

I don't have enough **FAITH**
to be an **ATHEIST**

with Dr. Frank Turek PODCAST

Making Sense of God: An Invitation to the Skeptical (ENCORE) | with Tim Keller

(May 26, 2023)

Frank:

Ladies and gentlemen, this is going to be a very special edition of the "I Don't Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist" radio program and podcast. Back in Christmas of 2016, I interviewed Dr. Tim Keller and many of you know Dr. Keller died about a week ago. And I learned so much from him that I wanted to rebroadcast this program for you. It's an evergreen broadcast. You're going to learn a lot. Here is Dr. Tim Keller.

Ladies and gentlemen, how can you make sense of God to secular people? To skeptical people? Can you just give them reasons? Just give them arguments? That approach doesn't work very often, does it? No, reason alone usually is not enough. There are often cultural, emotional, and volitional obstacles in the way of belief. So, the question we're going to deal with today is, how can we address those obstacles to move the skeptic toward Christ?

And in his spare time, he writes New York Times best-selling books that sell over a million copies, such as "Reason for God", which I think is already an apologetics classic. In fact, it's always just number two behind Mere Christianity, it's right there on Amazon, always way up at the top, great book. And then "Prodigal God", which you may have also heard of. Which is one of the most profound books you'll ever read on the true nature of Christianity. Now, the book we'll be discussing today is an equally outstanding book. It's actually a bit of a prequel to "Reason for God." It's called "Making Sense of God: An Invitation to the Skeptical." Tim, Merry Christmas to you, and it's a pleasure having you on the show.

Well, there's probably nobody in America, who knows how to reach skeptics better than my guest today. In fact, since 1989, he's been engaging skeptics and then pastoring them in the heart of one of the most skeptical areas of the world. And that would be New York City. And as you've heard, if you can make it there, you can make it anywhere. So, my guest, of course, is Dr. Tim Keller, the founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church, which has a weekly attendance of over 5000, across three, and now soon to be four locations in Manhattan. Tim has also helped start over 250 churches in about 48 different cities.

Tim:

I'm glad to be here. Merry Christmas to you. Yeah.

Frank:

Now, Tim, you I've heard you say that "Making Sense of God" is a prequel to "Reason for God." Well, what does "Making Sense of God" address that "Reason for God" doesn't?

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Tim:

Well, "Reason for God" is almost completely dedicated to the question: Is Christianity true? Is it rationally true? Is there evidence why I as a rational person ought to believe it? "Making Sense of God" is addressing the question: why should I care if it's true? So what if it's true or not? Why would it even be relevant to me? Isn't religion actually a bad thing? You know? Maybe I shouldn't want it to be true. I got the idea for a lot of reasons.

But there's a place where Blaise Pascal on one of his *pensées* says that before a person is probably open to really listening to good case for Christianity being true, they've got to see that it would be great if it was. And I do think that most people, at least in my city, don't think it would be great if Christianity was true. They really don't want to go there because they'd be afraid it might be true, and they don't want it to be true. So, that's why I would say "Making Sense of God" is kind of a prequel.

Frank:

Well, what I really like about it...well, there's a lot to like about it. But it's not a typical apologetics book that brings facts from the outside, you know, facts from science, philosophy, and history. I mean, it does some of that, but it does much more. But the book "Making Sense of God", friends, for those that are listening here is, I think it brings facts from the inside. In other words, it awakens a sense of transcendence that most of us have latent in our intuitions and desires. And Tim, you identify at least six transcendent desires, which are things that we really can't live without. What are those six that you go through in the book?

Tim:

Yeah, it's meaning. Meaning and life purpose, satisfaction, identity, freedom, justice, and hope. And basically, I'm trying to say, nobody can live without these things. So, every worldview, or culture says, here's how you get them, because nobody can live without them. You've got to have a meaning in life. You've got to have some kind of sense of satisfaction, fulfillment. You've got to feel like I'm free. You've got to feel like I know who I am.

You've got to have some basis for justice, understanding justice, doing justice, calling for justice, and you need to have hope for the future. And what I'm trying to show in the book, is that Christianity gives you better resources than you've got right now if you're not a Christian, for every one of those six things. And of course, that will lead people to say, hey, that's great. But how do I know it's true? Well, that's another book.

Frank:

Well, you cover that in the last couple of chapters...

Tim:

The last two chapters, I try to do a little recapitulation of "Reason for God." And I also try to add some stuff that I didn't get in to "Reason for God" since I wrote that eight years ago.

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Frank:

Yes. And you also debunk a couple of myths before you get into the six transcendent desires. The first one...right in the beginning of the book, you say it's a myth that religion is dying out and the world's getting more secular. Deal with that one first. How is that a myth?

