

By

Mark McGee



*Surviving Religion 101: Letters to a Christian Student on Keeping the Faith in College* (Michael J. Kruger, Crossway, 2021) is a wonderful book for parents and students to read, especially with students heading off to college in a few weeks.

Dr. Michael Kruger is the President and Samuel C. Patterson Professor of New Testament and Early Christianity at the Charlotte campus of Reformed Theological Seminary. He has served as president of the Evangelical Theological Society (2019) and is the author of many books including *Christianity at the Crossroads: How the Second Century Shaped the Future of the Church, Canon Revisited* (Crossway 2012) and *The Gospel of the Savior*. He is also editor and contributor to *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the New Testament* (Crossway, 2016).

Dr. Kruger wrote that he had planned to write this book years ago, but other projects took precedent. He explained what spurred him to write it now.

*Perhaps not surprisingly, the primary reason for the reawakening was a life change relevant to its theme: my daughter Emma was accepted as a student at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the very place I had begun my own undergraduate studies exactly thirty years before. As I pondered her departure and the many complex and difficult challenges that awaited her, I remembered afresh my own university experience. As I explain in the introduction below, I was decidedly unprepared for what I would experience in college. And I wanted to make sure that she (and many other Christian college students) would not enter that experience unprepared. At that point, I knew this book had to be written. It was time.*

“Deconversion” is a problem among young people who leave their homes and high schools for college. Dr. Kruger wrote that no one should be under the illusion that his book would somehow keep Christian college students from converting, but hopes it may be a “nudge in the right direction.”

*But this book is written for my children, Emma, John, and Kate, three of the brightest lights in my life. Even if your lights flicker in college, may they never go out. And my prayer is that this book will help your light burn all the brighter, through college and for the rest of your life.*

In his Introduction, Dr. Kruger admitted that he was not prepared for college “intellectually” and learned the hard way that intellectual preparation was what he needed more than anything.

*But my lack of preparation wasn't just because I was a teenager. The Christian culture in which I grew up also played a role. The most important issues in the evangelical world of my youth were personal conversion (was I saved?) and personal piety (did I live like a Christian?). To be clear, I think these two issues are very important, and I am tremendously grateful to have grown up in churches that did not ignore them (in our current*

*day, many churches need a renewed focus on them). But generally speaking, my theological training stopped there. There was very limited instruction on the Christian worldview—what we believe and why we believe it—and virtually no instruction on how to respond to non-Christian thinking.*

Dr. Kruger shared his personal story of how a young and engaging professor challenged his faith. That professor's name was Bart Ehrman.

*Although I could not have known it at the time, I was taking a class with a scholar who would become one of Christianity's loudest and most prolific critics. Ehrman, now the James A. Gray Distinguished Professor at UNC, would go on to publish more than thirty books about the New Testament and early Christianity—five of which became New York Times best sellers. And these books, generally speaking, rehearse the same claims about the*

*New Testament I experienced in the university classroom: it is untrustworthy, is filled with mistakes, is poorly transmitted, contains many books that are forgeries, and so on.*

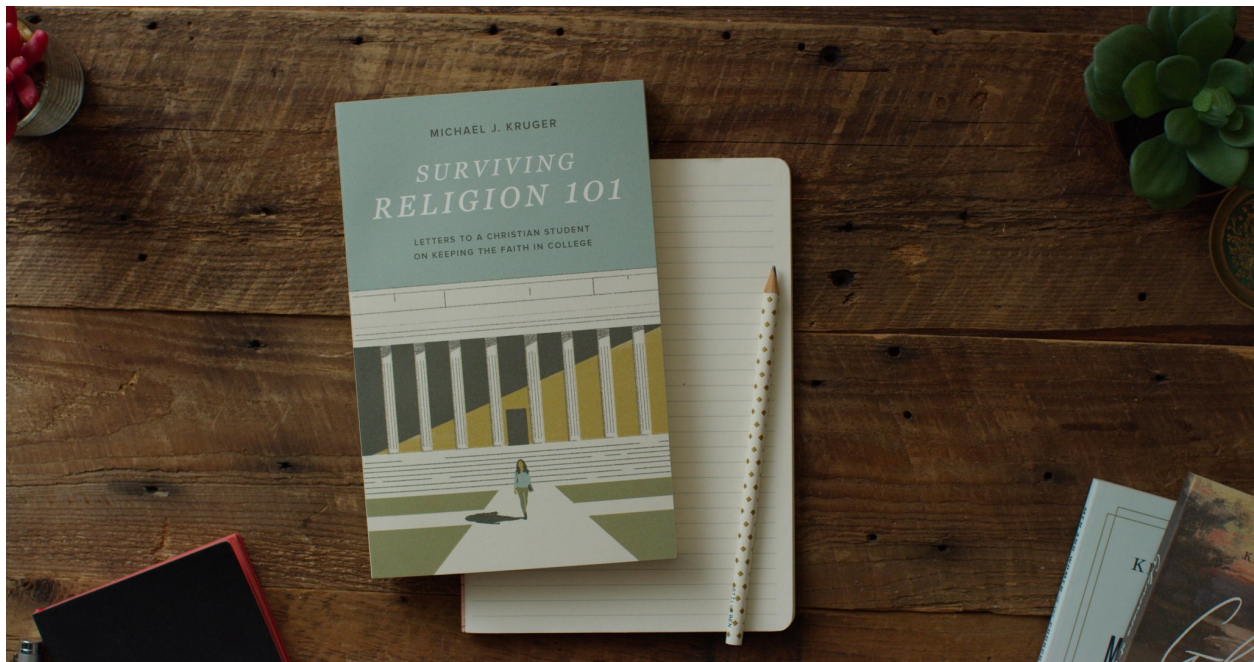
Dr. Kruger decided to see if there were answers to Ehrman's questions and claims and discovered that Christians had offered answers since the early days of Christianity.

