



Blue Like Jazz: Nonreligious Thoughts on Christian Spirituality

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"I never liked jazz music because jazz music doesn't resolve. I used to not like God because God didn't resolve. But that was before any of this happened." ?Donald Miller

In Donald Miller's early years, he was vaguely familiar with a distant God. But when he came to know Jesus Christ, he pursued the Christian life with great zeal. Within a few years he had a successful ministry that ultimately left him feeling empty, burned out, and, once again, far away from God. In this intimate, soul-searching account, Miller describes his remarkable journey back to a culturally relevant, infinitely loving God.

For anyone wondering if the Christian faith is still relevant in a postmodern culture.

For anyone thirsting for a genuine encounter with a God who is real.

For anyone yearning for a renewed sense of passion in life.

Blue Like Jazz is a fresh and original perspective on life, love, and redemption.

Blue Like Jazz: Nonreligious Thoughts on Christian Spirituality Details

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From Reader Review Blue Like Jazz: Nonreligious Thoughts on Christian Spirituality for online ebook

Maureen says

"All great characters in stories are the ones who give their lives to something bigger than themselves."

I really enjoyed this book a lot - Donald Miller has a really intriguing writing style and it is hard to put the book down because of it!

I loved all of his stories and thoughts on Christianity - he explains everything in ways that are so easy to understand but still challenge your thoughts on the matter.

Overall fantastic read that I would definitely recommend!

Jason Savage says

The problem with Miller, Bell, and this whole Gen X/emerging church/postmodern church movement is that they want to be so much smarter than they are. Truthfully this book is spiritually shallow and leaves me thinking, "yeah, but so what?" I have already wrestled with a lot of the issues raised by Donald Miller and found myself wanting him to say more. I believe I finally put my finger on the issue. Jesus told the Samaritan woman that one day we would worship in Spirit and in Truth. Miller has found the Spirit, but is low on Truth. His book does not challenge me because it is nothing more than the ramblings of an idealist. The difference between C.S. Lewis and Miller is the challenge. Lewis really does challenge me to think harder about my Christianity. Miller makes me feel like we should all sit around and pontificate while smoking pipes. Sounds like fun, but what's the point? I like that. That's how I would describe Blue Like Jazz. "Sounds like fun, but what's the point?"

Tabby says

I wish that reviewers on this site would review books for what they are meant to be and not insist that they be something else. "Blue Like Jazz" is not meant to be a deep theological treatise. If you thought it was supposed to be, then of course it doesn't compare to Augustine or C.S. Lewis. Miller's book is instead meant as a memoir of one man's walk with God, his struggles along the way, and what he's learned from them. I enjoyed this read a lot because I related to many of his struggles. While I understand those who complain he placed too much emphasis on "feelings," I think for me it was actually a good reminder that Christianity is about more than just head knowledge. Having grown up in a church that is heavy on doctrine and probably somewhat mistrustful of feelings, Miller's book reminded me of the command we see in Matthew 22:37: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."

Yes, Jesus does say to love him with "all your mind." Yes, I think it's great for people to read theological classics. But I hope that along the way, we don't forget that Jesus does say to love him with "all your heart." The heart is the seat of our emotions and it's also where we keep the things dearest to us. I think it's important for Christians to cultivate that sense of the awe and grandeur of God, and also to cultivate a deep and affectionate love for Christ. If we don't have those things, how will our lives reflect the love that Christ has shown for us?

One of the saddest things for me is to see people who continue to outwardly live "good" lives, but who have lost their passion for the things of God. I know we all go through dry seasons where sometimes all we can do is put one foot in front of the other, and I have sympathy for that, but I hope that's not the place we stay. I think we ought to be striving to maintain closeness to God as much as we can, and do our utmost to keep Him in the center of our hearts, souls and minds.

Ben says

This book was recommended to me by MyFleshSingsOut, who is a very religious goodreads friend. He is a Jerry Falwell loving, hardcore, right wing conservative. He believes the entire old testament word for word: *none* of it is allegorical to MyFleshSingsOut. He doesn't even believe in evolution. You've probably run into him before. He goes around this site trying to save souls.

Knowing that I struggle with my belief and that I'm not nearly as religious as him, but more spiritual, than say, the average goodreader, he advised I give this book a shot.

And I'm pretty glad I did.

It's not a very deep or penetrating book. If you're looking for the deeper questions of science and the existence of God, or musings on morality, this is not the place to turn. Donald Miller was no Dostoevsky, nor was he as analytical as I would've liked. I do not recommend this book for non Christians.