Tim:

Well, because we're right now, in America, there definitely has been what I would call a collapse of the mushy middle. And the mushy middle is the people who would nominally be Christians, who would say, yes, I go to a church. They're not very devout. They're not very observant. They may go on Christmas and Easter only. And for years, there was a huge percentage of Americans that would say I'm a Christian, even though they weren't very observant or devout. That's sort of collapsing. So, the children of those people are largely saying no religious preference.

So, the numbers of people who say I'm secular, I don't have any religion, are going up. And that's always reported in the news media. And that gives people the impression that the world's getting more secular. But across the whole world, everybody who knows demographics, everybody knows about these things, knows that actually, religion is growing. Devout religion is growing. And the actual number of people over the next 30-40 years, the number of people in the world who say I'm secular, I have no religious preference, the percentage of those people is going to go down.

Frank:

The second myth, which you have an entire chapter on is the idea that secular people base their beliefs completely on reason and religious people based theirs completely on faith. Why is that a myth?

Tim:

Yeah, basically, I'm trying to say you've got a set of beliefs. If you're a doubter, if you're a skeptic, if you're a secular person, you shouldn't say you have belief, I don't. The fact is that secularism is a set of beliefs, not recognized as beliefs. So, my idea, that's the main thesis. Secularism is a set of beliefs, not recognized as bliss. And by the way, skeptics who have read the book, that is where they push back, I think harder than anywhere else. That is very threatening to them. So, that's the point of the second chapter.

Frank:

And it kind of reminds me of something Philip Johnson, the Berkeley Law professor said back 25 years ago when he wrote "Darwin on Trial", or it may have been his book "Reason in the Balance." He said, "He who is a skeptic in one set of beliefs is a true believer in another set of beliefs. And it seems to me Tim, you unpack this in "Making Sense of God", but isn't materialism really their positive belief? They believe in materialism. They may believe in multiverses. They may believe in macro evolution or quantum vacuums.

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Tim:

Yep. Yeah. See, by the way, those books by Johnson are great.

Frank:

Oh, they are. Yeah.

Tim:

Really, they are great books. And that's exactly what I'm trying to say there. I'm trying to say, like, for example, when somebody says, well, look, science is the only arbiter of truth and reality. It's got to be proven scientifically, otherwise, it's not true. And of course, here's the problem with that. How do you prove that proposition?

Frank:

Not scientifically.

Tim:

Yeah, there's no way to empirically verify that everything has to be empirically verified to be true. It's a philosophical statement when you say that. Or the idea of, you know, we've evolved through, you know, nature red in tooth and claw, survival of the fittest. And the only reason we're here is the strong eat the weak. And now, we have to honor everybody's human rights. We have to treat everybody with equality and dignity.

Friedrich Nietzsche said that is a huge leap of faith. To say, well all we have is materialism. There's no God. There's no truth. There's no objective, moral values, but we still need to honor everybody. That's a huge leap of faith. So, basically, I'm trying to say your view of rationality, your view of science, your view of morality, and all that, those are all beliefs. And so, you and we, religious people, skeptical people, we both have beliefs. The burden of proof is on both of us, not just on Christians.

Frank:

Exactly. We're talking to Dr. Tim Keller, his new book, "Making Sense of God." A fabulous read, a prequel to "Reason for God" you need to get. We'll have more with Dr. Keller right after the break. You're listening to CrossExamined with Frank Turek and the American Family Radio Network. We're back in two. Don't go away.

Welcome back to CrossExamined on the American Family Radio Network. I'm Frank Turek. Our guest today is Dr. Tim Keller of "Reason for God", of "Prodigal God", of the new book called "Making Sense of God: An Invitation to the Skeptical." And for those of you who have listened to this program, you know I've mentioned Dr. Keller before. It's a privilege having him on the program. And this new book you need to get is a prequel actually. You know, Star Wars came out last night, so Dr. Keller is going in the vein of Star Wars here. He's doing prequels now. This is before "Reason for God." And this is the kind of book that you can give to somebody, and it's not just going to be an avalanche of facts supporting Christianity. It's going to be some of that.

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But it's really going to get into some very existentially relevant issues that everyone has to deal with, including satisfaction, hope, justice, and many other things. And that's what we're talking about today. Tim, your chapter on meaning, chapter three. You talk about meaning. And you point out that we all seek a purpose beyond ourselves, and that there's a psychological need for meaning and purpose. And there's even scientific evidence for those secularists out there, that people who adopt a purpose or a cause outside of themselves do better medically. How do we get secular people to recognize that there's a transcendent meaning and purpose to life, so they're at least open and maybe even motivated to say, investigate Christianity?

