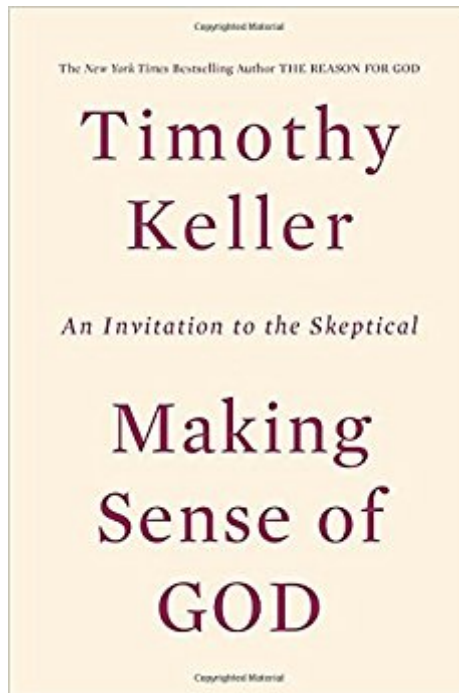




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Making Sense Of God: An Invitation To The Skeptical



Synopsis

We live in an age of skepticism. Our society places such faith in empirical reason, historical progress, and heartfelt emotion that it's easy to wonder: Why should anyone believe in Christianity? What role can faith and religion play in our modern lives? In this thoughtful and inspiring new book, pastor and New York Times bestselling author Timothy Keller invites skeptics to consider that Christianity is more relevant now than ever. As human beings, we cannot live without meaning, satisfaction, freedom, identity, justice, and hope. Christianity provides us with unsurpassed resources to meet these needs. Written for both the ardent believer and the skeptic, *Making Sense of God* shines a light on the profound value and importance of Christianity in our lives. Look out for Timothy Keller's latest book, *Â God's Wisdom for Navigating Life*, available from Viking in Fall 2017.

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Customer Reviews

Praise for Timothy Keller and *Making Sense of God*"Writing about philosophy and religion without jargon, condescension, or preaching, Keller produces an intelligent person's invitation to faith." *Â •Booklist*"Keller provides a calm and measured invitation to examine convictions and assumptions in a way that both believers and skeptics could use as part of a reasoned dialogue." *Â •Library Journal*"Keller *Â* masterfully weaves in relevant history, politics, and literature while expounding on the scriptures, and effectively exposes the weaknesses of secularist and atheistic worldviews. . . . *Â* Skeptics with philosophical minds will appreciate Keller's thoughtful, tightly-argued prose." *Â •The Christian*

Post"Superb. . . we should be grateful to Keller for his wisdom, scholarship, and humility." •The Gospel Coalition"Tim Keller's ministry in New York City is leading a generation of seekers and skeptics toward belief in God. I thank God for him." •Billy Graham"Unlike most suburban megachurches, much of Redeemer is remarkably traditional. What is not traditional is Dr. Keller's skill in speaking the language of his urbane audience. . . . Observing Dr. Keller's professorial pose on stage, it is easy to understand his appeal." •The New York Times"Fifty years from now, if evangelical Christians are widely known for their love of cities, their commitment to mercy and justice, and their love of their neighbors, Tim Keller will be remembered as a pioneer of the new urban Christians." •Christianity Today

Timothy Keller was born and raised in Pennsylvania and educated at Bucknell University, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, and Westminster Theological Seminary. His first pastorate was in Hopewell, Virginia. In 1989 he started Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City with his wife, Kathy, and their three sons. Today, Redeemer has nearly six thousand regular Sunday attendees and has helped to start more than three hundred new churches around the world. He is the author of *The Songs of Jesus*, *Preaching, Prayer*, *Encounters with Jesus*, *Walking with God Through Pain and Suffering*, *Every Good Endeavor*, and *The Meaning of Marriage*, among others, including the perennial bestsellers *The Reason for God* and *The Prodigal God*.

