



## **The Grand Paradox: The Messiness of Life, the Mystery of God and the Necessity of Faith**

*Ken Wytsma*

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**If we were made for relationship with God, why do we often feel lost and distant from Him?**

The life of Christian faith is and always has been a beautifully awkward reality. Following Jesus is done—can only be done—in the messiness of this world into which we were all born. Yet many Christians expect the walk of faith to be easier, neater, and relatively devoid of hassles.

So perhaps it's time for a frank conversation about the true nature of Christian faith. Maybe there are many desperately in need of a clear dialogue about how—despite living in a turbulent, chaotic world—our greatest joy is found in our pursuit of God.

In *The Grand Paradox*, Ken Wytsma seeks to help readers understand that although God can be mysterious, He is in no way absent.

God's ways are contradictory and counter to the way the world tells us to pursue happiness.

Doubt is okay, it will accompany in the life of faith.

What looks like struggle can actually be the most important and meaningful season of our lives.

This book is an exploration of the art of living by faith. It is a book for all those wrestling with the paradoxes that confront those who seek to walk with Christ. It's an honest look at how faith works, here and now, in our culture, our time—and how to put down real roots and flourish in the midst of our messy lives.

## **The Grand Paradox: The Messiness of Life, the Mystery of God and the Necessity of Faith Details**

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## **From Reader Review The Grand Paradox: The Messiness of Life, the Mystery of God and the Necessity of Faith for online ebook**

### **Robert Vincent says**

This book was a pleasure to read and gave insight on faith in a believer's journey through the messiness of life. There are many paradoxes in the life of faith as played forth in scripture. How we walk the Christian life is how we balance the paradoxes. Think about some of these:

- Die to live
- Serve to gain
- Give to receive
- Lose your life to find it
- The first will be last
- The weak will be strong
- Walk by faith, not by sight
- Suffering can be blessing.

Most of the time we tend to walk by sight and not by faith. Wytsma gives a roadmap of how to live through and actually by the paradoxes of God's word. He presents the key, which is trust, in chapter 11, "Cultural Landscapes" where he says, "Ultimately, our anchor point has to be trust. Trust that God is good. Trust that God is in control. Trust enough to do what He's asked of us. It's almost as if we cling to trust in the goodness of God as we walk out His calling in our lives, despite the raging culture change and hostility to faith around us."

Wytsma also gives the reader a very practical truth, which is "Love is Never Wrong". Think about it, when you are loving someone you will never hurt; you will not do harm. The reader knows almost intuitively the basics: "God is love, Forgiveness matters, be humble, Love your enemies, do good, and pray."

The author also knows that we need rest in this information age that so many of us strive to keep up with. He stresses a principle of rhythm, rest, and trust in resolving the paradox of living in a world spinning out of control with information for us to feel we must immerse ourselves. We so want to find rest and yet keep up. He says, "We've made information the new law, and nobody can obey it perfectly. Just as the Law of the Old Testament couldn't be satisfied, but to the extent that we attempt it, we're living under a new tyrant...God loves us for who we are. He has grace for us...Do you want to please God? It's simple: just spend time with Him." So the solution is to create a balance by practicing the presence of God. "More information is not the solution to an overload of information. Stepping out of the current is the answer." Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed (Mark 1:35)—good advice for you and me even in 2015.

Wytsma presents the paradox of life that we are both physical and spiritual beings and that the spiritual will live on after physical death. He quotes D.L. Moody on the assurance of heaven for all who believe, "Someday you will read in the papers that Moody is dead. Don't you believe a word of it. At that moment I shall be more alive than I am now. I was born of the flesh in 1837; I was born of the spirit in 1855. That which is born of the flesh may die. That which is born of the Spirit shall live forever."

The reader is brought to the point of seeing that joy and blessings arise from obedience. Obedience to God's calling brings a deeper walk with Him: "We don't earn blessing from God, but we can submit to the conditions for blessing. Blessing arises from obedience like the blossom growing on the rosebush, the rain

falling from the cloud, the laugh exploding from a tickle, the smile after a joke, the warmth of a hug.”

I really like the descriptive phrases in the quote above, which leads me to saying that I liked Wytsma’s writing style. He is well read as evidenced by the abundance, not only of supporting biblical passages but quotes from authors of old and contemporaries.