Tim:

Well, in that book, what I tried to do was say, first of all, if somebody says, can I have meaning in life without God? I know the Christian is supposed to say, no, you can't. But I start by saying yes. Sure, you can. But there's a different kind of meaning than what you can have through the Christian faith. The two differences are (there's more than two), but the one is, you're talking about created meaning, versus discovered meaning.

Created meaning is, I decide I want to get a gold medal in swimming, or I decide I want to help the poor in Africa. And so, my meaning in life is something I just create. Discovered meaning is, you were made by God to do these things. And that when you do them, you discover the purpose is like a fish, who, when you're in the water, the fish is designed for the water, and the fish is happy, and then darting about. But if you put the fish up on land, the fish does not exploit experiencing meaning and life. It's not built for the land. It's going to flop around and die. So those are two different views of meaning. One is discovered, one is created. And then I just go through and compare and say, discovered meaning is very fragile. Because suffering can come along and take it totally away from you.

Created meaning isn't fragile, because if the meaning of life is to please God, then suffering can actually make it easier for you to please God. And it gives you a reference point outside of this world. Whereas created meaning can be totally destroyed by suffering. And so, I go through and just compare the two kinds of meaning, and say, wouldn't it be great if you had this kind of transcendent meaning? You'd be much more buoyant, much less fragile, much more durable, much more fulfilled. That's kind of how I do. It doesn't say that Christianity is true, it just shows how great it would be if it was true, which is the way in which this whole book works.

Frank:

And you make an excellent case that the fragmentation and division in our society really results from the fact that people are trying to go on created meaning rather than discovered meaning. Can you unpack that for us?

Tim:

Well, it's not very socially cohesive if you've got a bunch of people saying, my meaning in life is to make as much money as I can and not care about anybody else. But just, you know, have 20

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houses and spend it all on me. Then you got some other people say, well, my meaning in life is to try to help the poor and people who have had a terrible life. Well, you're working against each other. And so, when you have a society which everybody can choose whatever their meaning is, you do not have a cohesive society anymore.

Frank:

You quote Nietzsche in here. You say that Nietzsche is calling people to worship themselves, to grant the same faith and authority to themselves that they want to put in God. What did he mean by that?

Tim:

Well, Nietzsche was a very consistent atheist, but not totally, because nobody can be by the way. But he was very consistent in saying that people who say you should live for the poor, you should live for your fellow man, you should be living to make the world a better place...Nietzsche says that's silly. If there's no God, then you're still holding on to Christian values. He said, the idea that you need to care for the poor and help other people, that ethical idea made sense in a Christian universe, in which you had a holy God, a loving God who made all human beings in His image. That made sense.

But today, frankly, you can decide what is right or wrong for you. You are like God. If there is no God, then you are God. And if there's no moral norms, then you can just make up your own moral norms. And so, he was very consistent up to a point. And he pushes other people in a very uncomfortable way. Secular people do not like reading Nietzsche because he pushes them and says, there's no reason for you to be good, or nice, or kind, or work for justice. No reason at all.

Frank:

Gee, you can be like, God. Where have we heard that before?

Tim:

I wonder whether Nietzsche was being ironic when he said that. He must have gone, hey, you know me, Friedrich serpent and Friedrich Nietzsche said the same thing.

Frank:

Now, Tim, I think this created meaning and created morality is really at the heart of why a lot of people are not Christians. I speak at a lot of college campuses, and I co-wrote a book with Dr. Norman Geisler called "I Don't Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist." So, we do these presentations on college campuses. And when the skeptics come up to the microphone, if they're a little bit hostile, I'll ask them this question. I'll say, if Christianity were true, would you become a Christian? Now, they normally hesitate. And sometimes they'll actually say no. And they'll eventually admit that the reason they're saying no, is because they have a moral objection to God.

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In other words, they don't want there to be a God, because God will make a moral demand on them, and they'd rather be God. They're not really on a truth quest, they're on a happiness quest. And they think, this moral freedom, and we'll talk about freedom in a minute, because you cover it in a whole chapter in the book. This moral freedom that they have, by their own definition, their own created morality, will somehow make them happy. Have you found in your dealings there in New York City that many of the skeptics that you deal with, it really comes down to a moral objection, not an intellectual objection?

Tim:

Yeah, that hasn't changed much. Actually, when I was a college student, which, as you may know, is a long time ago. I'm 66, so that was a long time ago. It was true back then. Even in a much more traditional society where fewer people were willing to come right out and say, I'm a skeptic. Most people went to church. But when you talk to them about being a committed Christian, it was a moral objection. Just like you say.

