they never call just to say something nice), and automated phone calls about politics.

**Q: Finish this sentence: "If you like \_\_\_\_\_, you'll like *My Imaginary Jesus*."**

**A:** "If you like breathing, you'll like *My Imaginary Jesus*."

**Q: What's your biggest hope for *My Imaginary Jesus*?**

**A:** Many people haven't been able to have a conversation about Jesus because it's been too boring or the language is inaccessible or they haven't wanted to have that conversation. I hope this book will change that. It'll provide an environment where people can sit down with anyone—people they agree with, people they disagree with, people they've known a long time, people they've just met, Christians, non-Christians—and have a fun, exciting, interesting, enjoyable, relational discussion about who Jesus is.

And if the book does that one very simple thing and if Jesus has the grace and the love to show up in the midst of those conversations, then I would be absolutely thrilled by that.

**Continue the *My Imaginary Jesus*  
experience online**



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**Visit the Imaginary Jesus Gallery!**

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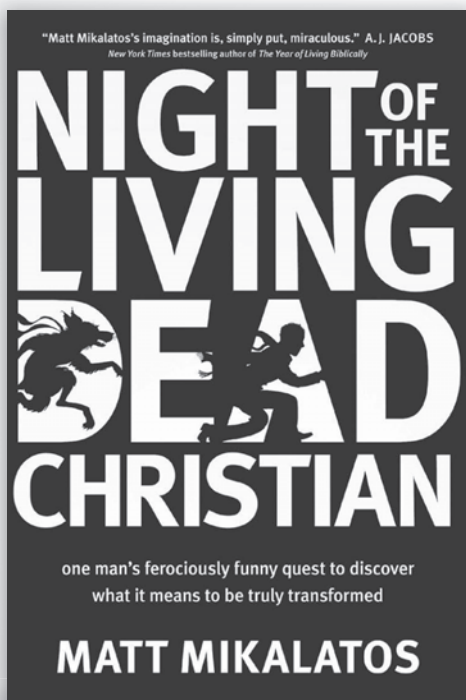


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