

The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism Study Guide

The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism by Timothy Keller

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Contents

The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapter One: There Can't Be Just One True Religion.....	4
Chapter Two: How Could A Good God Allow Suffering?.....	6
Chapter Three: Christianity Is a Straitjacket.....	8
Chapter Four: The Church Is Responsible for So Much Injustice.....	10
Chapter Five: How Can A Loving God Send People to Hell?.....	12
Chapter Six: Science Has Disproved Christianity.....	14
Chapter Seven: You Can't Take the Bible Literally.....	16
Chapter Eight: The Clues of God.....	18
Chapter Nine: The Knowledge of God.....	19
Chapter Ten: The Problem of Sin.....	20
Chapter Eleven: Religion and the Gospel.....	21
Chapter Twelve: The (True) Story of the Cross.....	22
Chapter Thirteen: The Reality of the Resurrection.....	23
Chapter 14 and Epilogue.....	24
Characters.....	26
Objects/Places.....	29
Themes.....	31
Style.....	33
Quotes.....	35
Topics for Discussion.....	37



Plot Summary

"The Reason for God, Belief in an Age of Skepticism," by Timothy Keller, is a pro-Christian work which lays out the major criticisms that modern skeptics have about faith and in particular Christianity. The author takes on each criticism and provides the relevant Christian response. The criticisms include the belief that there can't be just one true religion. He points out that historically, many of the major religions teach the one-religion philosophy and provides arguments that make the case that Christianity is that one true religion. He includes the many efforts by man to repress and eradicate religion and how these efforts have historically resulted in stronger belief.

Keller addresses the discomfort that many critics have about the Bible and how Christianity has been responsible for injustice and wars. He asks that those seeking to become believers, try to read past some of the ancient passages of death and dying so that the larger, overall message is not missed. However, his belief in the Bible is complete and nothing in it can be ignored. Readers should remember that some of the passages in the Bible are written in subtext and have a deeper meaning than they initially appear to have. Keller also confronts the criticism that the Bible cannot be taken literally. He makes the connection between the accounts of the crucifixion and resurrection as told in the gospels with anecdotal information that there were hundreds of eyewitnesses to both events.

The author presents how the advancement of science has, in some cases, added more fuel to doubts about faith. He takes each case in which faith have intersection and responds answers based on his knowledge of faith and Christianity. He cites surveys in which forty percent of modern scientists are open to the concept of a god as creator. He cites that modern physicist Stephen Hawking is open to the idea of a loving god.

The second part of the book provides the reasons for faith and the evidence that Christianity is the one true religion. He describes the clues that there was a loving creator who made everything and everyone. One only has to look around at the beauty and joy of nature to wonder at their perfection. Keller also explains the role of sin in the evolution of Christianity. He probes into the basic and most important foundations of Christianity which of course begins with Jesus Christ. Keller explains why it was necessary for Jesus Christ to sacrifice himself for man's sins and why the resurrection and cross are important building blocks for belief.

Keller provides the steps that a person must take in committing to a religion and in particular Christianity. To be a believer, one must be devoid of doubt and must commit his devotion to Jesus Christ. For a Christian to flourish, he must commune with other faithful Christians.



Chapter One: There Can't Be Just One True Religion

Chapter One: There Can't Be Just One True Religion Summary and Analysis

It has been author Timothy Keller's experience that the problem that most people have with Christianity is its exclusivity. On a panel about the major modern religions - Christianity, Judaism, and Islam - it was agreed that the major difference among them is the belief or lack of belief in Jesus Christ. It is conventional wisdom that one of the largest barriers to world peace is religion. Each religion teaches its followers that it is their religion that is the true religion. Teaching in this way creates barriers to peace and creates societal divisions.

There are three approaches that cultural leaders are exploring for an answer to the divisions and animosity that religion causes.

Outlawing Religion:

The outlawing or governmental control of religion has been tried in the past. Soviet Russia, Communist China, the Khmer Rouge, and to an extent, Nazi Germany, have all tried controlling religious practice in their countries. But in each case, instead of peace, the result was more oppression.

Others thought that religion would eventually die out. The thinking was that early man had a need for religion but as science advanced, the need for god would erode. But this has yet to occur. This secularization thesis has been discredited and all major religions are growing in their number of followers. It seems that when governments have tried to suppress religion that it has only grown stronger.

Condemning Religion:

Religion is not losing its popularity and cannot be controlled by authorities. A more subtle way to destroy religion is through education teaching students that all religions are equal and to distrust the ones that attempt to convert people to their beliefs. Those institutions that are attempting to change the mindset of people about religion, depend on certain axioms that sound logical but have no real validity.

The belief that all religions are the same and have equanimity is easily dispelled. One only has to think of the Branch Davidians or religions that require child sacrifice to see the fallacy of such a belief. Of the major religions, there are stark differences that debunks the myth that religions are all alike.



Many claim that religions are the result of the culture and history of a community and that people are socially conditioned to believe in a certain religious philosophy. There is the belief that all religions have a piece of the truth but none has it all. But man is predisposed to be spiritual and must do hard work to learn the truth through his religious journey.

There is also the belief that it is arrogant to try to convert someone to a religion. Noted scholars felt that it was insulting to try to convert an intelligent and educated person to a religion. It is just as narrow to believe that a person should not try to share their truth with others.

Keeping Religion Completely Private:

There is the trend to keep religion out of the public sphere. Influential scholars such as John Rawls and Robert Audi argue that in political discourse, moral positions that are taken should be secular and not based on faith. However, Stephen L. Carter of Yale asserts that it is impossible to leave faith out of moral reasoning. Carter bases his belief on the fundamental fact that religion is a set of standards by which its followers live. It is part of the consciousness of believers who are not able to leave their beliefs at the door when they enter the public square. Religion informs the daily life of believers.

Philosopher Richard Rorty contends that talk of religion is a conversation stopper. But talk of secular concepts can also stop conversation. Many of the mores of society can be tied directly to the Bible. For example, taking care of the poor is taught in the gospels. Legal theorist Michael J. Perry concludes that it is impossible to separate secular from religious discourse. Those, like Catholics, who believe that the main reason for marriage is to procreate base that belief in the word of the Bible. Many modern scholars are beginning to admit that it is futile to try to keep religion out of the public discourse.

Author's Belief: Christianity Can Save the World

It is the author's belief that Christianity has the resources that can make its followers true agents for peace. It is a religion that can bring people together and erase the divisiveness that is part of human nature. Christians are not necessarily better people than non-believers. But Christianity has the fundamental beliefs that can forge the way for world peace.



Chapter Two: How Could A Good God Allow Suffering?