Frank:

How do you go about dealing with that as a pastor? I'm sure when you're counseling people, you have one spouse who's a believer, another spouse isn't. You recognize that the spouse who's not a believer has a moral objection. How do you deal with that?

Tim:

Well, you know, there's always a background. One thing I learned from Michael Ramsden...He always says, when you get an objection like, "I don't want to lose my freedom," or "I don't believe in a God who allows evil and suffering." He says, there's about 10 different paths that a person could have tried to get to that question. There's something behind it, some experiences, some issues, and you probably need to ask counter questions to get a better idea where the person is coming from before you answer. Because there's generally a lot of different ways to answer it.

When I talked about the fish, for example, I used to say, if you believe there's a God, or even a possibility of a God, then if you're created, you're like the fish, in that the fish is not free really, to be anywhere but in water. If somehow, we feel like it's actually the freedom for the fish to go on land, the fish is going to die. And so, I would use that. I'd say, if there's a God, then you were made for certain things, and you will experience freedom when you submit to your design.

Just like the fish, in a way, experiences more freedom in the water, when it's actually submitting to its design. So, I try to say that freedom is not the absence of constraints. It's finding the right ones, the ones that fit in with your nature. Now, if they say there is no God, then we go somewhere else. But generally, you're right in saying, they say, well, there might be a God, but I don't want to submit to Him. And that's when I use the fish illustration to say, that's no way to really be free.

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Frank:

In fact, in chapter five, the chapter on freedom, you point out that freedom in the modern sense, is not the same as say what our founders may have meant by it. How has the view of freedom changed?

Tim:

Well, I think it's what Isaiah Berlin or somebody like that...our more modern view of freedom is actually negative freedom, negative liberty. We define it strictly in terms of freedom from, strictly in terms of, I'm free to the degree that I am liberated from any restraints at all. The main point I tried to make in the book is that destroys your ability to love somebody. I said, if that's your only definition of freedom, that it's freedom from, not freedom for, not freedom to do the right thing, but just freedom from any constraints on my behaviors, my decisions, my choices, then you actually have a definition of freedom that would make it impossible to be in love.

Even if you're dating somebody, you can't go out of town without telling that person you're going out of town. You start to lose your independence the minute you start to get into any kind of love relationship. And so, when you define freedom as negative liberty, which would just be maybe independence, if you define freedom as independence, then you have set yourself up to be extraordinarily lonely. That's the argument there.

Frank:

We're talking to Dr. Tim Keller. His new book is "Making Sense of God: An Invitation to the Skeptical." And it is a must read, especially if you have skeptics in your life, or you know of skeptics. Because it's a book that isn't a typical apologetics book. It's going below the surface with many folks. And it's dealing with their very existential needs and wants. And it does so in a very disarming way. So, I highly recommend you get this book.

Now Tim, how long was this book going on in your head? And how long did it take you to put it down? Because it's so well researched. I mean, you're quoting Charles Taylor. You're quoting sociologists. You're quoting "Habits of the Heart," back from the 70s or 80s. And I mean, there's so much in here. You're quoting Nietzsche. How long did it take you to pull this together?

Tim:

Well, I usually take about a year to write a book, basically. It didn't take me longer. But probably what you mean is, when it comes to pulling it together, about a year. But about three or four years ago, we started a ministry here called "Questioning Christianity." And "Questioning Christianity" is where I'm giving talks, then you can ask questions. It's about the truth of Christianity, or the relevance of Christianity. And it's like a 30 minute talk by me. Then you get to ask questions for about 45 minutes, and then we break, and eat, and just talk. So, it's kind of an evangelism apologetics thing.

But the way we work it out is you can't come unless you bring a person who online registers as a self-identified non-Christian. In other words, you can't just say, oh, I'm bringing in non-

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Christian friend. The person actually has to say, "I am not a Christian." That way, we want to make sure that more than 50% of the people in the room are not believers. And that has changed everything, because we just are absolutely strict about that.

Frank:

Well, let's talk more about that right after the break. Tim Keller's my guest. The new book, "Making Sense of God: An Invitation to the Skeptical" is outstanding. You want to get it. A good Christmas gift by the way. Back in two minutes, don't go. If you're low on the FM dial looking for NPR, go no further. We're actually going to tell you the truth here. That's our intent, anyway. You're listening to CrossExamined with Frank Turek on the American Family Radio Network. Our website, CrossExamined.org. Merry Christmas to everyone.

Hey, I want to keep you guys up to date. In the coming semester, we'll be visiting and doing "I Don't Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist" seminars at Appalachian State, Central Oklahoma, Wake Forest. We're going to George Mason. We're working on University of Arizona. several other places. Keep an eye on the calendar, also the CrossExamined app. Download that if you will. It's got the calendar on there, the podcast, it has our TV program, it's all up there at the CrossExamined app. We're talking to Tim Keller. Tim, if people want to follow you, where do they go? I know you have a Twitter account, and they can go to Redeemer.com. Where do they go to learn more about what you're doing?