The tone is very informal. He's just one of the guys talking to you. He's young too, like just-turned thirty or something. And it shows, not only in his lack of probing depth, but in his annoying need to be cool all the time. He constantly goes out of his way to show that he's not like other Christians, because, you see, he's been there and done that. He drives a motorcycle and has hung with hippies, and he hates Pat Buchanan. He even drinks and goes to parties. You see, he's cool. And if you forget how cool he is, don't worry, because he'll remind you time and again.

Yet, there are some advantages to Miller's frank, informal narration. He's brutally honest about his shortcomings, he's entertaining, his prose makes for easy reading, and he *does* have heart. His message is a positive one: focus on love and Jesus, not doctrine and religiosity. And really, his childlike look at things is refreshing at times: he comes up with some touching insights; the kind that seem simple and obvious, but tend to get lost or go unnoticed in everyday life.

So, while I rolled my eyes a number of times, I did appreciate this quick and easy read, for both its entertainment value, and its ability to remind me why I'm a person of faith.

Thanks for the recommendation, MyFleshSingsOut! I liked this book.

Lyn says

Great book, I really like Miller as an author. I loved the scene at the Reed College bacchanal where Miller and his Christian friends offered the reverse confessional, brilliant!

Even for the non-religious, this book may restore a little faith in humanity.

If you find that your faith is somewhat unconventional, this may be a good book for you.

Tara says

My nonreligious thoughts on this book.

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Donald Miller's Most Frequently Discussed Topics:

1. The danger of being self-absorbed.
2. Himself.

==

He makes a really good point about how truth shouldn't be defined by what's trendy. Then at every turn, he pats fundamentalism on its dorky little head, because can you believe those Christians who, like, memorize Scripture on a (*gag*) schedule? That's not authentic, man.

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Fun game: eat a Skittle every time Miller mentions that he's smoking a pipe.

Pro tip: buy a jumbo bag.

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I kinda hope someone hugs Donald Miller today. He needs it.

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But goodness, he also needs to stop obsessing over whether or not his future wife will want to see him shirtless. Dude, calm down. And your habit of kissing your pillow in the morning "as if it were a woman, a make-believe wife?" Didn't really need to know that.

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I will never look at Emily Dickinson the same way again.

"I saw Emily Dickinson step out of a screen door and look at me with dark eyes, those endless dark eyes like the mouth of a cave, like pitch night set so lovely twice beneath her furrowed brow, her pale white skin gathering at the red of her lips, her long thin neck coming perfectly from her white dress flowing so gently and cleanly around her waist, down around her knees then slipping a tickle around her ankles---" and are you feeling as uncomfortable as I am yet?

If getting a crush on Emily Dickinson is "a rite of passage for any thinking man," then dear God, please help me not marry a thinking man, amen.

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My best Donald Miller impression:

"Guys, guys, guys. I just had this MAJOR epiphany about myself. I'm just really super selfish. Like, I know marriage is great and all, but I just can't imagine having a woman around ALL THE TIME. Wouldn't it be great if I could get married, but my wife could have her own house, and she'd only come over when I felt like shaving? That's...probably not normal, right? Man. I have intimacy issues. Or maybe I'm just really selfish. I should probably stop being so self-absorbed. The world isn't about me. Me, me, me, me, me. That's all I ever think about. But I am not the center of the world. It's not MY world. I don't know why I think that. Why do I think it's all about me? Must be my intimacy issues. Guys, have I mentioned how selfish I am? Welp, guess the only thing to do is indulge in some major introspection and continue to plumb the depths of my tortured soul. Maybe then I will find out why I'm so focused on myself."

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In the midst of their college's 3-day orgy (errr, Ren Fayre), he and his friends set up a confession booth for all the drunk, high, naked students. Oh, but heh, small detail: Miller and his friends are the ones confessing. For the Crusades.

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My second-best Donald Miller impression:

"Institutions suck. Churches are institutions. Find a church that isn't super institution-y. Oh, but Reed College? Best institution EVAH. People say it's godless, but dang if those drunk, high naked people aren't more Christ-like than my fundamentalist friends. Like, my one friend talks like Elmer Fudd, and if he went to church with me, someone would snicker at him behind his back, and that is a tragedy of epic proportions. But Reed College? There is literally not ONE soul at Reed College who would even *think* something bad about my friend. Ugh, Christians suck sometimes. Hippies are freaking awesome ALL THE TIME. Also, I once went to a Unitarian church and yeah, I didn't love the fact they ignored the Bible, but they accepted people, and that's just the best, huh?"

