

GODLY Inc.

Does God exist?

No, but he could. YOU could create him.

GODLY Inc.

777-777-7777

“So how exactly does this work?” Joel narrowed his eyes on the tiny chip squeezed between the nurse’s forceps.

“This will be implanted in your ventromedial prefrontal cortex. That’s the part of your brain that controls--”

“Belief and reality perception.” Joel swallowed. “Yeah, I know. What I meant is, how is it going to feel? I mean, I’m not going to forget coming to Godly, so won’t I logically know that my “God” isn’t real?”

“We can erase your recollection of visiting Godly, for an additional fee, but remembering us won’t stunt your belief. Even if it doesn’t make logical sense, we guarantee your faith in your custom deity will still be as strong as ever. Most of our customers who do choose to keep their memory find ways to rationalize their experience here with their newfound devotion. In fact, I was speaking with a woman the other day who told me she believed that her God brought her to Godly so she could be saved.” The nurse smiled as she laid the chip and forceps on the desk. “When you want to believe something, your mind will find a way to rationalize anything that doesn’t make sense. It’s human nature.”

“So you’re going to make me stupid?”

“No. We’re going to make you a believer. How that changes you, for better or for worse, is dependent on you. But based on our customer reviews, we’re willing to bet it’s for the better.”

Joel fiddled with the cuff of his jacket, something he did so often that it was permanently wrinkled. It might have been noticeable if the rest of his jacket wasn’t equally as wrinkled, along

with his shirt and the hem of his pants as well. Mandy used to iron things for him. She didn't, however, comb Joel's scraggly hair for him, shine his shoes, or clean his smudged glasses, but without her around he stopped doing all that for himself.

The nurse picked up her tablet. In the crisp white light of the room, and in her immaculate white scrubs, she looked almost angelic compared to her patient. "So Joel," she said, "tell me what you want your god to be."

Joel squirmed in his seat. "Well, I want him to be holy. I suppose..."

The nurse laughed. "Alright, but I need something a little more specific. Do you want them so be male, female, or gender obscured? Or does it matter at all?"

"Male."

She tapped into her tablet. "Does race matter?"

"No!" Joel blurted out a little too quickly, taking in the representative's dark brown skin and coily black hair.

"Are you sure? Because we've found that customers usually prefer a God who is of the same ethnicity as them. If you'd like your God to be Caucasian Joel, then that's perfectly fine."

Joel squeezed his jacket cuff between his fingers. Though he wouldn't admit it, he'd sort of just assumed that God would be Caucasian. But if that wasn't the case, then it would probably be best to clarify.

"Um, yes then. You can make him white."

The nurse smiled and tapped again into her tablet. "What about his demeanor? Would you like him to be loving and patient, or punishing and wrathful?"

"Why would I want him to be wrathful?" Isn't the purpose of God to make you feel good? If not, then why was he even here?

“It depends on what you’d like to get out of this. If you’re trying to become a more upstanding individual, then having a God who you believe will punish you for immoral actions, or whatever you would like to define as immoral, is an excellent way to better yourself. On the contrary, if you would like to feel constantly accepted by someone and loved indefinitely, then we can create a God who will never abandon you.”

“What if I wanted my God to be, you know, all forgiving? Like, whatever I did, or whatever I’ve already done, it’s okay? I wouldn’t have to feel bad about it.”

The nurse nodded. “We can certainly do that. So long as you pick a decent set of morals to accompany that forgiveness. Participants who request Gods that forgive anything without having any moral guidelines have a tendency to do crazy things, knowing that their God will forgive them no matter what.”

Joel nodded. He certainly had no desire to do anything awful to anyone, and he wasn’t here seeking justification for any desired criminal or illicit activity.

The nurse carried on with her questions. Most of them were relatively unimportant to Joel. He picked a general set of morals; no killing, don’t steal, be nice and nice things will happen to you. The usual. Praying everyday is desired but not mandatory. And no matter what, God will always love you. The nurse tried to pitch him on a devil to compliment his new God, but Joel, already being a little apprehensive of his new God, decided to hold off on that for the time being.