I wrote in a previous interview with Keller, "He has a healthy aversion to sanctimony and platitudes. He has a low tolerance for simplistic answers. Years of pastoral ministry in the hurly-burly of New York have given him a deep desire to articulate the Christian faith with integrity. Keller's ability to frame old issues in fresh ways is a hallmark of both his teaching and writing. "I've read six other books by Keller, but *Making Sense of God* may now be my favorite. All the hallmarks of Keller's writing appear. There is an integrative approach where wonderful quotes (no, I won't use the overused "money quotes!") from various disciplines are used throughout the book. Keller clearly keeps up in his reading, especially when it comes to philosophy, sociology, and cultural analysis. How many pastors do you know who have read Charles Taylor's big book, *A Secular Age* not once, but three times? As Keller commonly says, he reads so widely because he is "desperate." Many of us are beneficiaries due to Keller's desperation. Another common feature of Keller's

approach, especially as it relates to skeptics, is what I like to call *“incremental apologetics.”* This is where the skeptic is moved ever slowly. No big jumps from A to Z. The skeptic is paid the respect he deserves. The skeptic is truly listened to, and maybe most importantly, is confident that Keller is portraying his positions accurately. Given these realities it is not surprising that Keller would realize a *“prequel”* to *The Reason for God* was needed. Related to the former is what I like to call *“let’s talk on the bridge.”* Keller models this well in both *The Reason for God* and in *Making Sense of God*. All sides are invited into a conversation (no bomb throwing allowed) where each participant is reminded that they utilize both faith and reason. This can be a tough sell for Christians and non-Christians alike, but it is crucial if real dialogue is to occur. *Making Sense of God* is strong at showcasing the problems of a materialistic worldview. The problems that ensue from the reductionism of believing that the physical world is the totality of existence are a particular strength of *Making Sense of God*. And Keller does not just use Christians to answer materialists like Stephen Pinker. Rather, he highlights other skeptics like Julian Barnes whose reflections on the beauty of Mozart’s *Requiem* made him wonder whether physical reality is the sum total of human existence. I close with one slight disappointment and a comment about source notes. First, the slight disappointment. Keller writes, *“All of us have things we believe—including things we would sacrifice and even die for—that cannot be proven. But since these beliefs cannot be proved, does this mean we ought not to hold them, or that we can’t know them to be true? We should, therefore, stop demanding that belief in God meet a standard of universally acknowledged proof when we don’t apply that to the other commitments on which we base our lives.”* Granted there is an important truth there, but believing or not believing in God is far more costly than other matters, so it is understandable why we might *“demand”* more evidence. There may be sufficient evidence for Christianity, but it is understandable why many of us would like more. I found this a bit too quick of a dismissal of an honest objection, something that is uncharacteristic of Keller. It may seem rather strange to finish this review with a comment about endnotes, but I must. I regularly scan the footnotes (these days they are almost always endnotes) to see whether the author has interacted with the best literature. Not only do Keller’s endnotes demonstrate his careful reading, but there really is a book within a book. My only concern here is that too many readers will forego reading the endnotes thinking they are unimportant, or simply too academic. For those willing to slow down and read the endnotes, they will find a treasure trove of bibliographic suggestions,

further interaction, and fuller quotes. Tim Keller graciously responded to my "slight disappointment" with this: My point here was that both belief in a universe without a God (that things exist on their own, that moral obligation exists without God, and so on) and belief in a universe with God take equal amounts of faith and reason to hold. Both views (I argue in the book) require major steps of faith, and both also have some good logical arguments on their side. Neither can demonstrably prove their position to all rational people. So I don't think the objection--that belief in a universe with God must meet a higher standard of proof than believe in a materialistic-only universe--really holds true. • Tim Keller