Chapter Two: How Could A Good God Allow Suffering? Summary and Analysis

Many people cite the misery in the world as evidence that a benevolent god could not exist. How could such a god allow the tsunami in 2004 that killed more than 250,000 people to happen. The mainstream media was quick to take up this argument as they are frequent critics of organized religion.

Evil and Suffering Isn't Evidence Against God

Philosopher J. L. Mackie in his book, "The Miracle of Theism," stresses that the pointless evil that exists in the world is evidence that the traditional sense of a good and powerful god does not exist. The problem with that way of thinking is that man does not know the purpose of the "evil" that exists. Only God can know why there is evil and that this evil is not pointless as Mackie asserts. There are things in God's world that man does not understand and it takes blind faith to accept this reality.

As a pastor, Keller often taught the story of Joseph of Genesis. He was an arrogant young man who was hated by his brothers and sold as a slave to the Egyptians. Joseph prayed to God for help but none was forthcoming. But Joseph experienced a strengthening of character over his years of bondage. He became a leader in Egypt and saved multitudes from starvation. Had Joseph not experienced the "evil" of his slavery, he would have never risen up to the heights that he ultimately attained.

Keller has seen the same type of experience in many people's lives including a parishioner who lost most of his sight in a drug deal gone bad. He confessed to Keller that he had been a selfish and cruel person but was humbled after his loss and changed into a better person.

Evil and Suffering May Be (If Anything) Evidence for God

Writer C. S. Lewis has described how he nearly rejected God because of the suffering in his life. But in the end he realized that suffering provided a better argument for God. The mere fact that elements of the "just" and "unjust" exist in the world is proof that good exists and that man bases his standards of living on that good. If one believes that there is wickedness in the world, it becomes a powerful argument for the reality of God.

Comparing Jesus to the Martyrs

All the gospels indicate that Jesus did not want to die. His suffering on the cross was only three hours compared to the torturing of other religious martyrs that was much



more severe and protracted. Why was Jesus so overwhelmed by a death he knew was his destiny? Jesus represented the suffering of man and his separation from God. Although he asked why God had abandoned him while dying on the cross, he did not denounce him. Jesus suffered more than physical pain - his was a spiritual suffering of cosmic proportion. His trial was so much more painful than the religious martyrs who seemed to suffer more severely. Jesus suffered for man's sins so that someday he could end evil without ending mankind.

Jesus' suffering taught us that God is always with us even when experiencing our worse miseries and that our suffering is not in vain. The Christian faith teaches the belief in resurrection that "there is a new heaven and new earth" (p. 31). The doctrine of resurrection fills the believer with a powerful hope of life everlasting and that a more perfect existence awaits him.



Chapter Three: Christianity Is a Straitjacket

Chapter Three: Christianity Is a Straitjacket Summary and Analysis

To some, Christianity is confining in that ideally every person should find his own truth. There is belief by some that Christianity is narrow and enslaves its believers. Even the Supreme Court opined that "the heart of liberty is to define one's own concept of existence, of the meaning of the universe." (36) Stephen Jay Gould asserted that although people yearn for a higher authority in the universe that none exists.

French philosopher Foucault opined that truth was related to power. And when an individual has power, he is able to dictate what the truth is. Foucault was a disciple of Nietzsche who applied this theory to both liberal and conservative thought: One who has power should be reviled; but are those who criticize those in power attempting to create a revolt so that they can gain power for themselves? Foucault asserted that the skeptic can never be a true revolutionary since he can never truly trust anything or anyone.

Christianity requires that its adherents have specific beliefs. This requirement causes some to accuse the religion of being exclusionary and makes it difficult for a diverse community to work together. However, any belief system would lose its identity if it did not require its membership to share in the same beliefs. No church should be criticized for maintaining certain standards for its congregation. Christianity represents the most culturally diverse membership in that it has flourished in all corners of the globe as opposed to the restricted demographics of other major religions: Hinduism is centered in India, Confucianism and Buddhism in Asia, and Islam in the Middle East. It is a verifiable fact that Christianity appeals to many and varied cultures and therefore cannot be considered a closed or exclusive religion. Keller's own congregation at Redeemer Presbyterian Church of Manhattan has grown in both number and diversity over the years.

Why has Christianity more than any other of the major modern religions been able to grow in diverse cultures? The acceptance of others is taught in the Bible. In Isaiah 60 and Revelation 21-22 speak to a "renewed, perfect, future world in which we retain our cultural differences" (p. 45). Contrary to what many think, Christianity is not a Western religion. For centuries it has welcomed people from every nation on earth.

Immanuel Kant described the educated modern man as one who trusts in his own powers of thought. Formal education itself is restrained and structured yet produces accomplished professionals. Why wouldn't it hold then that to gain spiritual advancement one must adhere to certain standards and beliefs? Love itself is said to provide the ultimate freedom. Yet, one loses a measure of his independence to the



person he loves in order to strengthen the relationship. Loving is not easy. C. S. Lewis wrote that when you love anything or anyone, your heart could wind up broken.

When a person realizes how Jesus sacrificed for him, he loves Christ and becomes a Christian and is not afraid of giving up what he used to consider his freedom for his Lord.



Chapter Four: The Church Is Responsible for So Much Injustice

Chapter Four: The Church Is Responsible for So Much Injustice Summary and Analysis

Mark Lilla, a professor at the University of Chicago wrote of his "born again" experience when he was a teen in college. He felt the Christian community was dogmatic and combative. He thought they used the Bible to control people's lives. It was when Lilla began to lose faith. Lilla's experience is not unique. People who lose faith often do so because of the behavior of the church or church-goers. Such negativity has undermined Christianity.

Outsiders see others living better lives than Christians. They wonder why Christianity has supported war and violence in the past. And many see Christians as smug and self-righteous. Some church leaders seem more corrupt than the average man. Everyone's seen the scandals in the headlines. There are non-believers who live exemplary existences. Why are many Christians so obviously flawed? The answer is that gifts from God are by grace; they are not given because of the good or bad characteristics of the person. A relationship with God is only possible through the grace of God.

Christopher Hitchens in his book, "God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything," addresses the issue of religion and violence. He cites the conflicts in Belfast, Beirut, Bethlehem, Baghdad, and others locations. He feels that religion fuels the flames of diversity and multiplies hatred and resentment. But secular states like those in Communist Russian, China, and Cambodia were responsible for massive violence against not only its enemies but its own people. It is fair to conclude that there is a violent streak in people that emerges whether there is religion or not.