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Emergent Goop would be a good band name. Also a better title for this book.

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To sum this all up, here is a conversation I had the pleasure of overhearing.

Friend: Oh, you're reading "Blue Like Jazz?" Is it any good?

Roommate: Hmm. Do you want the long version or the short version? The short version? No. The long version? Hell, no.

^ I think Donald Miller would appreciate her use of "hell." (It was authentic.)

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P.S. Too snarky? Just compensating for the 240 pages of emotional mush I just read. I feel better now.

Danielle says

This book is truly captivating to me.

So many friends had recommended it to me and when I started reading it, it was okay, but it didn't really grip my attention until the 3rd chapter.

The author tells a story about how Navy Seals go to rescue some prisoners of war. The hostages are so frightened that they don't believe the Seals are American and refuse to come with them. In order to help the hostages trust them, one of the Seals sets down his weapons, removes his helmet, softens his face, and curls up next to the hostages. He was showing them that he was one of them, so that the hostages could trust the Seals to rescue them.

Donald Miller makes the analogy that that's why Jesus became man, so that we could trust him to save us. He also makes the analogy that we are being held captive in a world run by Satan, and we have to trust in Jesus so we can be rescued by Him. That story and analogy really speaks volumes to me..

Another reason that that little story really struck me is that just the day before, I had an interesting conversation about how people can sometimes psychologically manipulate others by taking on similar positions or attitudes in order to get people to trust them and feel more open around them... it's a very interesting concept.

I'm only halfway through it and already there has been mention of Steinbeck and Chico State.. odd! The author is from Portland and that is where the story is based.. but it always intrigues me when there things or places so close to me are mentioned simply by chance. It seems as though the author is speaking directly to me!

It's the same thing as when some arbitrary concept is presented to you -- and then you read about the exact same thing in a different context the very next day, or someone else mentioned the same thing. Or you open the bible and the first verse you read is exactly what you needed to hear at that particular moment.. Or the verse printed on the page of the notebook I'm writing in pertains exactly to the message/sermon I'm taking notes on!! I love it.

It's a wonderful book about the author's journey through Christianity and life.. I can't wait to finish reading it!

Mitch Nichols says

If you pick up Miller's book looking for writing that is chock-filled with passages of Scripture or full of deep and nuanced passages of doctrine and theology then you will be disappointed. But if you approach the book as one man's journey to faith told in a friendly and humorous manner then you will enjoy Blue Like Jazz. Admittedly I approached the book from my very Conservative Evangelical subculture with a little trepidation. Miller uses ideas, terms and political viewpoints that will make the majority of conservative Christians bristle and he pokes at some of the "sacred cows" e.g. Republicanism is next to godliness. But Miller will take you on a journey worth the price of the book and asks some very needful and poignant questions about what baggage we saddle the Gospel with to it's detriment. Are there things in the book that maybe Miller will re-think as the Holy Spirit works in his life? Probably, but hopefully that can be said of you and I as well. I like the book enough to potentially give it to a seeker or someone turned off by the small C "christianity" that subscribes to a group think-you must be assimilated mentality. Miller didn't write it to be a definitive treatise on theological or doctrinal truths...he wrote it to express the need for a little more humility and a bolder testimony before the watching world.

Seth T. says

I thought of several different ways in which to begin this review - several witty comparisons that would surely catch the reader's attention. But that was a month and a half ago. See, I started reading *Blue Like Jazz* on the 20th of July and it is now the 4th of October. I have four pages left and I'm not sure I have the strength to continue.

For you see: Donald Miller is wearying. Endlessly self-amused and self-absorbed, he seems to want nothing so much as to be hip, cool, edgy (despite his own protests that hip, edgy, and cool are vanities and wastes of time and energy). And if four years of highschool taught me anything, it is that everyone with a heart is thoroughly and deeply embarrassed when the Very Not Cool Guy walks in and tries to be cool. Think: The Offspring's "Pretty Fly for a White Guy."

The thing is: Christianity cannot be cool. There is no reason non-believers should see Christianity as anything even on the same plane as Cool. Christianity says and believes terrifying things about the non-believer. Forget the homosexuals a minute - Christianity says that the friendly, tax-paying, socially-active, community-leading paragon of virtue who doesn't bow the knee to Christ is horribly sinful and an actual enemy of God. No matter how kind and cool they are. For Christianity to become cool, it has to stop having anything to do with Christ and his message. Maybe Donald Miller wants that. It kinda seems like it, but who can say - since he's not that great at expressing anything beyond his own meandering and fleeting feelings on matters.