Tim Keller's 2008 New York Times Bestseller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism*, is what first propelled him into the international spotlight. *The Reason for God* sought to make skeptics 'doubt their doubts' about Christianity by holding them up to the same intellectual scrutiny as to which they held Christianity. While *The Reason for God* impacted many interested in Christianity or at least in its consideration, Keller realized it was not written for those who do not deem Christianity "relevant enough to be worth their while" (4). Such people would never pick it up, but rather dismiss Christianity altogether as a "blind faith in an age of science, reason, and technology" or believing "fewer and fewer people will feel the need for religion and it will die out" (4). Keller's newest book, *Making Sense of God*, is directed at those people, serving as *The Reason for God*'s prequel. Keller's main point for both books is to explain how Christianity makes sense emotionally, culturally, and rationally. Naturally, *The Reason for God* discussed the rational, while *Making Sense of God* focuses on the emotional and cultural, making the case for Christianity's relevance in both spheres. Creating a True Secular Safe Space for Discussion *Making Sense of God* addresses skeptic objections to faith by attempting to create a true secular "safe space" for those exploring faith and ideas. Keller argues that such a space is needed since there is no "truly secular state" in which all beliefs and ideas can be presented in mutual respect and peace (3). Keller frames this safe space on page 50: "Rather than unfairly asking only religious people to prove their views, we need to compare and contrast religious beliefs and their evidences with secular beliefs and theirs. We can and should argue about which beliefs account for what we see and experience in the world. We can and should debate the inner logical consistency of belief systems, asking whether they support or contradict one another. We can and should consult our deepest intuitions." *Making Sense of God* is divided in three parts: Part 1 (Why Does Anyone Need Religion) exposes erroneous thinking that secularism and human advancement is swallowing up religion and argues that secularism and religion are both founded on faith. Part 2 (Religion Is

More Than You Think It Is) tests both skepticism and faith by examining what they mean for our meaning in life, satisfaction from life, individuality, finding your true self, hope, morality, and justice. These are issues of profound importance for every person, regardless of worldview.

Part 3 (Christianity Makes Sense) does what one would expect: make the case for Christianity's reasonableness by first testing reasonableness for belief in God and then belief in Christianity. Keller doesn't typically explain the flaws of secularism and skepticism through use of Scripture, but rather interacts with a diverse range of sources from a variety of fields: including scientists, secularist thinkers, philosophers, artists, and musicians. I appreciate Keller's generosity and humility in both seeking and describing truth. This generosity drove me to a deeper understanding of the nature of his critique. Examples of this comes when explaining how many non-religious people are actually more moral and kind than religious people, or when he cites Nietzsche to prove his points. There are many features of Keller's writing that makes it easy to see why he is a bestselling author: clarity of argument, deep knowledge of the secular belief systems he interacts with, a smattering of powerful illustrations and quotations, and a compelling presentation of the God who provides realistic and compelling answers to life's issues. Keller's writing both feeds the intellect and stirs the soul.

Why skeptics should read this book If you are a skeptic, I hope you take Keller's invitation to enter the secular safe space he seeks to create. Read this book and honestly think through his analysis. See if you agree with him that the secular worldview can't describe why good things like courage and love exist, why we need morals and on what basis they come, nor truly provide lasting satisfaction that can hold the weight of intense suffering. By doing so you might find yourself among the many mentioned in the book, both committed skeptics and converts to Christianity, who have thanked Keller for exposing flawed presuppositions and sharpening their grasp on reality.

Why believers should read this book Keller is masterful at examining secularism and skepticism with a surgeon's precision. Like its predecessor, this book is a must read for communicators of the faith and believers trying to live faithfully in a secular age. You will know how to engage skeptics better by understanding the thought processes that drive their beliefs and decisions. If you are like me, you will also be convicted and discouraged by seeing how our secular culture has influenced you. Most important of all, Keller's work will make you more confident that the God of Christianity is not only relevant for today, but the only One that makes broken humans whole and human existence in this crazy world understandable.

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