



PHIL ROBERTSON

#1 *NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLING AUTHOR

THE THEFT OF AMERICA'S SOUL

BLOWING THE LID OFF THE LIES
THAT ARE DESTROYING OUR COUNTRY

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THE THEFT OF AMERICA'S SOUL

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BLOWING THE LID OFF THE LIES THAT ARE DESTROYING OUR COUNTRY

PHIL ROBERTSON



THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798

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INTRODUCTION

In April of 1966, *Time* raised a ruckus when it printed this question in red block letters against a black background: “Is God Dead?”¹

It was a shocking cover posing a shocking question, and that question took root in the public dialogue of the day. Scientists, preachers, insurance agents, housewives—everyone from New York to California was drawn into the discussion. Even us river rats down in Northern Louisiana. But if the cover was provocative, the story inside the magazine was even more provocative.

“Is God dead?” the article opened. “It is a question that tantalizes both believers, who perhaps secretly fear that he is, and atheists, who possibly suspect that the answer is no.” The writer added that modern churchmen were trying to reconcile God’s supposed death with their brand of Christianity. “A small band of radical theologians,” he wrote, “has seriously argued that the chorus must accept the fact of God’s death, and get along without him.” These theologians

believed it was time for the church to figure out a way to “write a theology without theos, without God.”

Huh?

The disappearance of God in art, politics, and economics led to the death of God, some claimed in the article. Modern science had undermined or explained the mysteries of God in the natural world, others said. And in the wake of God’s supposed death, many believers in the modern church turned to other things in search of meaning. Psychiatry, Zen, and drugs were the new sources of meaning for so many. Others had “quietly abandoned all but token allegiance to the churches, surrendering themselves to a life of ‘anonymous Christianity’ dedicated to civil rights or the Peace Corps.”

Anonymous Christianity.

What in the world?

This *Time* article explored the very things I’d hear on my college campus at Louisiana Tech University later that year. My professors hung their hats on Nietzsche, Darwin, and Freud. Man’s ancestors crawled out of the salt water, they said. Man’s notions of right and wrong were taught, handed down; morality was a set of fabricated human constructs, they said. Morality was relative. Sexuality was relative. Nothing was absolute. God, the old white-bearded judge in the sky, was a myth. What’s more, professor after professor implied that if man could liberate himself from this archaic myth, he’d find true freedom.

Man could be his own judge.

Man could be his own master.

Man could be the arbiter of his own freedom.

Man could be the center of his own existence.

Today, many point to that *Time* article as the first time the elephant in the room—the question of whether God was still hanging around—was addressed in the broader market. Some of those same folks point to that article as the culmination of 1960s enlightenment. I know the truth about the sixties, though, because I lived them. The truth is, the sixties were anything but enlightened. They were very dark.

In the sixties a deep sleep-ism settled over our country. Atheism, agnosticism, humanism, moral relativism, naturalism, personalism, rationalism, materialism—all the isms washed over us. These isms led America deeper into sexual immorality, greed, and the wholesale slaughter of the unborn. The isms led us into debauchery. I know this because, to my embarrassment, those isms washed over me. For a time, they led me down the same road of sin, a road I'll write more about in this book.

It's been more than fifty years since the publication of that *Time* article, and almost as many years since I was freed from the lies written about in that article. How was I freed? Only through an encounter with the living God.

The last time I checked, God ain't dead. He is very much alive. It's a fact. What's more, the latest polls I've seen indicate that the vast majority of Americans know this to be true. More than 90 percent of Americans believe in God.² But despite the fact that God isn't dead, despite the fact that the majority of us believe that to be

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true, why do so many Americans seem to continue down the road of their isms? Why do so many continue toward death and destruction?

I suppose the Devil makes them do it.

Time presented Nietzsche's thesis, the thesis that "self-centered man had killed God, and that settled that." Here's what Mr. Nietzsche failed to realize: that declaration was far from settled. Here's what else he failed to realize: if the God of the Bible is dead, man has no hope of experiencing eternal life. Of course, Nietzsche discovered the truth just after he took his last breath. Nanoseconds after crossing over death's threshold, the German philosopher stood at the judgment seat of the wild, fearsome, Lord of the universe, the living God.