Tim:

Yeah, that's a good question. I do have a Twitter account. But I don't do too much of that. I mean, on a Twitter account, I don't do a lot. For example, if I go speak somewhere, I don't put it on Twitter accounts. So that's actually not a good place to go. I don't do it that way. You know, I'm still until next year, I'm still a senior pastor of a church. Although I do get around, I usually don't tell people where I'm going. Sounds kind of weird. I'm not quite in the same position I may be in a year or so. So, there isn't really one place where you find out where I'm going, what I'm doing except when you watch the books come out.

Frank:

Well, actually, I saw something on the Gospel Coalition app today. You're going to be in Indianapolis in April for a conference. So, people can find you there. And they can also find you at Redeemer, right there in Manhattan on certain Sundays, I'm sure. You're in three locations I understand. And you're about to start a fourth, correct?

Tim:

Yeah, right. But of the three locations even now have eight services. So, I only preach four every Sunday. I move around. Frank, I really appreciate you trying to help people find me. But I'm just not as easy to find. It may change later on. But right now, as a pastor of the church, I feel like that's my job and not to be a speaker at this point.

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Frank:

Absolutely, I understand. The book, again friends, is called "Making Sense of God: An Invitation to the Skeptical." Now Tim, before the break, we were talking about the fact that you're doing a forum for skeptical people. And I suppose this book kind of grew out of that forum. You got some ideas from the forum. Tell us a little bit more about that. There may be pastors listening now, who say, you know, we ought to do that. That's a good idea. How do you do that?

Tim:

Well, first of all, the people who organized it here in the church, they came up with the idea of saying, if you're going to make this a bring a non-Christian friend to hear a presentation of the Christian faith, we want to make sure that the room has got a majority of people in it who are not Christians. That affects the questions a lot. It affects everything. It makes the people who are skeptical feel like I'm not overwhelmed or outnumbered. So, we did have a situation, which you couldn't come unless you brought a... everybody had to register online. And you couldn't come unless you brought a person who said I'm not a Christian online, self-identified.

"Questioning Christianity", when we started doing it a few years ago, I started by doing the "Reason for God" kind of material. And I realized I wasn't starting back far enough. I started realizing I need to give folks...I need to compare their own secular beliefs on these other life issues with Christianity so they could see that their secular beliefs are not serving them very well and Christianity would serve them better. And so, I started developing it that way.

Also, in 2015, I did a series of evening messages at Oxford University for their university mission. And I did the very things I did meaning, satisfaction, freedom, identity and hope in five nights. And that grew out of "Questioning Christianity." And when I was done with that, I said I need to write a book. And it took a year to write the book. So, it basically grew out of my evangelism over the last five years.

Frank:

In fact, I think I've listened to one or saw one of those Oxford discussions online somewhere. It's probably on YouTube friends. You could probably Google it. Let's talk about satisfaction. Mick Jagger couldn't get any, but you can in this book, chapter four, Dr. Keller. And you make the point right off the bat. You say after centuries, we've made very little progress making ourselves happy. Why is that?

Tim:

Well, I think it's interesting that people are not necessarily happier than they were 3000 years ago, I don't think. I think it'd be very hard. Nobody doubts that the life expectancy used to be 31, and now it's 71 and that that's better. But does that mean we're happier? Which is interesting. I mean, I would have thought that 3000 years ago, if you said, we're going to develop a world in which you can live twice as long, and you can have air conditioning and heat and all that, they would so oh my goodness, certainly I'd be happy in that situation. Yet, no matter how good our

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external circumstances are, we still find ourselves stuck suffering with depression, suffering with anxiety, essentially not being any happier than our ancestors and maybe arguably less happy.

Frank:

And why is that? I mean, you point out that the suicide rate is increased 24% from 1999 to 2014. And we live in the most comfortable, most prosperous country in the world. Why is this going on? What's the big void that Augustine talked about, that secular people don't seem to be able to feel properly?

Tim:

Well, I mean, when you just simply lay that out, what we just did. Which is to say, you know, in spite of the fact that we're far richer and far safer and all that, that we really are not happier. Very few people deny that. Then you say, okay, here's of St. Augustine. God, you made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in the. You say that and then you say, wouldn't it be great to have a satisfaction that's not based in circumstances? Because the whole point is that when your circumstances get better and better, they never make you as happy as you think they will.