In his conclusion Wytsma gives the example of Christ, the Son of God as one whose story is full of paradoxes:

- “Though He was the most powerful man ever to live, Jesus exemplified humility.
- Though He was the most loving of all men, Jesus endured the great depths of human hatred.
- Though He was a dynamic leader, Jesus washed His follower’s feet, coming not to be served but to serve.
- Though He had the purest and greatest calling and mission in life, Jesus endured the greatest obstacles and apparent defeats in route to accomplishing that mission.

Though He was the one whom the Father would use to redeem the world, Jesus had to allow that world to first crush Him.”

This book was an inspiration for me to live by faith—not easy but I am nevertheless encouraged.

I’ll end this review by quoting Ken Wytsma’s prayer from Chapter 11; it reveals his heart:

Father:

In cities that never sleep, we are tempted to believe we should never stop striving.

In the noise of traffic and the hustle of crowds, our ears are dulled to the cry of the needy and our hearts grow hard to your prompting.

We are tyrannized by possibility.

We are paralyzed by inadequacy.

We are tempted by possessions.

Lord, help us see through Your eyes.

Help our hearts beat for love and justice as does Yours.

God, fill us with knowledge and grant us the wisdom:

To avoid distractions

To balance our duties

To continue in faith

Let your love fuel our love.

Give us the strength, supply us with the grace, and arm us with the humility needed to continue on the path of contentment and the road of justice in this world.

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## **Nathan Albright says**

[Note: This book was provided for free by BookLook/Thomas Nelson Publishers in exchange for an honest review.]

This book certainly lives up to its name, as it is full of paradoxes. It is a book that calls on obedience and decries cheap grace, but defines that righteousness a bit narrowly as social justice. It is a book that claims to seek a way beyond the partisan divide, but is itself narrowly focused with liberal political agendas (immigration, poverty reform, income redistribution) with a total avoidance of any discussion of personal

morality, except to disparage a focus on it. It is a book that disparages the reading of too many books (which I am probably guilty of). The book focuses on the tension that is necessary to have faith in God in the midst of doubt but derides being caught in the middle between God's ways and the ways of the world, unable to gain the advantages of either. In short, this book is likely to puzzle at least some of its readers because it is unclear the extent to which the author wishes to apply his principles to his own perspective.

To be sure, there is a lot that one can find fault with in this book, especially given the way it claims a balance while not providing it. Its mixed messages on the law, and rather content-free definition of righteousness and obedience is more than a little bit troubling. That said, there is a lot of value here, from a reminder to develop the ability to show gratitude for gifts and act justly in life, as well as focus on the larger community and one's ability to serve and be generous near us. These reminders, and the book's implicit relationship between the Sabbath and justice [1], are worthwhile ones, and the book is organized well with clever chapter titles. Clearly, a lot of attention was paid to craft the book well to make a particular (albeit partisan and political) case. Also, this book focuses a lot on trust, and that was clearly intentional as well.

When I read books like this, I am filled with more questions than answers. How is it that the Portland area (or the Bend area, in the case of the author) produces so many people who write passionate and moving books about social justice and produce so little practical obedience in the area at large? Why is it that it is so difficult to find a balance between obedience to God's clearly stated and consistent moral standards and a passion for justice for the oppressed, which is also clearly and consistently stated in scripture. The chief value of this book is in clearly and forcefully and biblically pointing out a great deal of the paradoxes inherent in walking with God, and these paradoxes can be applied far more widely than the author does, and far more consistently as well. We need the reminder that justice is important, and also the reminder that people can be so focused on justice as to forget other matters of righteousness. It is hard, given our perspectives and biases, for us to be fully balanced in the way that God wants, but it is worth every effort.

[1] See, for example:

<https://edgeinducedcohesion.wordpress...>

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### **Steven Hinkle says**

How does someone rate a good book? Well in my case, if the highlighter runs dry before the end of the book – that's a sign of excellence. Ken Wytsma's new book The Grand Paradox did not fail to deliver! Time to purchase a new highlighter.

Quotes were being highlighted as early as the Foreword by Eugene Cho when he describes Jesus and the near death experience that his disciples faced in the torrential storm on the lake. Cho points out that Jesus initiated “this life and death episode.”

Immediately we are thrown into the tension, the paradox, the apparent contradictions within the Word of God. We are challenged by Wytsma to embrace the unknown and realize that “faith is often characterized less by clarity than by confusion.” If God hasn’t swept “the confusing under the rug” then maybe it has been left there for to realize that His ways are truly above (and greater) than our own.

