

Different Paths



**Sam Kinison & Evel Knievel:
Two journeys to the same place**

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Introduction

Sam Kinison and Evel Knievel. Now there are two names I bet you'd never expected to see in the same sentence. Nor ones I thought I'd ever write about. But, as incredible as it may seem, they both have something in common. Their faith. You heard it right. These two party hardy rebels both share a belief in God. Several years ago, before my faith took root, I read an amazing story about both and the path each took in their spiritual lives that left an impression on me.

And talk about different paths.

Kinison was born into a faith-driven, Christian family, became a preacher and then drifted a bit, only to have an amazing encounter shortly before his death; while Knievel became a believer late in life after years of drinking and womanizing. Two different, yet amazing stories. Be prepared to scratch your head!

Note: The following accounts were taken from various resources on the internet. To find them or more, search for "Evel Knievel conversion" or "Sam Kinison death" from your favorite search engine.

Last Words from a Pentecostal Comic



Sam Kinison was born in Yakima, Washington on December 8, 1953. His parents were Pentecostal preachers who preached in different churches around the country. Sam followed his dad's footsteps and became a Pentecostal preacher himself after attending Bible School in New York. He preached for seven years from 1970 to 1977. Kinison married in the mid-70's, but the marriage was short-lived due to her infidelity. Soon after he gave up the ministry and got involved in comedy. He began playing in small clubs in Texas beginning in 1977.

Soon thereafter Kinison was headlining nightclubs, starring in movies and television, and hanging out with celebrity friends like Rodney Dangerfield.

On April 10, 1992, Kinison was on his way to Laughlin, Nevada in his 1989 Pontiac Trans Am to perform at a sold-out show. Following in a van behind him and his new wife of six days Malika were Kinison's brother Bill and friend Carl LaBove. During the drive, a pickup truck driven by an intoxicated 17-year-old crossed the center lane and slammed head on into Kinison's car.

Kinison's brother and LaBove reported that the comedian's body was pushed between the seats of the car, still alive with no apparent injuries visible. They subsequently tried to encourage Kinison to lie down and relax. It was then that Kinison began to look off into the distance and began talking to no one in particular "I don't want to die. I don't want to die."



LaBove explained, "It was as if he was having a conversation, talking to some unseen somebody else, but some unseen person."

Then there was a pause as if Kinison was listening to the other person speak. Kinison then asked, "But why?" and then paused again to listen.

"Okay, okay.... okay," Kinison then responded.

LaBove said that the final "okay" was softly spoken. "The last 'okay' was so soft and at peace," said LaBove. "Whatever voice was talking to him gave him the right answer and he just relaxed with it. He was so sweet, like he was talking to someone he loved."

Kinison then died and couldn't be resuscitated. An autopsy revealed that he had suffered from a dislocated neck, torn aorta and torn blood vessels within his abdominal cavity. Kinison's wife was knocked unconscious but survived with a minor concussion.



Ironically, and sadly, Kinison's brother stated in an interview shortly after the accident that "...he (Sam Kinison) had told me when he decided to get out of the ministry that he had been in the ministry seven years and he had never made as much as five thousand dollars in any one year. So he wasn't very successful. He felt guilty about it even up until he got killed. He was actually going to go back in the ministry in May, and he got killed in April."

Moral of the story? It's never too late to change.

Using Evel for Good



Evel Knievel, as everyone who has had a television since the 1970's knows, is perhaps the world's best known daredevil, jumping his motorcycle from ramp-to-ramp over 75 times, sometimes successfully, and occasionally unsuccessfully. His horrendous accidents were probably more documented than his successful ones, and still can be relived on YouTube today. To his horror, I'm sure.

Throughout his career and retirement, Knievel was outspoken in his disdain of organized religion and vigorously rebuffed the appeals of family and friends to make peace with God. He told his first wife, a devout Christian, that he was not interested in heaven unless it was "populated with beautiful women and golf courses". So, for 68 years, Knievel believed in God, but he couldn't walk away from the gold, gambling, drinking, and women.

During the last couple of years of his life, however, his thoughts began to change. "I think about God a lot more than ever, though I used to ask him, 'Help me make a good jump,'" Knievel told *USA Today* in January 2007.