About two-thirds into the book, a friend (who won't receive and identity via nickname, such as Tony the Beat Poet or Andrew the Protester) ask me what kind of a book it was. I had a hard time describing it at first. Then I realized: *OMG!! I'm reading a blog on paper! LOLZ!! KBAI!* Really, Miller's book is nothing more than a glorified blog in its meandering promise to get to a point that never comes. In reality, Miller would make a much better blogger than he does a writer. Unfortunately, even as a blogger, he would only be so good - because despite moments of value and bits that come close to insight, his style is heavy-handed and obvious for too much of the book's 240 pages (I know, only 240 pages and it's taken me almost two-and-a-half months!). I think his would probably sit in the Occasional Reads section of my blogroll, checked only so often for fodder for my own blog postings—and only out of some sense of duty because he linked to me first.

One good-but-obvious point Miller makes throughout the book is that the human expression of Christianity in the contemporary American church is lacking at best, gravely flawed at worst, but most likely, somewhere in between. This is clearly true. But also clearly known to probably most of us. And the real problems are not often the ones that Miller is pointing out - he seems frequently upset at how little the church fits in with a world filled with lovely sinners. Yet still, there is value in his critique.

But not much. Again Miller shows himself to be like too many bloggers; and like too many bloggers, he has much criticism and too few answers. If he were a blogger, this might be acceptable; after all, the only cost associated with reading a blog is time (and perhaps mental health). A book, however, is paid in currency. There is real loss if a book does not measure up to its published value - and *Blue Like Jazz* does not. I hate to say that because there are a few amusing stories and I get the feeling the book wants to be useful - but it just isn't.

Cyndia says

I was excited about reading this book originally, then I saw what some people had to say and thought it might not be as good as it was hyped up to be. I still expected it to be an enjoyable read. However, I was completely disappointed.

First, you can tell a lot about a book by the first chapter. This book's first chapter was terrible. It was like a bad movie that jumped all over the place so much and so often that you come away seasick. There are times where you want to scream out "too much information" but that does not make the author stop. By the end of the first chapter, I knew I was not going to enjoy the book and it would take effort just to make it through the book.

Second, the author is not that gifted an author. There is something special about the use of language to convey ideas. You can have simple, flowing language to express deep truths, such as what you see used by Alan Paton in *Cry, the Beloved Country*. You can use everyday language to convey conversations without dumbing down the subject, as Samuel Clemens, a.k.a. Mark Twain, demonstrates in his literature. You can even jump all over the place from one thought to another like William Faulkner. You can tell that Don Miller, the author, is well read and intelligent, but his attempts at the use of language leave something to be desired. He tries to be too relevant to today's audience, and ends up dumbing down his thoughts. Books should make you think and be a challenge. His book purports to make you think, but it only made me think about how I did not want to be like this guy. I hope this book does not become a classic because it will portray our time period in history as one where we thought we were smart, but we were dumb.

Third, the author seems to be ashamed of the gospel. If a non-Christian reads this book seeking an understanding of Christianity and Christ, the non-Christian is going to see Christians as a bunch of self-loving whiners who do not know who God is. I was hopeful when I reached the last chapter that purports to be about Jesus because I thought maybe the author was building up to a presentation of the gospel. However, he did not communicate who Jesus was in the chapter. He just communicated that Jesus was someone to find. It left me thinking about Romans where it is made clear that no one seeks after God. No one can come to a saving knowledge of God without being told the gospel. Miller almost seems to be ashamed of this. The gospel would have been a wonderful climax to the book, but it was missing. The lack of gospel left a feeling of emptiness at the end of the book. If what Don Miller portrayed is the gospel, I want no part of it. Give me the cross of Christ where He took on my sin and imparted His righteousness to me instead. Once I have accepted the real gospel, then maybe I will not whine and complain about the church not doing this and not doing that, but be a part of the change motivated by my desire to live for God's glory.

Overall, I thought this book was based too much on feelings. Feelings change too much, as evidenced by the author being all over the place throughout the book. The Christian life has to be grounded on something bigger than feelings and emotions. It must be grounded on God's Word. I felt that the author lacked being grounded in something. Even chapters that purported to be about God (such as the chapters on love, worship and Jesus) ended up being about the author. Christianity is not to be self-centered but Christ-centered. This book lacked conveying that idea.

I seriously do not recommend that people read this book. Even more, I am disturbed that non-Christians are reading this book and thinking that this must be what Christianity is about. I know this review is a bit on the harsh side, but I think that the church needs to be more discerning about what it promotes to the world. A watered down gospel is no gospel at all. It is time to stop being ashamed and start living for God's glory.

