

MR. MONKEY & THE BANANA OF WISDOM

A STORY ABOUT MY EXPECTATIONS

As you read along with me throughout this book—I hope you keep asking a couple questions:

What cultural expectations and assumptions do I bring to Christianity?

Do these expectations shape the way I define my Christianity?

If so...What should I be doing to practice being Christian?

But, before we can get into all of that, we have to start with the humble banana and the banana expert Mr. Monkey.

This may help you understand my approach to this entire book:

One day I was watching a National Geographic special on various jungle animals and such. I can't entirely remember the topic of the show, but I do remember the monkeys and the bananas.

The monkeys and the bananas blew me away.

So, here I am, sitting and watching these monkeys jump around and eating various things such as fruits and bugs and such, but oh man, how they loved those bananas!!!

Now, since I was kid, I've known that monkeys ate bananas.

But, then it happened.

This monkey—I'll call him Mr. Monkey—picked up a banana.

Mr. Monkey turned the banana upside down,
Mr. Monkey pinched it open...

Let's hit the pause button.

Instantly I thought: "What the heck! That monkey is an idiot! What a stupid, stupid monkey! He doesn't even know how to open a banana...what kind of monkey doesn't even know how to open a banana???" Everybody on the planet knows you open the banana from the stem....

and that's when Mr Monkey pinched the bottom of the banana.

The banana opened
Effortlessly
Perfectly

Like no other banana I had ever tried to open.
And the monkey chomped on his banana like it was nothing.

Like it was nothing.

And just before the camera switched to another shot—Mr. Monkey looked at it and calmly chomped on his banana, as if to taunt me with his accomplishment.

I sat there stunned.
I sat there shocked.

It was like one of those "ahaaa!" moments I have started having with Jesus over the past few years. That is when I heard this whisper in my head: "Maybe...just maybe...the monkey knew something I didn't. Maybe I've been assuming I knew 'the right' way to open a banana all these years!"

What the heck?!?!?!

I ran into the kitchen and grabbed a banana and turned it 'upside down' and pinched... and voila!

Open banana!!!

Mr. Monkey was a genius.

FYI: {A FEW THINGS THAT I WOULD LIKE YOU TO CONSIDER}

Then it hit me: how did I not know about this before?
How could this possibly happen to a sexy and sophisticated guy like me?

I have a college education.
I have traveled the world.
I know thousands of random worthless facts.

How is it possible that I missed this banana revelation? I began to seriously consider: Had I ever seen someone not open a banana from the stem? Nope. Did I assume that everyone opened the banana from the stem because that is all I ever saw? Yep. Did these people I witnessed opening bananas — did they simply pass down the method they saw their parents using? Yep. Had I seen monkeys open bananas before, and just expected them to open it from the stem — and therefore didn't pay much attention? Yep. It was my 'banana stem culture'.

I took what I saw and formed some expectations from it.
I expected that everyone opened bananas from the stem.
I expected to find everyone opening bananas the right way.

I had never stopped to consider that anything outside my experience existed.
Until that Dang-Gone Mr. Monkey went and blew up my whole banana mindset!

Here is what I've learned from Mr. Monkey about life:

#1. *It's easy for all of us to enter something with certain cultural expectations* that completely shape our expectations and preclude us from actually thinking or listening. Literally my banana world was turned 'upside down'.

#2. *I see this with American Christianity — we see something patterned for us* and expect that this is 'the right and natural' way to do things. We have so many cultural expectations of being Christian. This is dangerous. It can leave us with a whole pile of bruised and unopened bananas.

#3. *I would bet many Christians feel bruised and unopened.* They wonder what they're supposed to be doing, beyond going to church. Our expectations have caused us to miss some things that seemed very natural to early Christians.

#4. *I want to put your fears at rest.* There are no bad guys in my little story. I haven't taken a theological leap that Christianity is now an orange, or a peach, or a kumquat. I still believe the orthodox Christian theological tenets of faith. I'm just asking if we haven't made some assumptions about how the banana is opened, about how we practice being Christians. We're drawing these expectations from our culture.

#5. *If we can identify what parts of our practice come from culture* and watch Jesus to see how He did it, maybe we will discover a new way of peeling the banana. If monkeys are experts on bananas, Jesus was an certainly an expert on life. Let's look at what He did and go do it. Let's play 'monkey see-monkey do.'

#6. *Our natural reaction is to figure out who is right:* stem openers or monkey pinchers. Resist this urge. I am not saying one is right and one is wrong. In fact, I am saying both practices could lead to fruit.

These are all themes you'll find in this book.

What I saw as upside down...

Mr. Monkey patterned a natural way to
Peel and eat his most favorite tasty treat.

The bottom line was this:

The issue wasn't Christianity.
The issue wasn't the banana.

The issue was the expectations I added to Christianity.
The issue was the expectations that I added to opening a banana.

My expectations were the issue.

Luckily, we already have the first expectation out of the way...

Thanks Mr. Monkey.

{THE END}

FYI: {A FEW THINGS THAT I WOULD LIKE YOU TO CONSIDER}