It's been forty-three years since my encounter with God, and I can tell you, I'm not running from anyone or anything; I'm not enslaved to the isms of the world. And if America would awaken to that same truth, the truth and good news Jesus came to bring us, it might just change everything. In this book, I aim to show you this very thing.

There's a lot of bad news today. Suicide rates are up. Abortion runs rampant. Acts of terrorism plague the world. But once you understand how bad the bad news is, you'll appreciate the good news—and it's really good. Once you appreciate the bad news, you'll have the ability to truly adore the good news. What is that good news? Follow with me. Come and see.



***THE LIE:* GOD IS DEAD.**

***THE TRUTH:* THE GOD OF THE BIBLE IS
NOT DEAD AND HE NEVER WILL BE.**

I watched Miss Kay's Volkswagen Bug pull from the trailer and disappear. She'd taken whatever household items she could—some kitchen utensils, a few pots and pans, three folding lawn chairs, the black-and-white television—and she stuffed them into the trunk. She'd loaded the boys into their seats and crammed their clothes and keepsakes around them. She'd even taken their toothbrushes.

Miss Kay, my wife of only a few years, was leaving. Maybe for good.

Before the fight that resulted in me showing Miss Kay the door, I'd been at home alone with the boys: Alan, Jason, and Willie. I was sitting on the porch, fuming while I waited to go out with my friends per my usual routine. As I sat and stewed, as the seconds ticked by, I grew more restless. I'd already started drinking and was about half-lit when Miss Kay finally walked through the front door.

"You're late," I said. "Again."

She apologized and blamed it on work, but I thought I knew better, and I told her so. I accused her of running around on me. I accused her of lying to cover it up. I was sure she was a cheater, I said, and though there was no real evidence to bolster my accusation,

I was convinced. And what was most upsetting, her running around had disrupted my night. It had interfered with my plans for freedom and fun, my fishing, drinking, and carousing in the woods on State Line Road. This was the last time.

The argument escalated. So did my voice. And that's when I said the words that triggered a series of life-altering events, the words that would eventually open the door of God's grace to me.

"You're ruining my life!" I roared.

"You've been ruining my life for ten years!" she yelled back.

"Get out," I said, pointing to the door, "and take your kids with you!" As if they weren't my kids too.

Miss Kay shook from head to toe while she gathered what she could as fast as she could. Still, she knew this was the end of the line. She didn't grovel. She didn't beg. She was resolved to give me exactly what I'd asked for. In less than an hour, she'd disappeared into a Louisiana rainstorm. I stood in that rain and watched her go, and there, in that moment, I had no remorse. I thought I'd fixed my problem. I thought I was finally free.

Of course, a fight of this magnitude isn't made in a moment, or a day, or even a month. This last standoff between Miss Kay and me grew from years of unrest. What was the source of that unrest? I suppose I thought Miss Kay was cramping my style. I needed freedom, and for so many years, I'd been busy chasing some version of it. Freedom from the structure. Freedom from the law. Freedom from the rules. And there'd been so many rules.

I'd been reared by a God-fearing mother and father, and for as long as I can remember they had me in church. I attended my fair

share of Sunday morning services at my country Church of Christ, heard sermon after sermon for eighteen years. I took communion, drank the grape juice and ate the stale crackers. I heard message after message about what it meant to be a member of the church. “Hear, believe, repent, confess, and be baptized,” they said, but what any of it meant was beyond me. It was religious talk, mumbo jumbo. All I knew for sure was that I was supposed to follow the rules—don’t drink; don’t cuss; don’t dance. I was supposed to behave like the church folks, even if behaving wasn’t my strong suit. And it wasn’t.