Greg says

Originally this got three stars, now it has one. The more I think about this book the more I realize that it is nearly as noxious as most evangelical attempts at converting someone. What makes Miller really any different from the whorish looking teenage girls mentioned further down? Whorish teenage girls probably wouldn't do much to convince me I should be a Christian, but in the right frame of mind (where I excise parts of my brain and forget to be critical) his descriptions of loneliness, feeling like the whole world is an inauthentic rotting pile of shit, and feeling anchorless and rudderless in life I could conceivably fall for the message of this book.

This book is deceptive, and I'm not sure if it is intentional or not, but it still is deceptive.

Below I start the review with a story about two born-again Christians, one who I don't talk much about. This one was of the annoying breed of BA Christians, and he used an argument favored by practitioners of deception all over the world, the one where appeals are made to similarity between himself and the target. That was a shit sentence. What I mean is he would make arguments like this: "Man, I get that you don't like God, I was just like you, I was studying Environmental Science, and enjoying college, smoking lots of pot, just like you, I believed in Darwin, but then Jesus came to me and I realized Satan put fossils in the ground to deceive us." (how I wish I was making this up, this is really something he said).

What this guy and Miller are doing is trying to make me relate to them, and then see that I need to take the same path they did, because if they couldn't find a way out of their problems (emotional or intellectual), then how could I who am just like them.

I thought of Miller as the non-obtrusive Christian, but I think he really is just a more subtle version of his friend. The non-obtrusive Christian I think just really liked that religious people were paying him to skateboard. I remember one of the times we were talking to him he brought up evolution and Darwin, and started asking questions about what he had read in a book on Creationism and what Darwin really said about certain things. I didn't know much about Darwin or Evolution, so I couldn't really answer him except with what I 'felt' was true', I think he was genuinely interested in finding out if what he was being taught was true, or if it was bullshit.

Deep down I don't think Miller really cares if what he believes is bullshit, he's just searching for things to prop up his belief structure.

On Easter evening in 1999 my friend Mike (I'm so tempted to call him Mike the Goth or fill him with some hyperbolic characteristics that would make him sound cooler than any person could really be, but I won't succumb to Miller's influence) were hanging out at an almost empty coffee shop in town when two guys about our age approached us. At the time I was finely attuned to when someone was making an approach to hawk Jesus, in upstate New York it happened fairly often (more on this a little later), in New York City it doesn't happen in the same way. Now this skill set can pick out someone making an approach asking for spare change.

I don't know what Mike was wearing, probably something all black, or black with military pants. I know that I was wearing my Amebix t-shirt that had a guy crucified on the front, and 'No Gods, No Masters' on the back. I wore it because I was a shit who liked to passively get a rise out of people, and it was Easter--or

Zombie Day as I had wittingly started calling the earlier in the day when Mike and I were heading to a store meeting at Kinko's.

So anyway there we were, and these two guys approach us, and the one starts talking to us, making small talk, and I go into shutdown mode, knowing what is coming. Mike keeps answering the guys questions. The other guy who isn't doing much of the talking looks like he is about to explode with excitement, he just wants to say something, and after a minute or two he just blurts out, "Hey, what do you think of Jesus?" I say nothing. Mike starts blurting out Crass lyrics like "I am no feeble Christ not me, he hangs in glib delight..." and "Jesus died for his own sins not mine". Mike seems to be enjoying himself, the Christians seem to be enjoying themselves in some perverse way, and I'm really fucking embarrassed. I will them away but my powers of mind control are absent because by some occult means they end up taking a seat at our table. We talk to them for the next hour. Well Mike talks to them, I sometimes give one word answers to a question if I'm asked directly, but I just stare at my coffee cup and listen.

To make a boring story shorter, they all talked, and they tried to get us to sign up for the eternal Jesus plan of salvation insurance, Mike had some fun with them, and every few minutes they would all start kind of talking like normal people, until usually the excitable one would once again shot back with some kind of Jesus thing.

A week or so later, maybe more, but not much more, Mike and I were back at the same coffee shop (where we were everyday at some point), and the guy who didn't talk about Jesus quite so much in the conversation showed up and asked if he could join us. We all talked, I was a little more involved in the conversation, and the Jesus guy (sorry I don't remember his name) turned out to be a pretty decent guy, and didn't really talk about Jesus at all.