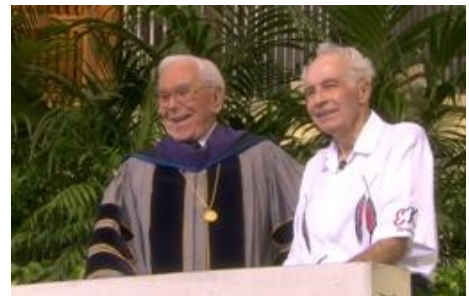
Although he always believed in God, and that there was a “God power”, Knievel had a hard time believing in Jesus Christ. However, on April 1, 2007, Knievel announced to a worldwide audience that he “believed in Jesus Christ” for the first time. He professed his personal faith in Christ and was baptized in front of over 4,000 people who gathered inside the Crystal Cathedral for Palm Sunday services in Garden Grove, California, and to thousands more via an “Hour of Power” telecast of the service to over 100 countries.

“I don’t know why I fought it so hard, I just did,” he told the audience. “But I think maybe it was the power of prayer. Maybe God just got sick and tired of me fighting it so much. He reached out and grabbed me and said, ‘Look, I just want you...you’ve got to stop this nonsense, you just come with Me.’”

Knievel told the congregation that he began thinking more about God prior to attending Daytona Bike Week in Florida in early March, 2007. While there, he decided to call an old friend whom he had not spoken to for more than thirty years. The friend happened to be a pastor who told Knievel that he would have his church pray for him. “My daughter had her whole church praying for me in Bozeman, Montana; and my ex-wife Linda, she’s had her whole church praying for me in Butte, Montana,” Knievel said. “And she’s prayed for me for 25 or 30 years that I would become a Christian.”

On the second night of Daytona Bike Week — a rowdy biker gathering known more for its alcohol and womanizing more than for religious contemplation — Knievel explained that he rose up from his bed in the middle of the night and shouted, “Devil, devil you bastard you, get away from me. I cast you out of my life.” He then went to the balcony of his hotel room and told the devil, “I will take you and throw you, throw you on the beach. You will be dead, you will be gone. I don’t want you around me anymore.”

“I don’t know if it was the power of the prayer, or of God Himself,” Knievel continued. “But it just reached out either while I was driving, or walking down the sidewalk, or sleeping; and the power of God in Jesus just grabbed me. It just took a hold of me so strong; I can’t tell you how strong it was...All of a sudden I just believed in Jesus Christ!”



He told the congregation, “I did everything I could. I just got on my knees and prayed that God would put His arms around me and never, ever, ever let me go. When I said [to the devil], ‘Get away from me,’ all of a sudden I was just overcome by the Spirit of God Almighty.”

After his unforgettable experience, he bought a Bible, the *Jesus of Nazareth* film, and Lee Strobel’s book, *The Case for Christ*.

As he shared his testimony, he encouraged the audience to not make the same mistake regarding Jesus Christ that he had made. “Do not let us come with any patronizing thoughts in our minds to say, ‘Oh yes, Jesus was a minister of his time, or a biblical person, a person who believed in God, who taught us, he was a teacher, a great human being.’ Jesus did not offer us that,” Knievel said. “He is the Son of God and if you don’t believe that Jesus Christ is what he says he is, you will surely die, you’ll die in your sins, believe me.”

The pastor of Crystal Cathedral looked out on the church and noticed most people were sobbing. "I went up front, and I said, 'I believe there is somebody who needs to be baptized here. Maybe up on that balcony or by that door or by that wall. So come forward,'" the pastor explained. "We started singing '*Amazing Grace*,' and I started baptizing people, baptizing them as fast as I could. I had a little candy dish of water. 'What's your name? Okay, I baptize you in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit'—crying the whole time and going to the next one."

The pastor continued this for 30 minutes, not realizing that four other pastors were baptizing just as quickly. During the second service, the response repeated itself. Together, the pastor estimates that between 500 and 800 people committed or rededicated their lives to God.

Knievel continued to share his experience and message up until he died in Clearwater, Florida, on November 30, 2007, at age 69.

Moral of the story? It's never too late to believe.