*In short, there was a whole other side to the argument, even though that other side was never discussed or explored in class ... My desire is that Surviving Religion 101 provides an intellectual pathway for Christian students so that they can keep their faith without sacrificing their intellectual integrity.*

Dr. Kruger approach to writing *Surviving Religion: 101* is unique. He structured each chapter as a letter to her that answers a question or series of questions he knew she would face.

*I am not writing for scholars, nor even for skeptics. I am writing for students.*

I left church in high school and became an atheist while in college. A book like this may have prepared me to deal with the challenges I faced. It may be just the book for you or your child as they head for college this Fall.





## Publisher Description

**“I can’t imagine a college student—skeptic, doubter, Christian, struggler—who wouldn’t benefit from this book.” —Kevin DeYoung**

For many young adults, the college years are an exciting period of selfdiscovery full of new relationships, new independence, and new experiences. Yet college can also be a time of personal testing and intense questioning—especially for Christian students confronted with various challenges to Christianity and the Bible for the first time.

Drawing on years of experience as a biblical scholar, Michael Kruger addresses common objections to the Christian faith—the exclusivity of Christianity, Christian intolerance, homosexuality, hell, the problem of evil, science, miracles, and the reliability of the Bible.

If you're a student dealing with doubt or wrestling with objections to Christianity from fellow students and professors alike, this book will equip you to engage secular challenges with intellectual honesty, compassion, and confidence—and ultimately graduate college with your faith intact.

# Contents

## *Introduction*

Chapter 1: I'm Worried about Being a Christian at a Secular University—How Will I Survive?

Chapter 2: My Professors Are Really Smart—Isn't It More Likely That They're Right and I'm Wrong?

Chapter 3: There Are a Lot of Different Views Here—How Can We Say That Christianity Is the Only Right Religion?

Chapter 4: My Christian Morals Are Viewed as Hateful and Intolerant—Shouldn't I Be More Loving and Accepting?

Chapter 5: I Have Gay Friends Who Are Kind, Wonderful, and Happy—Are We Sure That Homosexuality Is Really Wrong?

Chapter 6: The Concept of Hell Seems Barbaric and Cruel—Wouldn't a Loving God Save Everyone?

Chapter 7: There's So Much Suffering in the World—How Could a Good God Allow Such Evil?

Chapter 8: Science Seems Like It Can Explain Everything in the Universe—Do We Really Need to Believe in God?

Chapter 9: I'm Finding It Harder to Believe Events Like the Resurrection—How Can I Believe in Miracles If I've Never Seen One?

Chapter 10: Everything I Believe Seems to Hinge on the Truth of the Bible—How Do We Know It’s Really from God?

Chapter 11: My Professor Keeps Pointing Out Contradictions in the Gospels—Can I Still Trust Them?

Chapter 12: I’m Being Told That Ancient Scribes Changed the Words of the New Testament Thousands of Times—Is That True?

Chapter 13: My Professor Says That Books Were Left Out of Our Bibles—Can We Be Sure We Have the Right Ones?

Chapter 14: Some Parts of the Bible Seem Morally Troubling—How Can a Book Be from God If It Advocates Oppression or Genocide?

Chapter 15: Sometimes It Feels Like My Faith Is Slipping Away—How Do I Handle Doubts about What I Believe?