A couple of more times the decent Jesus guy showed up and asked to join us and then sat and talked with us for an hour or so. I didn't mind if he showed up, he was actually a fairly interesting guy, and he was a Christian, but kind of in the same way that I was a vegetarian at the time. I really cared about not eating or wearing animals and if asked I'd talk about why I felt that way, but I never felt the need to ask someone eating a hamburger if they knew they were eating a cow. I'd like it if everyone stopped eating meat, but I wasn't going to preach to someone, they would do what they liked. He was kind of the same way, he never pushed Jesus on us in these conversations.

Instead we found out that he was part of this group called Word of Life, which is a Christian all year camp / school for kids to be trained to be evangelical missionaries. The group itself I hold in very low regard, but this particular guy was just a normal individual without a pathological need to share and convert (he may have gotten that part erased from himself over time). He lived at this place, and part of each day he studied the bible and was trained to go out and spread the word of Jesus, and the other half of the day he skateboarded. Seriously, he skateboarded and worked on getting better at this Bible boot camp in order to 'infiltrate' the skateboarding youth culture that hadn't been to receptive to the good word so far.

I kind of think of Donald Miller as this guy.

As an aside, one of the other battle tactics of the Word of Life was to bring young girls to Saratoga Springs on a Friday or Saturday Evening in nice weather and unleash them from their vans on Broadway. Lots of people are out on the main drag of town in nice weather, and Saratoga is a kind of artsy town, and one of the only towns with a vibrant downtown that people come to, so these girls would be unleashed on the streets to convert people to Christ. On a particular Friday evening I was sitting on a planter in front of a coffee shop that had recently banned me from their premises, reading the brand new collection of short stories by David

Foster Wallace *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men*, when the live action show I'll call *Brief Encounters with Hideous Nubile Girls* started. I saw the small army of young girls (probably around 15 to 18 years old), unloaded out of the van, and disperse to conquer the hordes of heathens out of the street. All of the girls were wearing very revealing (or slutty) clothing and their approach was to go up to men and start flirting with them, before changing to conversation around to Jesus. It was one of the most surreal things I saw, not legal girls flirting with guys in their late twenties and older and then trying to convert them. Jailbait for Jesus. I don't know if they won any conversions, but they had no trouble getting guys to keep talking to them.

Forgive me Jesus I have sinned once again in a really long and rambling tangential personal story in what should be a book review.

I wanted to hate Donald Miller. I didn't though. I think that he is terribly misguided and unconsciously (or unintentionally) dishonest but I think he's probably got his heart in the right place. Of course I'll say that because he's pretty much the same person I am, but where I have wrestled with dis-belief in all things for most of my life he wrestles with belief. We are both reclusive, self-obsessed and overly self-conscious. We both have a similar sense of moral outrage at the world, and seem distrustful of institutions, and even ones that basically profess what we believe. He's a Christian who finds churches stifling and judgmental; I've been at separate and overlapping times a punk, an anarchist, a philosophy student and a vegetarian who for the most part has been unable to bear being in the company of others who shared my level of interest or commitment. He would leave church early just so he didn't have to talk to people afterwards, I'd bring pre-calculus homework to punk shows my band played in and then sat off to the side doing that once my band had played just so I didn't have to deal with the people.

I relate to him as a person, and there is something likable about him in the book. (He's probably a much more likable person than I am.)

In the comments to Ben's review of this book, I said I couldn't wait to rip Miller a new asshole in my review. I'm not going to do that, the book didn't turn out to be nearly as awful as I wanted it to be. But I was ready for it to be, and the first chapter nearly did me in with his description of having his first real interaction with God. I quote it below:

My slot-machine God disintegrated on Christmas Eve when I was thirteen. I still think of that night as 'the lifting of the haze,' and it remains one of the few times I can categorically claim an interaction with God. Though I am half certain these interactions are routine, they simply don't feel as metaphysical as the happenings of that night. It was very simple, but it was one of those profound revelations that only God can induce. What happened was that I realized I was not alone in my surroundings. I'm not talking about ghosts or angels or anything; I'm talking about other people. As silly as it sounds, I realized, late that night, that other people had feelings and fears and that my interactions with them actually meant something, that I could make them happy or sad in the way that I associated with them. Not only could I make them happy or sad, but I was responsible for the way I interacted with them. I suddenly felt very responsible. I was supposed to make them happy. I was not supposed to make them sad. Like I said, it sounds simple, but when you really get it for the first time, it hits hard.

I was shell shocked.