Miss Kay and I met while I was in high school and we’d fallen in love. She was a good girl with a beautiful smile, and her home life was an utter disaster. When she was fourteen, her father suffered a massive heart attack and died. All that grief derailed everything, and for a time, her mother was checked out, absent. Miss Kay needed saving, I thought; what’s more, I was just the man to save her. I genuinely loved her and wanted to spend the rest of my life with her. So, when we discovered Miss Kay was pregnant with our first child, Al, we had what we referred to as a “pioneer wedding” in the summer of 1964. It was a brief exchange of vows. No minister. No marriage certificate. It’d be 1968 before we’d call a justice of the peace and make it legal, but in those days, our pioneer wedding was enough for us.

I’d been offered a scholarship to play on the football team at Louisiana Tech University. So, in the fall of that same year, Miss Kay and I packed up what little we had, and we made our way to Ruston, Louisiana. The sixties were in full swing when we arrived on campus; it was the height of the hippie movement. Only months earlier,

Time had asked the question “Is God Dead?” And within days of starting classes, I realized my professors had already reached their own conclusions: God was, in fact, dead, and so, man was free. Free to party. Free to join the sexual revolution. Free to be whomever he wanted. Free to chase happiness.

I sat in those classes, semester after semester. Psychology classes. Biology classes. Philosophy classes. And because I’d never heard the good news of the living God, I began to buy what these professors were selling. If it were true, if God was dead, shouldn’t I be free to chase my own happiness?

I graduated college by the skin of my teeth in 1969 and entered the masters of education program at Louisiana Tech that same year. That fall, I began teaching English and coaching sports in Junction City, Arkansas, while I took my master’s classes at night. At Junction City I met Big Al Bolen on the first day of school. He was a large man with an even larger intellect, and his appetite for a good party was even larger still. He was a science teacher and an atheist and, for whatever reason, we took a shine to each other from the start. I’d never been much of a partier before I met Big Al, but I was drawn to the kind of freedom he seemed to embody. We were inseparable in my days at Junction City, and he invited me into his rowdy lifestyle.

We’d teach during the day and raise hell during the night. On the weekends, we’d be the last ones out of the bar, and we’d take out for the river or the woods to run trotlines and poach. We’d meet up with a small band of miscreants just off the beaten path, and we’d get high, get drunk, and get laid, mostly in that order. I did it all despite the fact that I was a husband and a father.

For the first time, I was tasting what I thought was freedom—the drugs, the drinking, the sleeping around. With each passing night, I indulged a little more. For a time, that indulgence felt so good. It was a lifestyle I'd never experienced, but as is the Robertson way, I took to it like a duck to water.

As the years wore on, my behavior became more erratic and unruly. My partying began to spill into the week; I was losing control. On so many occasions, I'd come through the trailer door after a night of partying, and there'd be Miss Kay, tending the children and waiting on me. So often I'd shift the blame; I'd light into her and accuse her of her own infidelities, of sleeping around. The irony was not lost on her, and she'd protest, tell me that she was too busy working and raising our passel of boys to cheat. (Willie had joined the family in 1972.) She was trying her best to hold the family together, she said. What's more, she knew I was guilty of my own indiscretions, and she did not shy away from confronting me.

"Why are you acting this way? Why don't you come home and be with your family?"

"I just need my freedom," I told her.

"Is this freedom? Really?"

Miss Kay was right. I didn't know what true freedom was.

As I wrote in *Happy, Happy, Happy*, my days of debauchery reached their height in 1975. I'd lost my job as a high school teacher the year before. If that wasn't enough, I'd owned a bar after that stint as a high school teacher and coach. And though it'd been a successful business venture, I'd lost it all in a violent dispute and

resulting fist fight with the property owners. The owners had shuttered the bar. They'd pressed charges too. I went on the run.

A fugitive from the law, I was flat broke. Needing employment, I took a job on an offshore rig in the Gulf of Mexico, and in the between times, I hid out in the woods and partied with Big Al and the gang while Miss Kay sorted out my legal troubles. I was shirking responsibilities, controlled by my own desires. The desire to drink. The desire for women. The desire to do what I wanted to do. But the more I chased my desires, the emptier I felt. And with this realization, a deep guilt set in.