*Postscript: What Do I Do If It Feels Like Christianity Just Isn’t Working for Me?*

## Endorsements

“This is a great book! I can’t imagine a college student—skeptic, doubter, Christian, struggler—who wouldn’t benefit from it. In fact, I’m sure almost anyone would be helped by this warm and intelligent apologetic for the Christian faith. I will recommend this book often, after first giving it to my own children.” **Kevin DeYoung**, Senior Pastor, Christ Covenant Church, Matthews, North Carolina; Associate Professor of Systematic Theology, Reformed Theological Seminary, Charlotte

“Having sent four children off to large state schools for their college years, I am thankful that Michael Kruger has written this book. With compassion and clarity, he addresses key questions that often precipitate a crisis of faith for young believers. This accessible book equips families for good conversations about challenges to our faith, helping us trade panic and doubt for blessed assurance.” **Jen Wilkin**, Bible teacher; author, *Women of the Word*; *None Like Him*; and *In His Image*

“Every fall, untold thousands of young Christians step onto the college campus and are instantly engaged in the battle of ideas. They need help and encouragement, and Michael Kruger offers a wealth of both in this timely book. The help comes in his serious and faithful confrontation with the big questions that are unavoidable on campus. The encouragement comes from a wise author who is also a father and friend. The chapters are written as letters, and every college student you know needs every letter in this book. Where was this book when I went to college?” **R. Albert Mohler Jr.**, President and Centennial Professor of Christian Theology, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

“*Surviving Religion 101* is a crucial book for all Christians to read because the world that we inhabit has become the university culture of Michael Kruger’s twenties. An epistolary book composed of letters from a loving Christian father to a faithful daughter entering the university, it invites us to ask crucial questions that help us make our calling and election sure. Are we intellectually prepared to

understand and respond to the non-Christian thinking that surrounds us? If we believe that personal conversion and personal piety are enough for the Christian college student to survive, we are dangerously wrong. Our lack of intellectual preparation may explain why so many faithful Christians have had their faith shipwrecked by so-called progressive Christianity, living now with cultural change and social activism as proof of holiness. And for this reason, this book is as necessary for students entering Christian colleges as it is for those entering secular ones. Thanks be to God for this book. May it be used by God to preserve the faith of our college students and bring their unbelieving professors into the kingdom of God.” **Rosaria Butterfield**, Former Professor of English, Syracuse University; author, *The Gospel Comes with a House Key*

“The move from home to college and those influences that grip the mind from the age of eighteen to twenty-two play an absolutely decisive role in shaping the rest of our lives. The need for us to claim the Christian faith as our own at that point—and not as something we have merely absorbed

from our parents or school friends—is exhilarating; but the process of so doing is often conflicted and intellectually, morally, and socially difficult. Michael Kruger is a well-known scholar, but he is also a parent with a vested interest in this issue and someone who himself experienced the range of challenges as a young student. In this clearly written book, he draws on all this to engage with the panoply of challenges that people face at college. While he covers the ‘usual suspects’—the intellectual challenges to faith—what is so brilliant and helpful about this book is the way in which he understands and addresses the form of challenges to faith as they manifest themselves in today’s therapeutic culture. Many students struggle with the claims of their faith because the moral tastes of our modern world make it seem so implausible. Kruger understands this and has written a book that speaks precisely to the kinds of problems that afflict college culture today. Students—and their parents—will find this work most helpful and enlightening.” **Carl R. Trueman**, Professor of Biblical and Religious Studies, Grove City College



“I wish I’d had a guide like Michael Kruger when I was in college. There’s no one I trust more to help students navigate the difficult challenges to our faith that arise in both the classroom and also the dorm room.” **Collin Hansen**, Vice President for Content and Editor in Chief, The Gospel Coalition; Host, *Gospelbound* podcast

“Today, Christian students in secular universities will face not just intellectual challenges to their faith. Perhaps even more caustic will be the social and moral pressures. Michael Kruger ably addresses the intellectual issues, and as a real, high-powered Bible scholar, he is especially effective in dealing with the objections to God’s word. But he also strengthens students for the more subtle spiritual trials they will encounter, addressing his readers with empathy and grace.” **Gene Edward Veith Jr.**, author, *Loving God with All Your Mind* and *Post-Christian*

“I’ve been in full-time college ministry for over two decades, and I can say with certainty that Michael Kruger has written a gift to campus ministers and college students everywhere. *Surviving Religion 101* is winsome, personal, intelligent, and incredibly helpful for addressing today’s common objections to Christianity. I plan to buy a copy for each of my elementary school–aged daughters and gift it to them when they graduate from high school. I absolutely loved this book.” **Shelby Abbott**, campus minister; speaker; author, *DoubtLess*

“Michael Kruger has given students and parents a welcome dose of biblical wisdom and insight for the college experience. With rigor and clarity, he provides helpful answers to hard questions. His encouragement to find that ‘band of brothers and sisters’ who share a common focus and concern for truth while moving through the college years is key in awakening confidence and trust in the Lord. If you’re looking for substantive help for difficult conversations, this book will deliver.” **Rod Mays**, National

Coordinator Emeritus, Reformed University Fellowship;  
Adjunct Faculty, Reformed Theological Seminary

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[We received a review copy from Crossway Publishing]