This is how the bomb fell: For my mother that year I had purchased a shabby Christmas gift--a book, the contents of which she would never be interested in. I had had a sum of money with which to buy presents, and the majority of it I used to buy fishing equipment, as Roy and I had started fishing in the creek behind Wal-Mart.... (some stuff about opening gifts)

...So in the moonlight I drifted in and out of anxious sleep, and this is when it occurred to me that the gift I had purchased for my other was bought with the petty change left after I had pleased myself. I realized I had set the happiness of my mother beyond my own material desires.

This was a different sort of guilt from anything I had previously experienced. It was a heavy guilt, not the sort of guilt I could do anything about. It was a haunting feeling, the sort of sensation you get when you wonder whether you are two people, the other of which does things you can't explain, bad and terrible things.

The guilt was so heavy that I fell out of bed onto my knees and begged, not a slot-machine God, but a living, feeling God, to stop the pain. I crawled out of my room and into the hallway by my mother's door and lay on my elbows and face for an hour or so, going sometimes into sleep, before finally the burden lifted and I was able to return to my room.

One, this is called becoming an adult in your awareness to other people, as opposed to a child who has difficulty in cognitively having mature interpersonal thoughts (but good for you to think about others, there are lots of people who may never mature enough to realize that what they do or don't do can effect other people). I don't want to belittle anyone's experience, but doing a shitty thing and then feeling guilty about it doesn't need a God in the sky to make that happen; I also think that if I was in the midst of being that close to the omnipotent creator of the whole fucking universe, or feeling so terrible, I wouldn't be falling in and out of sleep; but then again at thirteen I couldn't sleep on my back, because once I lay on my back I'd think that this was the position I would be put in a coffin when I died and the final position I'd ever be in, and that would make me feel claustrophobic, as if I was really in a coffin, and then I'd realize I was going to die, and I'd start calculating how much of my life I'd already lived (this would later become calculations on how much of my life I'd wasted so far), and then I'd think about everyone else I knew and loved dying and I'd keep thinking about this until I stopped laying on my back and distracted myself with other thoughts. (Forgive me again Father for I have once again sinned in transgressing the bounds of book reporting).

Miller also says things in the book that sound all emo, and kind of poetic and cool, but which are just wrong. And this would be fine if this was poetry, but he's using these wrong facts to justify believing in God (and for God's existence in an indirect way). Here are the two that really jumped out at me:

"My belief in Jesus did not seem rational or scientific, and yet there was nothing I could do to separate myself from this belief. I think Laura was looking for something rational, because she believed that all things that were true were rational. But that isn't the case. Love, for example, is a true emotion, but it is not rational. What I mean is, people actually feel it. I have been in love, plenty of people have been in love, yet love cannot be proved scientifically. Neither can beauty. Light cannot be proved scientifically, and yet we all believe in light and by light see all things."

Light is a scientific concept, what light is, how we see, even types of light that we don't have the capabilities to see with our naked eyes. It sounds romantic to say that light isn't understood, a mystery, and that as a result it's like God but this doesn't hold any water.

We hear a little more on this general theme in a second argument with a false premise just two pages later:

In this book Orthodoxy, G. K. Chesterton says chess players to crazy, not poets. I think he is right. You'd go crazy trying to explain penguins. It's best just to watch them and be entertained. I don't think you can explain how Christian faith works either. It is a mystery. And I love this about Christian spirituality. It cannot be explained, and yet it is beautiful and true."

I'm pretty sure penguins don't exist for our entertainment, and as for the further claims of it being a complete mystery that one would go crazy trying to unravel, there are people who do study penguins and have a fairly good understanding of why they do what they do (the penguins being talked about here, are the mating habits of penguins, you know like in *March of the Penguins*, which is mysterious and beautiful, but not as something utterly unknowable.

My real issue with this quote is the Chesterton quote, and using what is a bullshit statement to make hyper-logical / rational thinking seem as a malady, of which the poetic mind is immune to. I don't know much about the history of chess, but I know that every grandmaster didn't go insane. You have Bobby Fisher's, but you also have Gary Kasparov who I've never heard is insane even though he is probably one of the greatest living chess players in the world. On the poetry side I'll just say Arthur Rimbaud, Robert Lowell, Antoin Artaud, Anne Sexton, and Sylvia Plath; and that is just right off the top of my head.

I have about ten more of these types of examples marked by little pieces of ripped paper in my copy of the book. But I think I've made my point, and no need to brow beat the poetic licenses Miller's emo-ey confessional prose takes (a style I am a sucker for when it's done good, and hate when it's done poorly. Miller falls in the middle, he never makes me fall in love with his world, like a great writer of this style would do, but he also doesn't make me want to throttle him with his own book..... I wonder if Miller ever read Cometbus, and if Cometbus influenced him. Aaron Cometbus is a good example of this kind of personal prose that can work beautifully, although Cometbus won't make you want to believe in God, it might make you want to go live in squats, travel the country, drink too much coffee, read too many books, smoke too many cigarettes and fall in love with smart beautiful and damaged girls that can only end badly.)