Christian fanaticism is a turn-off for many non-believers. Born-again Christians often spout their dissatisfaction with others and appear intolerant and pious. There are various "forms" of Christians. The nominal Christian hardly believes at all. The fanatic overdoes it and over-believes. The ideal Christian is somewhere in the middle. Unfortunately, the fanatics emulate the angry Jesus in the temple rather than the loving and forgiving Jesus who said, "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone" (John 8:7). (p. 57). Fanatics are actually failed Christians who have not fully committed to Christ.

The antidote for extremists and fanatics is to study harder and grasp a fuller meaning and deeper faith in Christ. Marx's analysis as the Bible as an instrument of oppression was predicted by the ancient Hebrew prophets in the Old Testament. Jesus' "Sermon on the Mount" is focused on the flaws of Christians. A fundamental teaching of the Bible is for Christians to be modest and humble and not be condemning or judgmental.



The critiques by Jesus and other religious figures were not about religious practices or beliefs; rather, it was about the behavior of Christians. They did not want, as Marx concluded, for Christians to try to gain power through their religion. True faith is distinguished by concern for the poor and weak. Theologian John Calvin said that "God so identifies with the poor that their cries express divine pain" (p. 60). While the church has supported violence at times, the remedy for resisting this natural temptation is found in the Bible.

Historian C. John Sommerville claims ironically that many secular critics of Christianity actually use Christianity to denounce it. The standards that is leveled at Christianity come directly from the Bible and the Christian faith. Historically, the imperfect interpretation of Christian gospel can be attributed to the shortcomings of the church and its leaders. They erroneously determined that the Crusades was a way of defending God's honor.

A black mark on Christianity was its support of slave trade. Most of the European countries involved in this practice were Christian. However, it was Christians who were the first to denounce it. Christians began to fight for the abolition of the slaves not because it was politically correct; rather, they considered that slavery was a violation of God's laws.

The Civil Rights movement in America in the mid-century was spiritually inspired. Martin Luther King, Jr., preached that white Christians should be true to their beliefs and follow the word of the Bible. In the late twentieth century, the Catholic Church in Eastern Europe stood up against Communism; in fact, it helped to bring down the totalitarian regimes in that region. As King put it, injustice performed in the name of Christianity is not being true to the spirit of Christ.



Chapter Five: How Can A Loving God Send People to Hell?

Chapter Five: How Can A Loving God Send People to Hell? Summary and Analysis

A student in one of Keller's classes cited the Old Testament in which God ordered people to be slaughtered. Another student said she was disturbed by the doctrine of hell. The God described in the Bible, she said, was not a loving god. Pastor Rick Warren, author of "The Purpose Driven Life," spoke with a group that was troubled by the belief that God consigns some people to eternal punishment otherwise known as Hell. Didn't his flock see the contradictory spirit of that belief?

Robert Bellah's, "Habits of the Heart" discusses the concept of individualism that is dominant in American culture. The book notes that 80 percent of Americans agree that each person needs to arrive at his own truth. C. S. Lewis wrote in "The Abolition of Man" that there was in nature a blending of science and magic or spiritualism. In olden times, there was the strong belief that there was a moral order outside of self while modern man saw morality as malleable. Ancient man conformed to universal morality but modern man takes it and shapes it to fit his needs and desires.

Critics say that a god of judgment cannot be a loving god. But in Christianity, God is both loving and just. God becomes angry when he sees man ruining himself. Christianity teaches that God watches over all those he created but he destroys all that is wicked. Some critics tie these beliefs to those who take them as permission to wage war. Vengeance, based on God's word, can become an endless cycle. The key is to temper the passion for justice that is innate in man so that it does not feed what seems to be a natural tendency toward violence. Some think that a belief in a god of judgment leads to a brutal society. However, Nazism and Communism provide evidence that the loss of god is what actually leads to brutality.

It doesn't follow that a loving god allows Hell to exist. How does eternal punishment fit with the loving Christian God. Hell is actually the loss of God. Man can only flourish in his presence. "Hell" is simply the trajectory which one is on in life. The loss of God in life leads to an eternal existence in the afterlife without him. People in hell are miserable because they are prideful, paranoid, and filled with self-pity. According to C. S. Lewis, those that are in hell choose to be there.

During Keller's college years he wrestled with some intellectual issues about Christianity. He was drawn to the loving god but not the god of fire and brimstone. He studied the other major religions - Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Confucianism, and Judaism. He learned that Christianity was the only major religion that believed God created the world out of love. Buddhism did not believe in a personal God. The Islam religion believed it was disrespectful to claim a personal relationship with God. The Holy

Bible teaches that He is a God of Judgment and "will put all things in the world to rights in the end" (p. 83).



Chapter Six: Science Has Disproved Christianity

Chapter Six: Science Has Disproved Christianity Summary and Analysis

Many of Keller's young students don't believe in miracles. Bestselling books declare that science has made the belief in god obsolete. Richard Dawkins wrote that one cannot be an intelligent advocate of science and hold on to religious beliefs. One of the main reasons science seems to clash with religion is that most major faiths believe in miracles or the intervention of God into man's life. Miracles are especially an important part of Christianity. Each year Christians celebrate miracles such as the incarnation, the birth of Christ, and the resurrection. Since the scientific field does not believe in the possibility of miracles, many scientists discount the entire Bible.

It is Keller's contention that science has not proven that all phenomena are the result of natural causes. But science has no way of testing for supernatural causes and therefore cannot say they don't exist. By declaring that miracles cannot occur the scientific field also says that there cannot be a God who creates them. The news media enjoys fueling what they perceive as a war between religion and science.

Many people, including scientists of course, can't fathom the rejection of evolution by religion. The Catholic Church has made official proclamations that elements of evolution are compatible with Christian belief. When science expands the evolutionary process to be all-encompassing, it steps away from science and on to philosophy. Not all scientists reject the concept of God. In "The Language of God," Francis Collins believes that the beauty and order of nature point to a divine creator. Collins is a research scientist and head of the Human Genome Project.

Ian Barbour asserts that there are four ways in which God and science are related: conflict, dialogue, integration, and independence. But many scientists see no incompatibility between faith in God and science. A survey of scientists in 1916 indicated that 40 percent believed in God. In 1997, a similar survey of scientists found almost the exact same percentage of believers. Digging deeper into the surveys actually found that larger percentages were believers or open to the idea of God. Even Stephen Jay Gould, who was an evolutionist and scientist and a proclaimed atheist, could not conclude that science clashed with Christian faith.

There are different approaches to evolution by the faithful. For Keller, he ascribes to the view that God was the creator who set in motion a process of natural rejection. However, he does not agree with the the concept of evolution as an all-encompassing theory. Miracles are hard to believe in. Even the apostles had problems believing what they saw themselves. It's just human nature to be skeptical. But the faithful believes that

miracles are not just intellectually challenging propositions, they are promises to the heart of believers.