Just recently I challenged my high school students to not accept a simple or comfortable faith and suggested that Jesus was radical because of his paradoxical challenges. Things like finding wealth by giving it away,

finding life by giving it up, and finding yourself in first by humbling yourself and serving. The book adds to the list of life-giving paradoxes: the weak will be strong, walk by faith and not sight, and suffering can be a blessing.

The Grand paradox covers a wide variety of subjects, including but not limited to prayer, joy, doubt, contentment, despair, the will of God, spiritual fatigue and renewal, rhythm and Sabbath. I would highly recommend this book even if it only contained Chapters 11 and 12 on understanding our cultural landscapes as well as religion and the church. WOW! (I think this is where my highlighter lost it!!)

We must learn to live in the tension. Want help along the way on how to navigate and differentiate between the actual and potential? Make sure to grab your own copy of the Grand Paradox today (and don't forget to purchase a new highlighter).

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### **Amy says**

This book rather fell into my lap by accident (or perhaps not by accident). I was sitting on my couch writing in my journal contemplating the paradox of life. The paradox of religion. So many paradoxes with no real solutions to them. The term "great paradox" suddenly appeared in my mind. So, I looked it up online to see what folks thought of it. Lo and behold, this book shows up at the top of the list.

So I read a bit about the author and about the book and despite the fact that I am not a Christian, but a Jew, I decided I would give it a try.

This was a delightful read. It answered questions I had about my place here on this planet. That life is never clean and neat but messy. That you need the sand in the oyster to truly make a pearl (overused metaphor I know).

I loved Wytsma's careful thought of the meaning of life and what we are here to do. What our potential is, and yes, that God is beside us every step of the way.

But yes, there is a TON of hypocrisy in the world. A TON of judgment. There always will be. There will always be division but each of us has an obligation rather big or small to carve out our place and our meaning in this world. To do what we can and to leave this place perhaps a little better off than when we found out (that is my philosophy, anyway).

I will be reading more of Wytsma's books :).

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### **Emily Hill says**

This book is one of the most helpful books I've ever read on navigating the Christian life and changed the way I think about my faith on a daily basis. I'd highly recommend it.

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### **Hank Pharis says**

This book is refreshingly honest. I hate to say that most books on the Christian life aren't but ... Here are a few of the opening paragraphs of the book which give you a taste for it:

"We want answers from God. We have a ravenous appetite for clarity in life. And often, we desire justification or, at least, some kind of explanation for why He allows certain things to transpire. God,

however, is more mysterious than we think He should be or wish He were. Most of the time, we don't receive the desired answers or the clarity for which we clamor. In spite of our seeking, God seems just out of our reach. Try as we might, we cannot pin Him down.

In short, the truth is: life is messy, and God is mysterious.

We struggle with these truths. We spend our energy, often wrestling in prayer, hoping to attain that place of peace in which our life is less difficult, painful, and challenging.

Yet the messiness of life remains a constant reality, and God remains mysterious.

Life is messy and God is mysterious.

We even find this tension echoed in the teaching of Jesus: while we desire simple formulas, Jesus taught in apparent riddles. So how do we live, grow, flourish, and remain content in the mess? How do we trust, follow, and continue to obey God when He seems to remain elusive? ...

Faith is often characterized less by clarity than by confusion. ...

So it's time for a frank conversation about the true nature of Christian faith."

And that's what we get here: A book that is both Biblical and realistic.

(Note: I'm stingy with stars. For me 2 stars means a good book. 3 = Very good; 4 = Outstanding {only about 5% of the books I read merit this}; 5 = All time favorites {one of these may come along every 400-500 books})

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### **Bruce Strom says**

In *The Grand Paradox* Ken Wytsma invites us to sit around his dining room table and engage in "a frank conversation about the true nature of Christian faith." One can envision sitting in Ken's house with occasional appearances by his wife, Tamara, and four daughters, talking philosophy, history and the Bible into the wee hours of the night.

"Do we have a wrong definition of faith?" "How do I talk to God or hear from him?" "What is God up to in this world?" "Do I have to give up the things that make me happy to have faith?" "Are doubts ok?" "What is God calling me personally to do?" "How am I supposed to live for God in a crazy world?" "Can't I just have Jesus and not the institutional church?" and "What is it all for?"