And when your circumstances collapse, then you're really upset. And so, either way, circumstances are like fool's gold. They don't really deliver, and they change. And I said, wouldn't it be great to have a satisfaction, and a peace, and contentment that's not rooted in circumstances at all? Now, by the way, there's other religions that offer this too. But the Christian approach is really, really, really attractive because we have a personal God of love. And the other religions offer something like it, but not the same. So, I basically in that chapter, just lift that up. And I really think that's very attractive (if it's done well), very attractive to non-believers.

Frank:

In fact, you actually say this, "You harm yourself when you love anything more than God. Explain that.

Tim:

Yeah, well, you know, it's funny. If you try to describe sin to a non-Christian as breaking God's law...which by the way, that's right. That's true. The Bible says sin is transgression of the law. They'll start to argue with you and say, well, who's to say what right and wrong is? Everybody's got a different set of standards. But if you say, hey, if there's a God, and you love anything more than God, and you turn that thing into a God, it's going to drive you. It's going to become like an addiction.

If the main thing you love in life is financial success, it's going to drive you into the ground. It's going to become like a God. If the main thing is romance, then the people you're falling in love with, it's going to drive you into the ground, because you're going to have to have them love you. And if they break up with you, you're going to want to kill yourself. And when I start

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describing sin as idolatry, sin as putting something besides God in the place of God in your life, they get quiet. I mean, if I say sin is breaking the law, they argue. If I say sin is loving something more than God, they get quiet and they listen. And they began to say, I don't know if there's a God. But you know what, that does explain a few things.

Frank:

In fact, I think you quote, is it Miroslav Volf? In here you say, "If attachment to God amplifies and deepens enjoyment of the world, it doesn't diminish it." I think you say that it's not that we should love these things less, it's that we should just love God more.

Tim:

Yeah. And actually, that quote is trying to deal with a counterpoint. People say, well, if you love God more, that means you don't appreciate the world anymore. You Christians pie in the sky, by and by, you don't really love the world. And Miroslav makes a good case. He's quoting somebody else, but he says, for example, if your mother died, but you loved your mother, and you took a chair from her house, and it's in your house now, you love that chair. Somebody else might come in and say, oh, it's a nice chair, and they sit on the chair.

But for you, the presence of your mother comes to you through that chair, in some ways. And that chair means something to you because of attachment to your mother. So, it's even more special. It's not like you love the chair less. You love the chair more because you love your mother more. And then he goes and says, if you believe this world is given to you by God, God's behind the whole world, of course you're going to love the world. And in some ways, it's not going to just be raw material. It's a gift from God. And the idea that loving God more than the world means you don't appreciate the world just doesn't work.

Frank:

The chapter on identity in fact, you have two chapters on identity. The first one deals with the difference between the traditional way of getting an identity and the modern way. And you say both are crushing. And there's a third way. Let's talk about those two ways, the traditional way and the modern way. What's the difference?

Tim:

Well, if you go to a traditional society, and there are lots of them in the world. A child grows up and says, who am I? And the parents are going to say, you are our son, or our daughter. Basically, you find your identity in your family. If you're a good son, a good daughter, and then you work for us, and you help the family. And if you're basically a good son or daughter, then you're a good person and you can feel good about yourself. That's the way traditional cultures are. That's pretty suffocating. You know, some of us know what that's like. I have to marry the person my parents want. I have to do the career my parents want. That can be pretty suffocating.

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But the modern western view of identity is you have to be true to yourself. You have to find out who you are. If you want to be an Olympic swimmer, you've got to go be an Olympic swimmer. But then, there's other people that point out that modern Western, that's also crushing because now you have to accomplish everything. You have to in a sense, earn your salvation. You don't get it from your parents, who just say good boy, good girl, which is suffocating.

Frank:

And it's very well said. In fact, after the break, I want to ask you about this thought experiment you have. It's actually on page 125, about the Anglo Saxon warrior. Because that thought experiment is so revealing. Especially when today many people get their identity by their feelings, or their desires. And you point out a number of problems with that. We're going to cover that after the break. We're talking to Dr. Tim Keller. His new book is called, "Making Sense of God: An Invitation to the Skeptical." It is a prequel to the apologetics classic called "The Reason for God."

But at least in some ways, less crushing than saying I've got to go out, and I've got to be a world beater, and I've got to be beautiful, and I've got to be handsome, and I've got to be athletic, and I've got to have a great spouse. It's incredibly crushing. I would say, I'm trying to say in the chapter, that both of those approaches, I think, are nowhere near as liberating as the Christian approach where the course is who I am in Jesus Christ. It is not an achieved identity which I have to accomplish, but a received identity through grace.