Chapter Seven: You Can't Take the Bible Literally

Chapter Seven: You Can't Take the Bible Literally Summary and Analysis

Many scholars view the Bible as historically inaccurate. When Keller was in college and taking courses on the Bible as literature, his professors taught that the New Testament was based on oral traditions of churches and reflected their beliefs. The "historical Jesus" is depicted as a charismatic teacher who provoked the opposition that eventually executed him. Even his followers had varying views of Jesus. Some thought he was divine others thought he was human. Skeptics of Jesus' divinity, assert that after a power struggle, it was decided by scholars to throw out any evidence that Jesus was human and the gospels were created on the anecdotal information that he was divine.

If the foregoing is true, it would throw Christianity into chaos. Doing his own research, Keller found virtually no evidence for the "historical Jesus." The theory that Jesus was a mortal man has been crumbling in recent years even though it was promoted in the bestseller and movie, "The Da Vinci Code." The writer Anne Rice famous for "Interview with the Vampire," was raised Catholic but lost her faith, married an atheist and became a writer. But she returned to her faith after her extensive research on what was termed the "historical Jesus." She found a lot of assumptions but very few facts to support that theory.

Many visitors to Keller's church are surprised that the church follows the Bible so closely. Many assert that one can't take the Bible literally. This implies that they think the Bible does not have credibility and that much of it is symbolic. Many scholars distrust the gospels because they were written so many years after Jesus lived and they are thought to be filled with embellished and even fictionalized accounts. There are concrete reasons to believe that the gospels are historically accurate.

The gospels were written only forty to sixty years after Jesus' death. Paul's letters were written only twenty-five years after Jesus lived. Luke claimed his accounts were from eyewitnesses who were still living. There is scholarly evidence that there were many people who contributed to the gospels who lived while Jesus was alive. There are details and specifics contained in the accounts. In Mark, he refers to the man who helped Jesus carry the cross and mentions the name of the man's children. It was not only supporters of Jesus that had survived to provide their accounts. There were bystanders, opponents and officials.

The gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were immediately recognized as authoritative accounts. Irenaeus of Lyons in 160 AD declared that these works were the only four gospels. The claim in "The Da Vinci Code" that Constantine in 325 AD decreed Jesus' divinity and ordered that all evidence to the contrary be destroyed is refuted by



the fact that there was evidence of devotion to Christ long before the Emperor ordered it.

Some theorize that the gospels were written by early church leaders to promote their beliefs and gain power for their movement. That is disproved by the fact that the gospels include issues in which Jesus had vast disagreement with later church policy. There is no way a church leader at the time would have written in laudable terms about a crucifixion because only criminals were crucified. The leaders of the church would not have depicted the religious leaders in the Bible - the apostles - as petty and jealous. The Gnostic Gospels were written much later and had a dark tone that fit the worldview of the Greeks and Romans which was at odds with the first-century Jewish world which Jesus was part of. C. S. Lewis found the gospels to be unique for the time. The style of writing was a cross between reportage and modern novel writing which was a technique that didn't exist at the time. Richard Bauckham, is an expert on recollection and finds that the gospels bear the mark of accounts that the witnesses were recalling.

Modern people have issues with the slavery and the subjugation of women found in the Bible. Such passages are so outrageous to modern people that it turns them off to the rest of the Bible. Keller advises his students and congregation to not take those passages to heart, skip them and read on. They will benefit from their reading even though they may wrestle with some of the ancient passages. He also suggests to them that what a passage seems to say may not really be the underlying lesson it's teaching. He also advises them to focus on the major themes instead of the lesser primary teaching. However, believers cannot cherry pick what they like from the Bible. If they do, then they are falling back in the trap of creating a God that suits them.

Keller reviews the argument he has laid out for Christianity. He summarizes Christian beliefs against the major objections and doubts people have about the faith. He also addresses the different Christian denominations and emphasizes that he has presented his case as a Protestant. A Catholic author would have had different views on some of the issues. He expresses his hope that he presented a plausible rationale for belief in Christianity. It is the hope of man that if God exists, that he would appeal to our rationality.



Chapter Eight: The Clues of God

Chapter Eight: The Clues of God Summary and Analysis

It was Somerset Maugham who asked what the purpose of life was if death ends all. Jean-Paul Sartre thought there was no reason for existence. A young scientist that Keller knew was haunted by the notion that God existed. Although he was willing to believe, no matter how many pro-God arguments he found, there was always something irrational about the premise. He was looking for one "air-tight" reason to believe.

The philosopher Alvin Plantinga did not believe that there was one argument that would be convincing to all rational people. However, he did feel that there were many compelling arguments. Keller presented just a few of them. The mysterious bang is the first that he discussed. Most scientists believe in the Big Bang Theory which marked the beginning of the universe. Where faith comes into the equation is that logic tells us that something had to create the Big Bang. The cosmic welcome mat welcomes life and in order to do so the constraints of physics must fall into a narrow sphere. The chances of such a design happening by accident are statistically negligible. Stephen Hawking believes in the Big Bang Theory but also concludes that there are clearly religious applications to its existence.

There is a regularity of nature. Philosophers David Hume and Bertrand Russell were troubled that they had no idea why there was a regularity in nature and found no evidence that this regularity would continue. Science cannot prove that the the regularity of nature will continue. Such belief can only be based on faith. Any work of art can fill one with a sense of hope and strength. Beethoven wrote perfect songs—so perfect that not one note could be replaced with another. Many have an innate desire for beauty which, based on the design of everything else in nature, was not accidental. In the presence of great art, man gets a sense of life's purpose. The beauty of a forest was designed to draw people to it because it held sustenance for them.

For every argument for the existence of god there is one against it. The school of evolutionary biology claims that everything can be explained as a function of natural selection. Laws of reason have to be logical merely because they are tools of survival. Our brains tells us things to keep us alive and survive so we can pass our genetic codes down to future generations. In "Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon" asserts that modern man has religious feelings because of traits that have been passed down through the genes of those who were in a struggle for mere survival.

Where science and religion intersect, there will always be conflict and inconsistencies and scientists and ordinary people will have different reactions to both disciplines. But the air tight case that Keller's young scientist friend was looking for remains elusive. In the next chapter, Keller promises to prove that we all already know that God exists.



Chapter Nine: The Knowledge of God

Chapter Nine: The Knowledge of God Summary and Analysis

A student of Keller's debated the existence of God with another student. Charlie was sure that there was a God because man has an innate belief in a supreme being, a universal intelligence. Many of Keller's students have a sense of right and wrong and have justifiable moral outrage; however, there is a problem with their moral outlook. One young woman was upset about practices that marginalize women. After asking her how she knew those practices were wrong, she finally recognized that the rights of humans were gifts from God.