These are the conversations Ken navigates as he seeks to rouse us from our "Cultural Dramamine" and demonstrate "the story of Jesus is full of paradox." "Real faith doesn't allow for easy answers." "Life is messy. God is mysterious. And accepting this tension-filled truth, no matter the circumstances, is the pathway to peace."

While faith is the common thread that weaves through these conversations, the book is probably best read as part of a group discussion that can chew on each piece. The book is also ideal for someone seeking direction in life who gets alone in nature and pulls out this book and the Bible as they wrestle with God.

Ken invites that wrestling. “Discovering God’s will for our own lives can only be grounded in a correct understanding of His will at large.” We need to see ourselves as part of God’s big story as we learn to be happy in contentment, pray authentic prayers, and move forward by faith. While there are times for contemplative solitude, Ken also advocates for life in community – specifically the messy family of faith known as the church.

Ken invites a deeper understanding of God and “our understanding of God should compel justice.” Ken speaks of the power of story as he demonstrates this in each of his discussions. One such discussion took place at The Justice Conference which Ken helped launch. A young pastor exclaimed, “I’m all for justice, but at the end of the day, I want Jesus not justice.” This is one of many apparent contradictions the book explores. In this instance, Ken demonstrates the gospel and justice cannot be separated. As he says, “Justice was Jesus’ mission, what he did in healing people and advocating for the poor, and the mandate He left His followers – that we should do likewise, and love one another. In fact, justice and Jesus are so closely linked that whatever you do for the poor, vulnerable, or oppressed is as if we are doing it literally to Him and for Him.”

Ken brings the heart of a pastor, the mind of an educator, and the hands of a justice laborer to the table as he lovingly, honestly, and directly deals with the tough issues of faith and the mysteries and messiness of life. As he says, “Part of faith is trusting that your calling, as well as your steps, may remain a mystery...(but) when we surrender our plans to God, we’ll find that we are successful in serving God.” “What is God’s will for your life? Simple. It is that you live out His will for the world.”

The conversation is long and engaging. Along the way, Ken wants to reflect the heart of Jesus and His kingdom. Relationships matter and in the Kingdom answers are less important than love. That may be frustrating for those looking for pat formulas. But as Ken says, “What God has called us to do is something He’s made possible for us to do... You have gifts, talents and the ability to love. Be empowered. Be encouraged.”

As the night turns to dawn on the discussion of faith, Ken might summarize the discussion as ‘the just shall live by faith.’ As he says, “The just will live by faith simply states the obvious: that if I live outside of myself, if I live to give and serve, if I think of others as being as important as myself, if I live for justice – what ought to be – I have to trust that somehow I am going to be taken care of. I have to believe that it truly is better to give than to receive, and that God really does watch over and sustain the just.”

This would be a good graduation gift for a college student or graduate student. Also appropriate for anyone wrestling with doubt or their place in this world. The book is not written to an older, more mature audience so pick it up and give it to someone you know who is young and struggling with the issues of life.

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### **Leslie says**

It took my husband and I 4 months to read this book - page by page during breakfast. It was wonderful: refreshing, profound, and thought provoking. Read it!

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### **Karen Zacharias says**

“I believe we are all closet doubters,” Ken Wytsma says.

We don't always recognize it as such but doubt is our path to God. Here's what Ken says about doubt in his book:

"Throughout Scripture, God never challenges whether doubt should exist. It is the one point of unity between us and God – the recognition that we struggle with faith, belief, and trust. Where we differ from God is what we think should follow doubt. We think the burden rests on God to erase our doubt. God knows that the burden rests on us to continue to trust and wait on Him, even in our doubt. Our programmed response to confusion is doubt, while the Psalms teach us to respond to confusion with faith. We think doubt demands an answer. God thinks doubt demands faith. We look at doubt and think it needs an urgent resolution. God looks at doubt and thinks we need patience and endurance."

Ken is the pastor at Antioch in Bend, the church my daughters call home. He is also the founder of The Justice Conference. I have been an outspoken advocate of Ken's ever since I first heard him preach some years back. Ken is a thought-leader. His sermons are deep, complex. He is not trite or shallow or pithy. He doesn't keep to a three-point 20-minute presentation. He's part historian, part theologian, part activist, part analyst, and part storyteller. He's the professor who makes you think, even when you don't want to. It is simply impossible to listen to Ken preach and not think, unless, of course, you aren't paying attention.

His books are equally as challenging.