The guilt. It was the thing that led to my outburst with Miss Kay that night in the trailer. It was the source of my fury, my anger, even my jealousy. Thinking it was my family who caused all the guilt, who kept me from experiencing ultimate freedom, I could only see one solution. I had to get rid of them. Maybe by pushing them away, I thought, I'd push the guilt away too.

So, after Miss Kay pulled away from the trailer in her VW, I decided to make the most of my newfound freedom. I'd live it up. I'd work when I wanted, hunt and fish when I wanted. I'd drink what I wanted, when I wanted, and with whomever I wanted. For a week or so, I did just that. I lived in my own bachelor's paradise. But it didn't take long for the truth to set in: my ideal bachelor's paradise was no kind of paradise at all. In fact, it was a prison of guilt, shame, and loneliness. Why didn't I feel a new sense of freedom? What had gone wrong?

I didn't have the benefit of the Scriptures in those days. No one had taught me the plain truth: God was not dead. In fact, he

was alive, and he'd written his law, the law of right and wrong on my heart. I didn't know that my guilt was a result of violating the very real law of a very real and living God. I didn't know the words of Paul:

. . . when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them. (Rom. 2:14–15)

Had I known the Word of God, maybe I would have understood that by choosing to violate God's law, I'd chosen judgment under the law. In that judgment, I'd condemned myself to my own prison of guilt and shame. If I had known the truth, maybe I would have understood why my conscience ached and why I felt so isolated and alone. But I didn't. And so, even with Miss Kay and the kids gone, even in the absence of responsibility, even in my bachelor's paradise, I couldn't escape my misery. Hunting, fishing, and partying had all lost their luster. I was ten times more a prisoner after Miss Kay left, and I knew it within the first week.

Little did I know, in those months, Miss Kay had her own encounter with the living God. She'd always believed in Him, but after she left me, she went all in. She'd given everything in her life to Him, and somewhere, miles away from my trailer prison, she was praying. She was praying I'd be miserable in my sin. She was praying

that misery would drive me into the arms of God. She was praying God would reconcile our marriage, our family. Miss Kay was praying for my freedom.

I think it was the power of those prayers that wouldn't let me wallow in my misery for more than a month. And when that misery became too much to bear, and when I came to understand how empty my life was, I slid into the driver's seat of my truck, hungover as I was. Miss Kay was working at Howard Brothers in Monroe, Louisiana at the time, and so I set off to find her. I held the steering wheel in some kind of a death grip as I drove into town, hands trembling from nerves and engine vibrations.

I cried from the minute I hit the city limits to the time I pulled into the store parking lot. I bawled, in fact, a thing I'd been too proud to do for most of my life. In that parking lot, I sat in my truck, engine idling, head on my steering wheel, wondering what I'd say to Miss Kay if she even agreed to see me. But before I could get up the nerve to open the truck door, there she was, tapping on my window. I rolled it down.

She was rigid as a pecan tree, looked sturdy as one too. She didn't say anything at first. She just stood there, staring. I broke the silence.

"I can't sleep. I can't eat. I'm miserable," I told her. "I just want my family back."

I was the one who groveled first. Those are the facts.

"I'll quit drinking this time," I said, but I could tell she didn't believe me. It was a hollow promise, one I'd made too many times before.

“No,” she said. “Promises aren’t enough, Phil. You need help.”

She was right. The truth was, I couldn’t any more get myself sober than Big Al could stop being big. Agreeing with Miss Kay’s assessment, I remembered the only man who’d ever had the guts to try to teach me something about God during my partying years. His name was Bill, and he was the preacher from my sister’s church. Years ago, before I lost the beer joint outside of Junction City, he’d waltzed in with my sister and offered to teach me the good news of God. I, of course, had refused to hear it.

“Think you could find that preacher who had enough guts to come to the bar a few months back?”