And ladies and gentlemen, this is an excellent book for Christmas. Especially for those people who are thinkers that you know, who might not respond to a standard apologetics book, even "I Don't Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist." They may not respond to that. But Tim Keller will get you thinking and get them thinking about the most important things in life and how their worldview doesn't measure up, but Christianity does. You want to get it. We're back in two minutes. Don't go.

Making sense of God, how do you do it? How can you do it for someone who is resistant? A thinker, they're skeptical...how do you move them closer to Christ? The new book by Dr. Timothy Keller can do that. It's called "Making Sense of God: An Invitation to the Skeptical." Tim, before the break, we were talking about this idea of identity. I think I saw you say this at Wheaton College. This is before the book came out. And then I saw you put it in the book, this thought experiment about the Anglo Saxon warrior. Can you unpack that for us?

Tim:

You [unintelligible] put it at Oxford, right on the spot because I was kind of under the gun. And I've been using it since then because it seemed to really connect. Well, here's the thought experiment. Imagine an Anglo Saxon warrior in 700-800 AD walking through the middle of London, because London still existed back then. And he looks into his heart, and he sees two feelings, or two impulses. The one is, he sees aggression. That when people get in his way, he kills them. Okay, so he's very aggressive. He tends to kill people.

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And the other is a same-sex attraction. The other thing he notices in his heart is, he's sexually attracted to men. So, what he's going to do is, he's going to look at the aggression and say, that's great. That's me. Because this is a shame and honor culture. It's a warrior culture. And being that aggressive actually is really just what my society wants. But the same-sex attraction? No, that's not me. I'm going to suppress that. I'm going to hide that.

But today, if a young man walks through the streets of London, and he looks into his heart and he sees anger and aggression, that when people get in his way, he tries to kill them. He's going to say, that's not me. I need therapy. I've got anger management; I've got to do something. But if he's same sex attracted, he says, that's me. Now, my point is that when you look into your heart, there's lots of things in there. And they contradict frankly. And there's some good, and some bad. And you're going to have to sift. You can't just look in your heart to decide who you are.

You have to come into your heart with a set of values already. You have to come into your heart with a grid of moral values already, by which you're sifting what parts of the heart are "you" and what parts are not you. And actually, the modern person looks at it and says, oh, I'm gay. But I want to deal with aggression. I want to get rid of that. That person is no more liberated than the Anglo Saxon warrior. Because you're both doing basically what your culture tells you to do. You're both working off the cultural script. And you're not getting your identity from inside. You're getting our identity from what your culture tells you. That's the thought experiment.

Frank:

And I saw you say this at Wheaton, that when you're changing your identity, because you're in the modern view that you can pick your own identity...what you're doing is you're just exchanging one set of cheerleaders for another set of cheerleaders.

Tim:

Yeah, you can see that actually online. When you come out and say, I'm a trans woman, or I'm gay. You'll get some people who insult you. But then you get another whole group of people who are cheering you. And Charles Taylor, you mentioned him already. The philosopher says the problem with the modern identity is that it's very fragile. We need lots and lots and lots of affirmation because we've gone inside, we've made this decision. And now we come out, and we demand recognition.

Whereas if you go out to God, and say, who am I? God tells you through His word that you are made in my image, and you were made for a relationship with me, and you believe in God through Jesus Christ, and you become a Christian...basically, God is recognizing you. God says, I love you. And even though it's hard to take criticism from other people, you've found your recognition in God. And therefore, though it's good to get it from elsewhere, that's where the recognition comes from.

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With the modern identity, you go inside, you come out and there's nobody to validate you except everybody in the world. So, you go around, and you demand validation from everybody. It's one of the reasons why the modern identity is so angry. You have to recognize me. Otherwise, you're actually destroying me. It's because you've gotten your identity from inside, not from your family, not from the church, not from God.

Frank:

Great insight. And this is in Tim's new book. We're talking to Timothy Keller. His book is called "Making Sense of God: An Invitation to the Skeptical." So, you mentioned that the traditional way to get identity is to go outward. The modern way to find identity is inward. But you say the right way is upward from God, which is what you were just saying here. In that chapter, Tim, you say that this is an identity that doesn't crush or exclude others. How does this identity from God...it doesn't crush or exclude others?

Tim:

No, it shouldn't. I think all Christian listeners have to realize we don't live completely out of our identity in Jesus. And that's the reason why we are very often cast down by what other people say. Or we do get caught up in the rat race for money and wealth, and things like that. But the reality is, that if I feel good about myself because I'm a Democrat, or Republican, or I am for this or that political cause. Then in order to feel good about your identity, you're going to look down at people who don't have yours.