I have to confess something here. I get asked to read a lot of faith-based books. I read very few of them. I especially avoid those books that offer a formulaic approach to Christianity.

I need books written by people who've lived in the trenches. People who know we are all one hot mess. People who understand anguish and heartache, but hope and trust anyway.

The Grand Paradox is that kind of book. Get it now.

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### **Edward Durand says**

Ken Wytsma's book was very thought provoking. It gave me much to consider and ponder. I even saw myself being described in a couple of chapters. Ken caused me to be stretched and to grow. I am still giving thought to what he wrote.

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### **James says**

If you want a simple, step-by-step approach to the Christian faith don't read The Grand Paradox by Ken Wytsma. Like his earlier volume, Pursuing Justice, Wytsma examines an idea from many different angles. In the former book he looked at the mosaic of justice. Here he turns around the jewel of 'faith' in all its mysterious and messy glory. This isn't a book about easy faith with pat answers. Wytsma is much more interested in the paradoxical nature of faith--how walking by faith calls us to 'live the questions' (13). In the place of answers, Wytsma calls us to something deeper: trust in God.

That Wytsma examines a topic from various angles shouldn't be too surprising, he wears a few different hats.

He is the lead pastor of Antioch in Bend, Oregon and a philosopher who teaches at Kilns College. As the founder of The Justice Conference he moderates a discussion on biblical justice and how to care for the vulnerable. He is also a C.S. Lewis aficionado. So in these pages Wytsma offers reflections that are pastoral, theologically rich, philosophically deep and practically engaged. There are a number of rich insights here, though not always 'easy reading.'

Wytsma begins his paradoxical look at faith by examining Joshua's defeat of Jericho. The plan that God gave Joshua was to walk around Jericho with the ark and blow horns, watch the walls fall down and take the city. From a strategic perspective this is a terrible plan, but through it God demonstrated that the victory was his and not the might of Joshua and Israel (4). The Jericho example sets us up for the nature of faith--where we are called to walk by faith and not by sight. Sometimes the stuff God calls us to makes no sense, from a human point of view. Wytsma writes, "Walking by faith doesn't bring the control or sense of satisfaction we desire, and over time, it guarantees a measure of suffering. Walking by faith on the other hand, can feel like walking blind--an even more dangerous idea--and we know that it, too, will involve suffering. Both alternatives seem undesirable." If that was where things ended, faith or no faith carries no special promise. But Wytsma goes on, " It is the faithfulness, the promise, and presence of God that give us a way out of the catch-22" (16). God, and God alone provides a way through the paradox.

In chapter three Wytsma (with a great deal of Kierkegaard) describes the nature of authentic faith as trust in God, though we don't understand him (26). In chapter four he discusses how Christian wisdom may look like folly to the uninitiated and therefore close-communion with God is required for us to know that we are on the right track. In chapter five, Wytsma examines the imperative of justice for all who claim Jesus as savior. Chapter six examines how the pursuit of happiness (in the ancient sense) encapsulates all that is necessary for human flourishing and therefore is a necessary component of the virtuous and godly life. Chapter seven examines the interplay between doubt and faith, Chapters eight and nine examine personal calling where chapters ten and eleven examine the wider cultural landscapes. Chapter twelve examines the role of church and the final three chapters unfold the eschatological dimensions of faith.

I appreciate many of the insights Wytsma has here. I am a new pastor who has been preaching on discipleship through Lent and I've been thinking a lot about the paradox of discipleship. Wytsma has been a good dialogue partner and has pointed me to other theologians too. Where a lot of pastor/authors are light on content, and where justice practitioners sometimes lack thoughtfulness it is refreshing to read a book from a justice-loving-pastor which is meaty, challenging, theological and inspiring. This is a comprehensive guide to the pursuit of God and it gives space for questions, doubt and uncertainty while still calling us to greater trust and obedience. That I appreciate.

My convoluted (and small) critique of this book is that I think he emphasizes the personal dimensions of faith at the beginning of the book to the exclusion of its communal aspects. Wytsma doesn't explore the church until chapter twelve. Eschatology comes later. Yes, I know he is a pastor and he cares about justice (which he addresses beautifully in chapter five), I just wish the company of witnesses was named earlier and given their due throughout. I give this book a solid four stars.

Notice of material connection: I received this book from the publisher in exchange for my honest review.