Man has moral feelings but also has a sense that there are moral standards that exist apart from him and create those moral feelings. There are things that people just know innately to be wrong. The Nazis' extermination of the Jews was wrong. But the Nazis knew their actions were wrong, too. Otherwise, they wouldn't have tried to hide what they were doing and planning. These moral compasses were passed down through generations. Altruistic people survive in greater numbers than do selfish and cruel people. Evolutionary biologists tie this to the survival instinct.

There is another school of thought that asserts that moral beliefs are created within cultures, also known as cultural relativism. Harvard law professor Alan Dershowitz argues that if all men were created in God's image, then every human would be sacred and inviolable like God. He points out that many people are agnostic which would not be a mindset in God's image. Others think that human rights come from nature and that man is part of natural law. Many feel that human rights are created by man. Law professor Michael J. Perry wrote that there is a "religious ground for the morality of human rights. . .It is far from clear that there is a non-religious ground, a secular ground, for human rights" (p. 152).

Writer Annie Dillard lived by a creek for a year to feel close to nature. What she learned, however, was that in nature violence by the strong against the weak prevailed. It was her experience that all of nature was based on violence. But the human being is the exception in that there is an inherent sense within man that the strong should not exploit the weak. It is a moral obligation that stops mankind from trampling on the the meek.

We know that there is a God because man was gifted with an appreciation of beauty, an understanding that love has meaning, an inherent dignity, and since of moral obligation.



Chapter Ten: The Problem of Sin

Chapter Ten: The Problem of Sin Summary and Analysis

According to Christianity, the world's biggest problem is sin although many sophisticated minds find the concept ludicrous. There are many forms of sin. One is to be caught up in self and not be humble like Jesus taught. Until man can confess that he is a sinner, he will never be free to see his flaws, forgive others for their flaws and seek forgiveness from others.

The famous Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard wrote in his book, "The Sickness Unto Death," that sin is being in despair and not wanting to be yourself before God. Sin is seeking to have an identity apart from God. Anything other than devoting yourself to God, Kierkegaard wrote, is sin. In his book, "The Denial of Death," Ernest Becker writes of the strong human need to feel significant. To feel this significance, many turn to romantic love. They find someone who loves and adores them. Naturally, this neediness can put a strain on a relationship. It was Kierkegaard's point that everyone seeks a way to justify his existence.

However, without God, our sense of worth is only superficial. If your identity is that of a girlfriend and you lose your boyfriend, your identity disappears when the relationship breaks up. A person who identifies himself as a parent, feels the pain of the empty nest when his children leave. Any identity without God leads to addiction including substance abuse, alcoholism, and sex and relationship addictions. They are all god-substitutes. A godless life leads to emptiness which is filled up by unsatisfying substitutes.

Sin not only damages the individual, it is devastating to society. In her 1947 book, "Creed or Chaos?" Dorothy Sayers concluded that the despair being experienced by British intellectuals was due to their loss of belief in the Christian doctrine of original sin. In "the Nature of True Virtue," Jonathan Edwards wrote that when anything is held in higher esteem than God, a society is destroyed. If a populace gets its identity from any source other than God, conflict and resentment arises. Cosmic sin caused man to suffer from disease, genetic disorders, famine, aging and death itself.

Everyone has to live for something and that something becomes the focus of your life. Making that "something," Jesus will fulfill you completely.



Chapter Eleven: Religion and the Gospel

Chapter Eleven: Religion and the Gospel Summary and Analysis

Jesus is the only way to be forgiven for your sins and the only path to true salvation. There are two paths to sin. One is being very bad and breaking all the rules. The other is keeping all the rules and becoming self-righteous. One who looks to himself for salvation is rejecting the gospel of Jesus. A person needs God in his life to be good - he cannot will himself to be without sin.

When we struggle for our own sense of worth and fail to build our identity in God, it leads to anxiety, insecurity, and anger. It also causes us to treat others badly. Pharisees believe they can never pray enough or do enough kind acts or ever be free of impure thoughts no matter how hard they try. Their efforts lead to frustration and anxiety. Adherents to the Pharisaic religion often attack and despise others who don't share their fanaticism. Pharisaic Christianity is often confused with true Christianity but it is a completely separate faith.

Christians don't believe they have to earn God's grace. Jesus made that possible and is it there for the taking. Sometimes there is the misconception that we will lose God's blessing by our actions. What the gospel teaches is that our motivation for doing good is out of gratitude for the blessings we received because of Christ. Religion and the gospel also provide divergent ways of handling problems. Moralistic religion teaches that if one leads an upstanding life, then God owes them his grace. However, the gospel makes it possible to avoid bitterness and anger when things go wrong.

Some outsiders think that if they form a relationship with God they do anything they want. Nothing could be further from the truth. Grace can be frightening. A member of Keller's congregation related how she felt when she realized what her responsibility was in being blessed by the grace of God. Since she was a sinner and was saved by the sheer grace of God, there was nothing that He could not ask of her. She knew that by the grace of God she belonged to him forever. Victor Hugo encapsulates this theme in "Les Miserables" when the bishop releases Jean Valjean from prison, he is so moved by his kindness that he feels an indebtedness to change his ways and be kind and gracious to others. Later when Valjean has a chance to kill his archenemy, Officer Javert, he lets him go, emulating the moment of his own freedom. True freedom is when one gives up his identity for a bigger meaning.



Chapter Twelve: The (True) Story of the Cross

Chapter Twelve: The (True) Story of the Cross Summary and Analysis

Gandhi admired the sacrifice of Jesus when he died on the cross but he could not accept that it was mysterious or a miracle. The symbol of Christianity is the cross. However, it is not revered by people of other faiths." Why would Jesus have to die in order that man's sins be forgiven?" is the question that many non-believers ask. Why couldn't God just forgive man and why did he have to go through all that pain and misery with Christ? True forgiveness is given unconditionally. The desire for vengeance for being wronged is not motivated by good will. Instead, it is motivated by anger and resentment and ill will.

But why did Jesus have to die in order for man to be forgiven? Forgiveness means that the one forgiving bears the cost of the sin. Forgiving a great evil results in resurrection. The only way to triumph over evil is to experience the suffering of forgiveness. In Jesus Christ, God became human and offered his own blood in the name of moral justice and merciful love so that he can return and destroy all evil without destroying man.