If you say I'm a hard-working person, that's who I am. If that's your identity, then anybody who you think is lazy, you're going to despise them. So, if you get your identity from any kind of finite thing in this world, you do it usually at the expense of somebody else. You shore up your sense of self-worth by despising people without your identity factor. But with Jesus of course, it's salvation by grace. You know you're a sinner. You know you deserve Hell. When I receive that free grace, how can I look down at anybody?

If I save myself by my good works, I might look down at people without my true religion and say, oh, you're awful. But when you say you're a sinner saved by grace, well, then to be true to that, you couldn't really despise anybody. Or you couldn't feel superior to anybody. That's why I think the Christian identity keeps you from excluding other people.

Frank:

Someone said, evangelism is just one beggar showing another beggar where the food is.

Tim:

That's what it's supposed to be. But Frank, you and I know (and we may have gotten into it) that humility often is missing in evangelism.

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Frank:

Oh, it is. Yeah, yeah. My next book is "Ten Steps to Humility and How I Made it in Seven."
[Laughter]

Tim:

It took me four.

Frank:

It's actually humbled me, Tim, because it only took me six. So anyway, you ended the book...and I want to save a couple of minutes at the end for a new campaign you're working on. But you end the book in the concentration camp in China. And you end it talking about the ultimate battle is between human pride and God's grace. Or I guess the ultimate choice we have to make. Can you just give us a couple of minutes and unpack what happened there?

Tim:

Yeah, well see. Langdon Gilkey wrote a book called "Shantung Compound." He was a young, humanist kind of skeptic. When the Japanese overran Manchuria, I think it was, or that part of China in World War II, he was put in an internment camp. And when he was in there, he really got shaken up. He had a view that human beings were basically good and rational. And in that sort of semi-concentration camp situation, he came to see, human beings were absolutely selfish. And they just did not care about other people. They were just out to, you know, help themselves.

And what was really surprising was, a lot of the more religious people...there were priests and missionaries there, were every bit as selfish as everyone else. Except they used religious words to justify themselves. But there was a guy in the camp named Eric Liddell, about whom "Chariots of Fire", the whole movie is about him. He really was saintly, really was saintly. And he died of a brain tumor tragically in the camp.

But Landon Gilkey realized that it's possible for religion to be brought into the pride of a human heart, and you get proud of your religion. And then religion is actually just part of the problem. And the religious person is proud, is just a selfish, and just as bigoted, and a big part of the problem in the world. But he says if true Christianity humbles you, (because it's a matter of grace, not works) then you actually become part of the solution to the human problem.

Frank:

And, folks, if you really want a sense of that, get Tim's book, "The Prodigal God", one of the most profound books you'll read on the centrality of grace to the Christian faith. That's a fabulous book. And actually, I think you've done several sermons on that too, from the "Prodigal Son" passage. So folks, search for that. That's another great book for Christmas, "The Prodigal God." This one is called "Making Sense of God: An Invitation to the Skeptical." And before we go, Tim, I just want to give you an opportunity to mention to our audience what you're doing in New York, and how you're trying to turn that city from 5% church attendance to 15 percent.

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You've got something called "The Rise Campaign." Can you tell people about that and how they can get involved?

Tim:

Well, if you if you look up "The Rise Campaign", there's about a two and a half minute video. If you look up Redeemer Rise Campaign, you'll find it. But basically, we came to see that in the central part of New York...now, we're not talking about all of New York, but Manhattan, basically. Where there's about a million people living (at least our part of Manhattan). We discovered a few years ago that over a 20 year period, about less than 1% of the people went to an evangelical church. And now 5% of the population are going to an evangelical church. It took us 20 years to get there. And we'd like to triple that in the next 10 years.

The only way that could happen was for the churches of the center city to come together. And we tried to raise some money for that. We are trying to put together a leadership pipeline, a way of training leaders here in the city. And yeah, the goal is to collaboratively triple the number of Christians and the percentage of Manhattan residents in Gospel believing churches. And we're on our way. I mean, you know, it's a huge goal. I don't know whether we'll make it or not. But we've laid a very, very great foundation last year. And so, we're pretty excited about it.

Frank:

Well, you've got God involved. And you've got some great leadership there involved. And that, as you've said before, a lot of things begin in New York City and spread to the rest of the country. And you've got more images of God per square inch than any other place. So, we've got to start making more of an impact in that city so, appreciate what you're doing, Tim. Thank you so much.

And that's Dr. Tim Keller, ladies and gentlemen. Again, his new book, which you want to give away for Christmas is "Making Sense of God: An Invitation to the Skeptical." It's a fabulous read. If you want to go more into the evidence directly for Christianity, it's called "The Reason for God." And then of course, the true meaning of Christmas. He has a new book on Christmas you could Google. But also "The Prodigal God" is another book you want to get.

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