She nodded and said she’d been going to his church for the last several months. She gave me the address to her apartment and asked me to meet her there at five o’clock. The preacher, Bill Smith, would be there, she said.

That night, Bill sat across from me at Miss Kay’s makeshift dinner table—a small card table that almost didn’t fit in her tiny apartment—and he asked a pointed question.

“Do you know the gospel?”

I stared at him, and I reckon my look said all he needed to know.

“What do you think of when you hear the word ‘gospel,’ Phil?”

“I don’t know,” I said. “The Chuck Wagon Gang? Gospel music?”

“Do you know the good news?” he asked.

The good news of what? I’d been to church for the first eighteen years of my life, I told him, but I’d never really heard what could be called *good news*. I’d only been told the stories of the Old Testament

characters, maybe a few things about instrumental music and church structure. I'd been told I needed to hear, believe, repent, confess, and be baptized, but every time I heard this formula, I was left thinking "Hear what? Believe what? Repent from what? Confess what?" No, I told Bill, to the best of my recollection I'd never heard any good news in church. Instead, I was given a do-right formula, and the sad truth was, I never felt like I could do right. I wasn't good enough.

"I see," he said. "Can I tell you the best news you've ever heard?" he asked.

I nodded.

"Do you trust me?"

"I don't trust anyone."

He smiled. "I wouldn't either, not considering the fellas you've been running around with."

He pointed to the Bible on the table next to him.

"Do you trust this?" he asked.

"Sure, I trust it. But my father told me never to take a man's word at face value, especially about the Bible. You can share your story of the Bible with me Mr. Preacher Man, but you should know I'm going to read every verse you quote for myself, so you'd better give it to me straight."

"Fair enough," Bill said before pulling a folded restaurant napkin from his pocket. He drew a series of hieroglyphs on that napkin. First, he drew an arrow pointing down. Then a cross. Next a half circle. Then an arrow pointing up. Finally, he drew an arrow pointing down.

"Let's keep it simple," he said, then he shared how God made

man for fellowship, but how man broke God's law. As a consequence, men had been separated from God ever since. "But God never wanted that separation," he said, "and so, he made a way."

He pointed to the first arrow and explained how the God who created the universe loved man enough to step into that creation. Jesus was God's very Word made flesh, he said, and Jesus came and lived among his people. He healed the sick, made the lame walk, and brought provision to the poor. That same Jesus preached the ultimate good news: those who followed him would be free from sin and guilt and would have an eternal home with him.

Bill pointed to the cross he'd drawn on the napkin, then explained how Jesus's teachings made the religious folks angry. In fact, Jesus made the rulers so angry they'd nailed him to a cross. Here's what they didn't know, though: when Jesus went to the cross, he took on the sins of the whole world, even the sins of those religious rulers who crucified him. He took on the penalty of our separation.

He paused and asked if I was following. I told him I was, and he pointed to the semicircle, the dome. After his death, Jesus was laid in a tomb, Bill said. He pointed to the next arrow, the arrow pointing up, and he laid out the scriptures showing how Jesus conquered death, how he rose from the dead. The final arrow showed how Christ would return for those who believed.

"He's coming back for his people, for those who've trusted in his death, burial, and resurrection," Bill said. "Then, he'll take us home to live with him in eternity."



I sat there, stunned. I'd gone to church for years. How had I missed this? God could forgive me? He could free me from sin and guilt, even with all the things I'd done? He'd allow me to live in eternity with him? It was the most compelling story I'd ever heard. This was truly good news!

He finished his mini-sermon and asked me what I thought.

"I've never heard anything like it," I said, then I gave him the hardest look I could muster. "I'm going to read every verse you gave me, and if you're not telling the truth, I'll know it. If it doesn't add up, we're done."

Unfazed, he nodded and then asked me whether I'd be willing to meet with him the following evening. I told him I would.