Substitution is at the heart of Christianity. If a person becomes involved with someone who is weaker, his strength will flow toward him. Just as a parent cares for an innocent child. The parent watches over and ultimately teaches the child to be stronger. It is like that with God. Once a person establishes a relationship with God, his strength will flow to that person when God substitutes himself for us.

On the cross, Jesus took the place of those without power and those who were suffering. The cross cannot be used to urge the oppressed to accept violence. Jesus represented the suffering of the world as he suffered on the cross. It is a great reversal in that God, with all power, trades places with those with no power. Jesus wins by losing, triumphs through defeat and attains power through weakness - the crucifixion was an example for all of mankind. The ambiguity of the cross turns conventional wisdom upside down. The gospel is not a fictionalized story; it is a story about all of us.



Chapter Thirteen: The Reality of the Resurrection

Chapter Thirteen: The Reality of the Resurrection Summary and Analysis

Keller was taught in school that the resurrection of Jesus was problematic. Most non-believers expect the faithful to explain and defend the resurrection. That question can be turned back to the non-believers, asking them to explain on what foundation Christianity was built. One of the most common answers from those who are skeptical of the resurrection is that people in ancient times believed in magic and the supernatural and were easy prey to talk of miracles. Jesus' zealous followers were then bolstered by the gospels that were written specifically to give his followers what they were seeking.

Skeptics claim that the gospels were written long after the events took place. However, the first accounts of eyewitnesses are found in the letters of Paul which were written only twenty years after Jesus lived. In 1 Corinthians, Paul writes of the empty tomb and resurrection on the third day. He also lists the eyewitnesses by name. More proof that the resurrection occurred are that the accounts speak of both the empty tomb and the sightings of Jesus. There were literally hundreds of witnesses to the resurrection. It's human nature to be skeptical and by all accounts the people of the ancient world were no exception. In fact, the mere concept of resurrection would not have been a popular one. In Mediterranean countries at the time, resurrection was deemed not only impossible but also undesirable. Once the soul was free of it's body, it was thought, it would never choose to return.

Jesus' resurrection marked a new world view or a guarantee of man's resurrection. World views generally change over time. In this case, however, the resurrection changed thinking literally over night. Gods were viewed as impersonal forces in Eastern religions while Western religions embraced polytheism. It was blasphemous according to Jewish law to worship a human being. It was the resurrection that changed everything and formed the foundation for Christianity.



Chapter 14 and Epilogue

Chapter 14 and Epilogue Summary and Analysis

The Bible is often referred to as a four-act drama: creation, fall, redemption, and restoration. Christianity is the only world faith that teaches that God is a trinity or one God who exists in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. These three identities glorify one another in a mutually self-sacrificing love. Their glorification of each other results in a kind of dynamic dance. Love and joy springs from the triune. When people say God is Love what they mean is that God wants man to experience love.

God created man in order to share the infinite joy of mutual love and glorification. If we choose to join in God's "dance" we can share in his joy and love. In Genesis 3, the fall of man is described. Adam and Eve disobeyed God. As a result of original sin, we became self-absorbed and stationary. We were not abandoned by God. He sent Jesus to save us from ourselves and bless us with his selfless love.

Jesus said "I have given them the glory that you gave me" (John, 17). When Jesus came into the world he didn't need us and it gave him nothing he already didn't have. He shared with us the joy, glory and love he already had. If you are moved by what Jesus did for you, it is the first step of developing a relationship with him and begin to move toward making Jesus the center of your life.

How will human history end? Unlike other religions, Christianity teaches that Heaven will descend upon earth at which time it will be purified of all its imperfections. The prophet Isaiah referred to this time as a new Garden of Eden—one without sin. Nature will be returned to its former glory. Cultural and racial diversity will disappear and peace will abound. How is a Christian to respond to this daunting future? No other faith offers such a hope.

God created man to give him glory, honor and serve the dignity of man and cherish the joys and beauty of nature. Christians respond to God's grace by spreading the word of God and preserving his beauty and joy in the world. The Christian life also includes building up the Christian community through worship and service to God and the human community through acts of justice and service.

A person needs to explore his motivations before committing to a faith. A person thus must be sure that the motivation to become a Christian is to serve God and not expect Him to serve him. A Christian has a fundamental allegiance to Jesus. Jesus' name must be held above all other names. Contemporary people such as Bono of U2 have come to that conclusion. "Christians are people who let the reality of Jesus change everything about who they are, how they see, and how they live" (p. 231).

Several specific questions must be answered before one commits to being a Christian.
1) Is there anything about Christianity that you don't agree with? 2) Are there still



doubts? 3) Do you have fears about becoming a Christian? After these questions are resolved and one moves on to Christianity, the first step is to repent which begins with a new relationship with God. This repentance calls on a new Christian to give up old "idols" that he has depended upon in the past. The second thing is to allow yourself to believe in Jesus, that you need his salvation and that he died on the cross for you. You must trust in God. Also essential to living the Christian life is to commune with other Christians and believers to strengthen your faith.



Characters

Jesus Christ

As everyone knows, Jesus Christ is the center of Christianity. Belief in Jesus Christ is essential for one to consider himself a Christian. Jesus was sent to earth by God to save man from his sin. Appearing as a man, there was a human quality in the way Jesus lived, thought, and felt. The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all describe how Jesus did not want to die when he was on the cross being crucified.

But Jesus on the cross was a representation of the suffering of man and of his separation from God - a tragic condition that doomed mankind. His suffering represented much more than physical pain. He illustrated to man that spiritual suffering was far more devastating than bodily pain. Jesus had all the joy and love possible but chose to suffer for man's sins so that one day he could return and drive evil from the earth for once and all.

In many college-level courses, the Bible is treated as fiction and literature. The "historical Jesus" is described as an effective teacher whose overly-zealousness provoked authorities eventually leading to his execution. The theory that Jesus was a mortal man had been around since Jesus lived. In recent times, the notion had mainly dissipated but saw new life with the popularity of Dan Brown's book and movie, "The Da Vinci Code." Another famous author and former atheist, Anne Rice who wrote "Interview with the Vampire, did extensive research on the "historical Jesus" and found very few facts to support that contention.

God

God is the creator of heaven and earth and mankind. And God is also referred to simply as "Love." Different religions take different approaches but all cultures recognize that a superior being or intelligence must have created the earth and all its beauty and joys and the universe, most of which is unknown to man. Despite the conventional wisdom that man was created by some supernatural force, people have been trying to rid public discourse of the notion of god for centuries.

Non-believers and critics find plenty to complain about. How could a loving God who created man make him suffer and then as a final blow, send him to Hell and eternal damnation? But God works in mysterious ways and there is a purpose for everything—even evil. There are elements of God's world that man does not comprehend and that require blind faith for their acceptance.