When it seemed as if they had discussed almost everything one could discuss when creating God, Joel worked up the courage to ask about the one thing they hadn’t brought up yet, the topic most important to him.

“And...” The nurse looked up as Joel drew her attention back from her tablet. “What about...heaven?”

The nurse’s smile faded. “Generally we leave that a little open ended. We provide a moderate sureness that a heaven awaits for our customers, but that’s the one thing we can’t give you one-hundred percent belief in.”

Joel began to panic. “Why not?”

“Well,” she laid her tablet down. “We’ve found that when participants believe entirely in a perfect paradise waiting for them just beyond the thin veil of death, some attempt to...hasten their arrival there.”

Joel opened his mouth but the nurse cut him off before he could speak. “But if anything, that’s just a testament to the potency of our product. And it’s not as if you won’t have any faith in your afterlife, you will. It’s quite comforting, from what I’ve heard. But we can’t give you more than ninety-nine percent belief in it. Trust us, you need that one-percent of doubt.”

“I don’t want it for me,” Joel said. “I mean I do, but that’s not what I was worried about.” The nurse frowned. Who isn’t primarily concerned with the well being of their own immortal soul?

Joel took a deep breath. “Can you make me believe, with complete certainty, that my loved ones are in a better place?”

Oh. The nurse relaxed. She picked up her tablet and nodded. “Yes, that we can definitely do.”

With everything decided, all there was left to do was sign the paperwork and get ready for the procedure. Joel scribbled his name on the tablet, and he and the nurse were done. She left him alone with a pair of pills to take and a glass of water. He nervously choked them down. They

reminded him of the pills they'd made him take in the hospital. His heart quivered, remembering that time, but he pushed the thoughts back as best he could. Hopefully, they wouldn't hurt as much soon.

In no time at all, the nurse returned, along with the doctor, crisp in a lab coat just as bright as her nurse's scrubs. Perfect timing, as Joel was just starting to lose the feeling in the back of his head.

"Just relax," the doctor said. "The anesthesia pills won't affect your functioning, although I know it's an odd feeling not to be able to feel your head." The doctor steadied Joel's head, though he could barely feel her touch through the numbness claiming it. The nurse held his skull in place while the doctor inserted the new chip into her implantation tool.

"The chip will require a few hours to take hold," the doctor said, leveling the tool behind Joel's head. "I'd recommend going home and going to sleep. When you wake up in the morning, you'll be, well, a believer."

She punched the tool into Joel's head. He felt only a pinch as the chip cut through his skin, shot through his skull, and settled between the folds of his prefrontal cortex. Aside from the numbness, he didn't feel any different just yet. But that would come tomorrow.

Joel meandered home aimlessly. It was almost dark when he stumbled into the house. Clothes, paper plates, and unopened mail littered the living room, as well as the majority of his home. Except for the girls' room. But no one had gone in there in months. Not feeling like walking past it, or into his own room, Joel collapsed on the couch, and let himself drift to sleep there. If Godly was right, this would be the last night he went to bed feeling really, truly numb.

The next morning, Joel awoke a new man. Sunlight beamed through the sliding back door, and he woke up with a smile on his face. Was it possible? That he actually felt, okay?

Of course he was okay. He was more than okay. He had faith. He had God.

Joel jumped up from the couch and tore off his jacket. It was a raggedy old thing, he should have thrown it away a long time ago. There was a lot in the house that he should have thrown away a long time ago. Maybe he could use today to do that. But first, there was something he needed to do.

Freed of his useless jacket, Joel dropped to his knees, pressed his hands together, and bowed his head. It had been such a long time since Joel prayed. He hadn't attempted it since he was a child. But now, it felt like the most natural thing in the world.

"God, thank you for this wonderful day. Thank you for letting me find you. Thank you for this joy. Thank you for forgiving me, and please tell the girls I said hello. Amen."