That same night, I reviewed the scriptures he'd referenced. I read the first chapter of the Gospel of John, and sure enough, there it was. The very living God—the God who was surely not dead—came to earth in the form of Jesus. I read of his life, his death, and his resurrection. In Paul's writings, I came to understand that Jesus had died as a sacrifice for my sins. It was this sacrifice that made a way for me (1 Cor. 15:3–5).

I read the promises of John, how choosing to be in fellowship with Jesus would free me from all sins—past, present, and future. Finally, in the book of Acts, I read the ultimate promise. Jesus would return for everyone who believed in him.

Sure enough, the story was just as Bill said. The Bible showed how God was very much alive, and how he made a way for forgiveness of my sin. He could free me of all my guilt and could solve my ultimate problem—death. The notion of freedom from guilt and death filled me with great peace, a peace of mind I'd never experienced. I knew this story was the solution to all my problems. It was the solution to my disorienting drunkenness, my promiscuity, my search for freedom. And the more I considered it, the more I came to see that it satisfied a deep spiritual longing I didn't even know I had.

I met with Bill the next evening and told him I'd done my homework. I'd reviewed every scripture he gave me, and sure enough, his story panned out. It was the greatest story I'd ever heard, I said, and I wanted to follow this Jesus. I wanted to be baptized.

That night, in a near-empty auditorium with Bill Smith, Miss Kay, and my three boys, I gave my confession of faith. I believed in the saving work of Jesus and wanted to be free of sin and guilt. I wanted to follow him in baptism. Down into the water I went and when I came up from that cleansing flood I knew I was a changed man. Somehow, in that water, I'd encountered God. And that was the moment I decided I'd share the good news of Jesus with anyone God put in my path.

I stepped out of that baptistery, made my way to Miss Kay and the boys, and gave each of them a soggy hug. There was a new joy in this embrace with Miss Kay; a shift was already happening. The peace and strength I'd seen in Miss Kay over those last two days began to fill me too. Everything seemed so much lighter. And

though I wasn't sure how I'd stay on the straight and narrow, shaky as I was, I figured God would make a way. Wasn't this the promise of all those scriptures I'd studied?



Years later, Bill Smith told me that our meeting at Miss Kay's apartment convinced him to begin sharing the good news of God through that same little diagram he showed me. He called it "The Witness" and for years he carried it with him everywhere he went. The church had it translated into multiple languages and missionaries shared it around the world. It's proven to be a powerful tool and, following Bill's example, I still share it with anyone God brings to me: the rich, the poor, the powerless and powerful.

In 2016, just before the presidential election, I had the privilege of meeting with then presidential nominee Donald Trump in Washington, D.C. at the Values Voter Summit. There, I asked whether I could share some good news with him. He agreed, and I pulled out a copy of 'The Witness' I'd drawn on a card.

"Whether you win or lose, don't miss this," I said. "This is the most important thing you'll ever hear."

I explained the diagram and shared how the living God had made a way for us to have fellowship with him. I shared the truth of Jesus, of his death, burial, resurrection, and ascension. I shared how belief in Jesus might free him from all his past and future sins. I shared how he might come to live for eternity. When I finished, I looked up at him, wondering what he might say.

He pointed to the diagram, which I'd placed on his desk. "Can I have that?" he asked. I handed it to him and he folded it up and put it in his pocket.

I don't know if President Trump had ever heard the truth of God before that day, and I don't know whether he's accepted the message I shared with him. But here's what I know: like all of us, God has written the truth of His law on the president's heart. And so, sooner or later (if He hasn't already), I pray that God sees fit to lead him into that truth. I hope President Trump has a freeing encounter with the God who is most certainly alive, the God who cannot be killed by human hands.

If there's one thing I know, it's this: an encounter with the living God is the only hope for mankind. It's the only hope for President Trump, for me, for America. It's the only hope for true freedom and lasting peace. And the God of the universe has made a way for us to have this kind of encounter. That way is Jesus, the very personification of God, the very hope of the world.

The personification—the one men believed they killed—defeated death. He is alive, no matter what the professors, psychologists, and scientists say.