Writer C. S. Lewis became a very devout Christian in his later years. However, at one point he nearly rejected God because of the suffering in his life. The brilliant writer concluded that man's suffering provided an argument in favor of God. The mere fact that there is evil in the world provides evidence that it is counter-balanced by good. The



very fundamental standards of good and evil were established by God. Lewis concluded that the wickedness that man sees in the world becomes a powerful argument for the existence of a loving God. God works in mysterious ways.

The Christian God is a trinity, consisting of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is the only religion in which three identities exist within one God. The three persons in God glorify one another in a mutually self-sacrificing love. When people say God is Love what they mean is that God wants man to love Him and love one another.

Stephen Hawking

Theoretical physicist Stephen Hawking believes in the Big Bang Theory but also confesses that there are clearly religious implications to the existence of man and the universe.

Immanuel Kant

Philosopher Immanuel Kant felt that the educated modern man was more likely to trust his own powers of reason than depend on a god.

Soren Kierkegaard

The Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard wrote that sin was not wanting to be yourself before God. Sin is seeking a life apart from God.

Dan Brown

Dan Brown is the author of the book, "The Da Vinci Code." The concept that God had been a human had almost disappeared in modern times until Brown's book was published and renewed interest in the notion.

John Calvin

The founder of Calvinism, a predecessor of the Presbyterian Church, said that God has an affinity for the poor whose cries express his own divine pain.

Richard Rorty

Philosopher Richard Rorty declared that talk of religion was a real conversation stopper. It was his conclusion that people felt uncomfortable talking about religion.

Michael J. Perry

Legal theorist Michael J. Perry believes that it is impossible to separate secular discourse from talk about religion. He, like many modern scholars, feel it is futile to keep religion out of public conversation.

Anne Rice

Anne Rice is the author of "Interview with the Vampire." She was raised a Catholic and then lost her faith. After much research and study, she rejected the notion of a "historic Jesus" and renewed her belief in Jesus Christ.



Objects/Places

The Bible

The Bible is the Holy Book of Christianity. The New Testament is the story of Jesus Christ.

The Gospels

The gospels found in the New Testament of the Holy Bible tell the story from first-hand accounts of Jesus, the crucifixion, and the resurrection.

The Cross

Jesus Christ was crucified on a cross. The cross has become an important symbol for Christians and holds important meaning for them.

The Crucifixion

The Crucifixion of Jesus Christ is the event in which he was nailed to a cross until his death. He sacrificed himself for mankind's sins.

The Resurrection

Three days after Jesus Christ died on the cross during his Crucifixion, he rose to live again and ascended to Heaven to be with the Father. It is known as the Resurrection.

The Trinity

Christianity believes in One God who has three identities: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who live in self-sacrificing glory and love with one another.

The Big Bang Theory

Most scientists agree that the universe was created by the Big Bang. Many scientists admit that the concept of a loving God does not necessarily fall outside the Big Bang Theory since someone had to create the Big Bang that created the universe.



The Da Vinci Code

The notion that Jesus was a mortal man began to die out in recent years. However, interest was renewed in the topic with the publication of the book, "The Da Vinci Code," by Dan Brown.

The Gnostic Gospels

The gnostic gospels are not included in the Holy Bible. They were discovered long after the other gospels were written. They had a different tone than the original four gospels.

The Historic Jesus

The "historic" Jesus is the term used for people who believe that Jesus was just a mortal man. He was a charismatic teacher whose over-zealousness led to his crucifixion.



Themes

Christianity Can Respond to All Doubts

For each argument against faith, Keller provides the antidote in the form of a Christian response. In the very first chapter, Keller lays out the the major issues about Christianity that are problematic to the non-believers. He describes each criticism and the reasons why people hold their views. But Keller abandons his unbiased, tit-for-tat manner when at the end of the chapter he concludes the question of the one true religion with a subsection entitled, "Christianity Can Save the World."

Keller leads the reader through the debates about Christianity that have been raging for literally centuries, in fact, since the time Jesus lived on earth. At every turn, Keller instructs, shows the benefit of faith and provides proof that Christianity is the one true religion. He effectively rebuts the doubters who contend that all religions have merit and each one has part of the truth.

Jesus Christ came to earth to save mankind from itself and sacrificed himself so that man could be free of sin. What could be more monumental evidence of a loving god and creator and that his "name should be held above all others." Keller points to the original gospels as proof. There is historical evidence that they were written in a relatively short period of time following Jesus' death. The accounts of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection were described by eyewitnesses who lived during the events.

With the advances that science has made, more doubts about faith have naturally arisen. Most astrophysicists ascribe to the Big Bang theory, the super implosion of particles that gave birth to the universe. Keller has no issue with this theory but he responds with a notion that most scientists could not reject. Keller asserts that although the Big Bang was part of God's plan, there had to be a supernatural explanation for what was "there" before the Universe and the Big Band.

Oppression Against Religion Fails

Ruling parties in many countries and nations throughout the history of the world have attempted to eradicate religion in different ways. Leaders of various cultures have seen how religion beliefs can be divisive and create conflict among their people. The modern-day sociopolitical landscape is not different. For example, Soviet Russian, Community China, and the Khmer Rouge are all regimes that made robust efforts to control religious practices among their populaces. The actions of the Third Reich were largely based on religion in that they wanted to eradicate the Jews. The strategy behind such actions were to weaken religion advocates so that they did not present a challenge for the government.

Some governments have attempted to make warring sides of their populace find peace by urging all parties to admit that each religion or faith is just as good as the next. They



tried to instill moral equanimity in the hope that peace would abide. It was pointed out that each faith surely has some of the truth. Another argument was that people believe how they do because they were brought up that way. However, history has shown that the believers only dug in deeper to espouse and advocate in their faith and beliefs.

Another approach that governments have taken was to shame people into being quiet about their beliefs. Keeping faithful ideology to oneself will ensure peace and will illustrate respect for one another's belief. Despite the best efforts, however, history has proved that in each of the cases cited above and many others, religious belief emerged as stronger than ever before.

What It Takes to Be a Christian

In "The Reason for God" Timothy Keller either hints at or describes what is required to become a Christian throughout the entire work. It is without a doubt the underlying theme that emerges in this work. Even though the first part of the book is about criticisms of beliefs and religious faith, interspersed throughout the section is information about what Christians believe and what is required of them to be a devout Christian.

As the book gets deeper into the faith, there is more specificity about what it means to be a Christian. Keller stresses that committing to a faith is a serious step in one's life. It is a commitment that must be taken seriously and one that cannot be considered reversible when times get tough and doubts enter in.