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**Robert Durough, Jr. says**

Ken Wytsma's latest, *The Grand Paradox: The Messiness of Life, the Mystery of God and the Necessity of Faith*, is not another "here's the *real* answer" amid the myriad of "conspiracy" titled books about Christianity and/or the Christian faith that have been released in recent years; it's a "both-and," "wrestle with the tension," "it's okay to have *honest* doubt" book that is sure to help and encourage both those who currently struggle with their faith and those who could use (need?) that every-so-often, honest look at their current state of being with our creator. Ken has written in an easily accessible manner by which anyone should be able to understand the book's message without being further confused by his or her own paradoxical state. For some, it may answer, rework, and/or redirect questions, perhaps even give from another's perspective the permission needed to simply *have* questions; what it won't do is encourage the kind unhealthy doubt and skepticism that comes from a position of insincere and dishonest inquiry. This one comes highly recommended by the six pages of endorsements at the beginning of the book (maybe not as over-the-top as I initially thought) and myself. Read, enjoy, and be uplifted.

In a more personal note, I received a copy of the book from Ken over two weeks ago to review and take part in the book launch. Due to other obligations and reading that didn't get done as soon as I'd planned, I didn't get to it until today—the day of the launch! So, first things first, I hit my usual spot in the café on the campus of a local Christian college where I like to spend time interacting with students, many of whom use the space for dialogue and inquiry not so much encouraged elsewhere on campus. I begin reading and about a third of the way through I immediately begin thinking of a student who quit and left the school at the end of last semester due to many questions that could not and would not be answered in her previous environment, only to quit going to any church altogether as she wrestles with her faith. I highlight the passage, get one more page into the book, and who should walk into the café but the long absent student back to visit friends! I hop up, exclaim the providential nature of our meeting, have her read the section, and immediately receive affirmation of her relation to the text. I get her mailing address and immediately after finishing the book order a copy for her, marking the first time I've done such a thing, and on it's launch date no less! Take this as you will, and let it stand as a further stamp of my humble approval.

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## Bob says

**Summary:** An exploration of the mysteries and apparent contradictions in life that call followers of Christ into the life of faith. A good book for a thoughtful, general audience for whom the "conventional" answers are not working.

Most of us don't like things that seem contrary to each other. We often try to resolve the messiness of either-or binaries by choosing one and dismissing the other—until that stops working. Ken Wytsma argues that paradox is at the heart of the life of faith in Christ, and is the only way to live with the messiness of life and the mysteries that lurk behind statements like having to lose one's life to find them, that it is more blessed to give than receive, and that givers prosper while misers perish.

After introducing this idea he begins with our idea of faith and drawing on Kierkegaard's Fear and Trembling uses the story of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac to talk about faith as implicit trust and obedience that walks into the unknown. This means walking into the life of unceasing prayer that learns to listen for the voice of God. This in turn leads to the startling paradox that loving God calls us into living justice in the world. Living joyfully is found not in having but "on our heart's wanting the right things" (p. 62). The remedy for doubt is not answers. He argues that when we doubt and struggle, the answer is both honesty about our doubts and pain, and paradoxically a faith in the goodness of God we cannot see.

We find our way in life not by discovering God's plan but by pursuing God and pressing into the life of love which is always God's intention for us. Living well is not a consequence of more information, more experiences and more technology but growing in the Christ-shaped life. As flawed as the church is, it's messiness is what we need to sort out our lives.

The last chapters focus on our destiny, the eternity that begins now, living with hope in the darkest hours, and the patience that waits for the blessing of God on God's terms. It is living in the tension of being between the gardens of Eden and the New Jerusalem, which is often a Gethsemane experience.

As you can tell from this summary of the book's contents, Wytsma gives us less a linear argument for paradox than a series of reflections on the paradoxes that run through the life of a Christ-follower. He draws on philosophers like Pascal and Kierkegaard and theologians like Niebuhr and stories out of his own life and community to provide to explore different facets of this paradoxical life of faith. It's one of those books to be mused on a chapter at a time rather than read straight through.

This is a readable book with short chapters but not simple answers. He describes a Christian life with lots of loose ends and mess, with doubt and pain and darkness. Yet he also gives an account of the life of faith that has a ring of truth—one that helps the person in the midst of the mess to go on pursuing God. Such writing is all too rare as are such voices in the pulpit. May Wytsma's tribe increase.