With that, Joel hopped up, ready to embrace the day of endless possibilities before him. The first thing he did was pick up his cluttered living room and kitchen. Surprisingly, it only took a couple of hours. He even managed to organize the bills he'd neglected to read for weeks now, mostly from the hospital and insurance claims from the accident. How daunting they used to be to even think about. Now they were nothing but papers.

Steven called soon after that, and to the shock of Joel's old friend, he answered. Joel hadn't been out with friends in forever, despite them and everyone else trying to get him out into the world again. They made plans for dinner with a couple of other acquaintances. It would be nice to see everyone again. He could tell them about how amazing his experience with Godly was.

After running to the store to buy food for his first meal in months that wasn't either take out or microwaveable, Joel made himself the one breakfast food he excelled at cooking; chocolate-chip pancakes. As he poured the batter into the pan, a delicate smile crossed his face,

remembering hoisting little Lily up to sprinkle the chocolate chips into the batter, then Beth right after when she saw her sister. Those memories used to hurt so much, but now, they felt uplifting. After all, why should it hurt to think about the girls? It wasn't like they were gone, they were just in a different place. A better place.

His memory of the pancakes gave Joel another idea. When he was finished with breakfast, he gathered a few boxes from the garage and, for the first time in almost a year, made his way into the girls' room. It was just as he remembered. Pink walls, tiny twin beds, and countless dolls and coloring books cluttering their short play table and the butterfly rug under it. Why had he bothered to keep any of this? It wasn't like they were using it anymore. Some other little girls could make good use of these things. Besides, they probably had countless new toys wherever they were now.

Joel packed every box to the brim. Every teapot, teddy bear, and little dress disappeared into the cardboard. He even pulled the princess comforters off their beds and packed them up too. The girls' entire room was wiped away in no time at all. But why stop there? The girls weren't the only ones who were gone.

With a handful of trash bags, Joel made his way into what had once been his and Mandy's room, and stuffed every article of her clothes into the bags. After that, he packaged away her makeup, accessories, and anything else that wasn't assuredly his. Mandy had always been too pretty for makeup anyway. And she must have looked even more radiant as the angel she was now.

One call to the local salvation army, and all of the girls' belongings were gone. Joel even let them take the girls' beds and their play table, as well as Mandy's vanity. The only remnant

that any of them had ever lived in the house was the pink covering the girls' bedroom walls, and Joel had made plans to paint over those tomorrow.

Contentedly, Joel sat down on his now clear living room couch. He patted himself on the back for being so generous with the girls' things. Surely someone would get good use out of them. And now that it was gone, along with all that pointless weight he was carrying, he could focus on the future, knowing well and true that they were okay without him. And the accident wasn't at all his fault. He felt so light now. As if gravity itself had ceased having an effect on him.

The phone rang. Joel picked it up, hoping that Steven wasn't going to cancel on him. But it wasn't Steven. A number he didn't recognize danced across the screen. Curious, Joel answered the call and brought the phone up to his ear.

"Hello?"

"Hi, is this Joel?" A familiar female voice asked. But Joel couldn't quite remember where he'd heard it before.

"Yes, it is."

"Oh, hello," the woman said. "This Doctor Hayes, from Godly? I'm the one who did your procedure yesterday."

Joel sat up straighter. "Doctor Hayes, hello! Doctor, I feel wonderful. I've never felt so at peace. I'm having the most amazing day. I even prayed this morning and, I can't describe it, but I just knew that he heard me. This is heavenly, I don't know how I lived before."

"Well, I'm very happy that you're having a good day Joel," the doctor hesitated. "I don't know how to tell you this Joel, but we accidentally mixed up your chip yesterday and gave you



the wrong one. I promise you, this sort of thing rarely ever happens. If you come back in today, we can give you the correct one.”

Joel shook his head and perched on the edge of his couch. “Wait, so you gave me the wrong God? Whose God did you give me?”

The doctor cleared her throat. “Well actually, the chip we inserted in you was blank. We didn’t give you a God at all.”