There are certain questions that every person who contemplates taking the steps to become a Christian must ask himself. A person who wants to begin this journey but still has some trepidation about doing so, needs to take inventory of himself and his beliefs, doubts and fears. By doing so, the person may be able to resolve some things on his own. It is crucial that the individual be honest with himself because God knows what's in his heart.

The entire book leads the reader down the path toward Christianity. "The Reason for God" is not a blatant evangelical tool but the author does not hide the fact that he hopes to inspire people to become interested in Jesus and make the leap from doubt to faith.



Style

Perspective

"The Reason for God, Belief in an Age of Skepticism" by Timothy Keller is written in the first-person narrative. Keller provides an account of his personal journey to Christianity as well as his role as a pastor in the Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan. Not surprisingly, Keller's background and experience make him the perfect author for the subject matter.

Keller was educated at Bucknell University, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, and Westminster Theological Seminary. His first experience as a pastor was at the West Hopewell Presbyterian Church in the small town of Hopewell, Virginia. Keller established the Redeemer Presbyterian Church in 1989 with his wife, Kathy, and three sons. He told friend's that the venture was probably a fool's errand.

Church always meant family to him. New York City was filled with single people and non-traditional households. He was almost certain of failure. However, the fledgling church has grown from zero population to a congregation of nearly six thousand in just a relatively short period of time. Keller is helping to establish more Redeemer churches in large cities throughout the world.

Although a Presbyterian pastor writing about Christianity and its critics, possesses an inherent prejudice, Keller does not hold back in providing all the criticisms against his faith and why people hold those views. He, of course, addresses the criticisms from a Christian prospective but he does a fair job of showing both sides.

Tone

"The Reason for God, Belief in an Age of Skepticism" by Timothy Keller, is written in a scholarly, philosophical tone. A hint of emotion is interjected at times but feels totally appropriate since religion is an emotional issue and the author is a man of god. Keller's tone is reasoned and fair when presenting the modern arguments against faith and religious belief. He not only includes the points of criticism but he explains why the skeptics feel and think they way they do about the subject at hand.

For example, in Chapter Two which is entitled, "How Could a Good God Allow Suffering," he declares that "horrendous, inexplicable suffering, though it cannot disprove God, is nonetheless a problem for the believer in the Bible" (p. 25). In this statement, his understanding is demonstrated for those who would be repelled by the accounts of brutality that are contained in the Bible.

Keller though a scholar and Christian pastor does not have a tone that is in the least condescending or does he evoke a persona that is all-knowing and superior. Keller reaches out and connects with the reader, especially the skeptical reader on the basis



of understanding. He time and again states how he fully understands the criticism that the Bible and on a larger scale Christianity comes under. But by being humble and advancing his story, not in an aggressive way but certainly in an emphatic and assertive manner, he at least gets the reader's attention and respect.

Structure

"The Reason for God, Belief in an Age of Skepticism," by Timothy Keller, is separated into two main sections. Part 1, The Leap of Doubt, consists of seven chapters. The chapters in this section describe the main criticisms that skeptics have about Christianity. The issues range from the disbelief that there is one true religion and how a loving god could allow suffering to how science has proven the concept of god to be a false one and asks how anyone could take the Bible literally. The author presents the critiques on each subject and provides the Christian response to them.

Part 2, The Reasons for Faith, also consists of of seven chapters. The chapters in this section argue back against the non-believers. They cover issues like the meaning of the cross and resurrection and the religious and historic value of the gospels and how all three are important parts of the foundation of Christianity. An Epilogue asks the questions "Where Do We Go from Here?" and provides some answers.

There is an "Introduction" at the beginning of the book. Following the Epilogue there is an "Acknowledgments" Section, Notes, and an Index.

Quotes

"Religion has led to untold strife, division, and conflict. It may be the greatest enemy of peace in the world. If Christians continue to insist that they have 'the truth'—and if other religions do this as well—the world will never know peace" (Chapter 1, p. 3).

"Christianity has within itself remarkable power to explain and expunge the divisive tendencies within the human heart" (Chapter 1, p. 18).

"Truth is a thing of this world. It is produced only by multiple forms of constraint and that includes the regular effects of power" (Chapter 3, p. 37).

"The Bible says that God's wrath flows from his love and delight in his creation. He is angry at evil and injustice because it is destroying its peace and integrity." (Chapter 5, p. 73).

"Dawkins said very famously that 'although atheism might have been logically tenable before Darwin, Darwin made it possible to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist.'" (Chapter 6, p. 84).

"I could feel nothing to myself but an inconsequential buzzing. I was thinking...that here we are eating and drinking, to preserve our precious existence, and that there's nothing, nothing, absolutely no reason for existing" (Chapter 8, p. 127).

"The cold-blooded massacres of the defenseless, the return of deliberate and organized torture, mental torment, and fear to a world from which such things had seemed well nigh banished—has come near to breaking my spirit altogether. 'Homo Sapiens,' as he has been pleased to call himself, is played out" (Chapter 10, p. 159).

"The good things that enslave us are good things that deserve to be loved. But when our heart loves become inordinate, then we fall into patterns of life that are not unlike substance addiction" (Chapter 10, p. 165).

"I could accept Jesus as a martyr, and embodiment of sacrifice and a divine teacher. His death on the cross was a great example to the world, but that there was anything like a mysterious or miraculous virtue in it, my heart could not accept" (Chapter 12, p. 186).

"I can only say that observing these stories [the gospels] from the outside stirred me, but when I realized I was actually inside Jesus' story (and he inside mine) it changed me" (Chapter 12, p. 200).



"What will come of what I am doing today or tomorrow? What will come of my whole life? Why should I live, why wish for anything or do anything? It can also be expressed thus: Is there any meaning in my life that the inevitable death awaiting me does not destroy"(Chapter 13, p. 201).

"The doctrine of the Trinity overloads our mental circuits. Despite its cognitive difficulty, however, this astonishing, dynamic conception of the triune God is bristling with profound, wonderful, life-shaping, world-changing implications" (Chapter 14, p. 215).



Topics for Discussion

Explain the the reasoning behind the arguments that some critics take on religious faith: outlawing religion; condemning religion; and, keeping religion completely private.

How does Keller explain a loving God that allows suffering in the world he created?

What explanations does the author provide about the injustice and even wars that the church has been involved in over time?

Describe the intersection of science and faith. How has faith disproved the existence a loving god? What diverse opinions do scientists have about faith?

Why do critics argue that the Bible can't be taken seriously? How are these arguments countered?

Explain what the author means by the concept of moral obligation.

What is the importance of the gospels in Christianity? What are the Gnostic Gospels and how do they differ from the original gospels?