But I'll share one more little 'quirk' of Millers, and then call it a night for this review. His belief that Buddhists all rub the belly of Buddha statues and make wishes on them, and uses this as a way of showing how misguided people can be. This is just silly, untrue and even if it was true not any more silly and absurd as believing that a) by praying to God he makes checks wind up at your apartment on the day rent is due (pg. 188), b) that by giving God his tithe of 10% of what you earn he makes it so that you end up making more money, as if he is some kind of mutual fund (pg. 197), or c) the whole cracker and Christ thing (pg. 237).

I probably have so much more to say, but I'll leave this review by saying that I found Miller much more likable than I expected, and I imagine if I met him he'd be a nice guy to talk to. Him and I just from different sides who both happen to know that the other side is wrong. Oh, and he seems to have come around to jazz, and I pretty much can't stand it.

Carrie Anne says

This is my favorite book in the world, my own personal bible. It's not very long, and offers a lot of insight onto many different topics in life- college, relationships, etc. My whole book is highlighted in amazing quotes and I try to get all my friends to write in my copy as well. It's so great because Donald Miller explores the idea of finding Christianity and himself in a crazy world of skeptics and hypocrites. But most importantly, he isn't trying to sell anything. His style of writing is easy to read and fun, with chapters of titles like "Faith: Penguin Sex."

I feel as though a few of the quotes speak for themselves:

"I think one of the problems Laura was having was that she wanted God to make sense. He doesn't. He will

make no more sense to me than I will make to an ant."

"In fact, I would even say that when I started in faith I didn't want to believe; my intellect wanted to disbelieve, but my soul, that deeper instinct could no more stop believing in God...There are things you choose to believe, and beliefs that choose you. This is one of the ones that chose me."

"Self-discipline will never make us feel righteous and clean, accepting God's love will."

"I think it is interesting that God designed people to need other people...the soul needs to interact with people to be healthy."

"It is always the simple things that change our lives. And these things never happen when you are looking for them to happen. Life reveals answers at the pace life wishes to do so. You feel like running, but life is on a stroll. This is how God does things."

Maxwell says

I finished this book a few days ago, and I just can't stop thinking about it. It's not a perfect book by any means, but it was perfect for me at this moment in my life. I'm only bummed I waited so long to finally get around to reading it.

Samantha says

Instead of critiquing, perhaps let me just share a few of what I found to be some of the most powerful -- powerful because they are written so simply, and so simple in their truth -- lines that provide a glimpse of Miller's style, the beauty of this book, and the beauty of Christian spirituality:

"It is always the simple things that change our lives. And these things never happen when you are looking for them to happen. Life will reveal answers at the pace life wishes to do so. You feel like running, but life is on a stroll. This is how God does things."

"And so I have come to understand that strength, inner strength, comes from receiving love as much as it comes from giving it. I think apart from the idea that I am a sinner and God forgives me, this is the greatest lesson I have ever learned. When you get it, it changes you...God's love will never change us if we don't accept it."

"I think the most important thing that happens within Christian spirituality is when a person falls in love with Jesus."

and the quote that hit me personally the most.. "I think the difference in my life came when I realized, after reading those Gospels, that Jesus didn't love me out of principle, He didn't just love me because it was the right thing to do. Rather, there was something inside me that caused Him to love me."

Candace Morris says

Call me a snob, but I don't understand why everyone thinks Miller is such an amazing writer. Despite his ability to say what Christians around the world have been thinking for the last 8 years--and to say it in an interesting way--I don't think his thoughts or writing compares to so many other philosophy-type books.

I think what drives me crazy is that everyone in my "Christian" generation leans towards these trendy, faddish books that finally tell them how they feel about god, when there are so many other great theologians, philosophers, and thinkers that will challenge you. Honestly, I am more challenged by a discussion with my theologian friends than this book. But it seemed like everyone was blown away by this book, and it made me sad that their lives are not surrounded by people who challenge them.

I just feel like Miller is fine and great, but everyone hyped up this book way too much for me. His thoughts are simply not that original. He writes as if he is the first one in the world to have original, non-religious thoughts toward God. It lacks the necessary humility grounded in history for me to really respect his writing.