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Disclosure of Material Connection: I received this book free from the publisher through the BookLook Bloggers book review bloggers program. I was not required to write a positive review. The opinions I have expressed are my own. I am disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255 : "Guides Concerning the Use of Endorsements and Testimonials in Advertising."

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## **David says**

Honestly, I did not expect much from this book. I had never heard of the author but I picked it up when I saw a few people recommend it on Twitter...and it was free for a few days. After reading some challenging books this summer, from philosophers who hurt my brain to early church writers who make me feel guilty for being rich (compared to most people in the world) I thought this would be a quick read to squeeze in before summer ended.

As I was reading, I found myself becoming more and more interested. This is not just your typical book on how to live as a Christian by a megachurch evangelical pastor (though I honestly have no idea if this pastor is "evangelical" or if the church he is at is "mega"). There is a lot here about living in the paradoxes, accepting God and the Bible for what it is without trying to iron everything out.

What really got me was when he talked about reading books. I found myself being convicted, even feeling guilty, for how I read. I tend to consume books, at times reading through them too fast so I can log another "read" here on goodreads or at least fit into the identity of people who see me as someone who reads a lot of books. In the past I would read, hoping to find the key that would answer all my questions. If I just read enough, or learned enough, than doubt would be vanquished. There is still a bit of that too, so today I often

read to solve everything and to consume. Through this I often do find myself challenged (that last book by David Bentley Hart or those works of the early church fathers...wow, I can't get that stuff out of my head). But I wonder if at times reading books is my idol.

It is ironic then that I wanted to consume this book quickly before summer ended. I work on a college campus, in campus ministry, so around this time of year my time for reading greatly diminishes. Yet in the past I still managed to read a lot, maybe too much. As I read this book I came to a decision that as the school year commences, I am going to intentionally NOT read as much. Of course, I still need to read to prep for teaching (hence that Jeremiah commentary). And I will read for pleasure, because it is fun. But I am going to lay aside the big heavy theological tomes, not because I do not have more to learn (believe me, I do, and there are some books I really want to read) but because I know enough (head-knowledge that is) to minister on campus. When I read it will be for teaching prep, spiritual development (yeah, I can't get away from the church fathers) or for fun (hello biography of Napolean!). I also hope this will lead to more time for journaling, meditation and the like.

So overall, I recommend this book. I can see it being greatly helpful for college students so I will recommend it to them. I could see it being helpful to any Christian. Thanks Ken for a great book.

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### **Tyler Lacoma says**

The Grand Paradox has a grand vision: To unpack faith and its role in the modern world. The title gives a hint, but only a hint, to the answer. It's the refreshingly authentic narrative the book follows that is truly impressive.

What seems like a daunting goal – describing the nature of faith and spiritual life – quickly becomes a fascination and encouraging guide to the Christian life. Rather than growing too esoteric or pedantic, Wytsma fills his book with relatable anecdotes and down-to-earth language. Certainly Paradox attempts to explain some of the mysteries of life, God, and faith - but it also encourages readers to enjoy those mysteries, to thrive in the midst of doubt, chaos and distraction. Never has spirituality seemed such a part of the the day-to-day living we all go through.

It's no surprise, then, that what stands out most in The Grand Paradox is its accessibility. The chapters on doubt and Spiritual Fatigue will encourage weary Christians and offer a gateway for those unfamiliar or apprehensive concerning Christian beliefs. The chapters Between the Gardens, A World Made Right, and Personal Calling and Mission will speak directly to Christians of all flavors on how to joyfully make a difference in the world while holding hope for spiritual realities. The chapters on social media, the modern world, and the role of faith with resonate with modern, anxious young believers eager to help change the world but unsure of where to start. Wytsma has created a book that has a message for everyone.

Yes, there is some heady stuff here. Wytsma does not back away from discussing the beliefs of early church fathers, key points of ancient philosophy, or detailed exegesis. Fortunately, these sections tend to support rather than distract from the main points, which revolve around a much-welcome practicality. Interspersed with deeper stuff are refreshingly honest, personal accounts of travels, friends, family and past experiences. They help ground the story, and I found them not only entertaining but also frequently educational.

So, what we have here is an unusual thing: A book that, in taking the side of God and faith, seems to be on everyone's side. The Biblical values are authentic, but the message is happily timeless. If you aren't

considering picking this book up for yourself, I would at least consider buying it for a friend or family member interested in a real, meaningful discussion on life, faith, God, and ultimately the search for meaning.

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