

BASED ON THE 50-MILLION-COPY BESTSELLER

THE
REASON
SON
WHY

FAITH MAKES SENSE

FOREWORD BY KEN BLANCHARD

MARK MITTELBERG

THE REASON WHY

BASED ON THE CLASSIC BESTSELLER BY ROBERT A. LAIDLAW

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The Reason Why

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*To the memory of Robert A. Laidlaw,
businessman, Christian leader,
and author of the original book
The Reason Why,
which impacted the lives
of countless people
all over the world.*

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Foreword

IN MANY WAYS I'm a latecomer to the Lord. Early in our marriage my wife, Margie, and I became so upset with the behavior of people in churches that we turned our back on God. Our first teaching job was at Ohio University in the mid-1960s during the height of the Vietnam War. A pastor friend of ours was leading the sit-ins protesting the war and his southeastern Ohio congregation fired him in the most vicious scandal we had ever seen.

To be honest, we didn't start thinking about God again until 1982, when *The One Minute Manager* came out. It was so ridiculously successful that I was having trouble taking credit for it. When people started asking me why I thought the book was so successful, I began saying, "Somehow God must be involved."

The minute I opened myself to God, He started sending incredible people into my life. For example, there was an eighty-six-year-old pastor who had a tremendous impact on Margie and me. He told us, “The Lord’s always had you on His team—you just haven’t suited up yet.” I was the first one to “suit up”; Margie didn’t join the faith at the same time. After all, turning your life over to the Lord is not a team activity.

She turned the corner on a snowy afternoon in Aspen, Colorado. Margie had hurt her knee and wasn’t able to ski that day. Our longtime friend Phil Hodges (who would later become the cofounder of our Lead Like Jesus ministry) had fallen in love with the book Robert A. Laidlaw had written so many years ago, *The Reason Why*. Thinking it would be perfect for Margie, he asked her if she had time that day to read it.

When I returned from skiing that afternoon and walked into our bedroom, Margie was sitting there with a smile on her face.

She said, “Well, I suited up.”

I said, “You did what?”

She said, “I read *The Reason Why* and when

Laidlaw asked for the declaration at the end of the book, I couldn't refute his arguments."

Margie was the president of our company; since Laidlaw was a successful businessman, he spoke her language. When I read it, I had a big "ah-ha" too. Laidlaw knew how to explain profound spiritual truths using helpful stories and illustrations that anyone could learn from. The only problem was that he wrote his book nearly a century ago, and over time much of his language and even some of his examples became dated and increasingly difficult for people in today's culture to access.

Thankfully, Mark Mittelberg has now recreated this book by giving it contemporary expressions, updated examples, additional information and evidence to back it all up—while retaining the practical tone and clarity as well as many of the pearls of wisdom from the original work.

Books on faith-related topics are everywhere. Some are heady and hard to understand. Others are simple, bordering on simplistic. Mittelberg's *The Reason Why* is neither; it speaks in down-to-earth yet intelligent terms, using everyday

language and examples that all of us can grasp and gain from.

I highly recommend this remake of a classic and urge you to read it with an open mind and a receptive heart—seeking all that the Lord has for your own life and eternity.

Ken Blanchard

Coauthor of *The One Minute Manager* and *Lead Like Jesus*

Introduction

“SPIRITUAL VERTIGO”—that’s what a friend of mine calls it. It’s that dizzying feeling you get when you suddenly sense that the arguments or claims you’re hearing have knocked you off your spiritual moorings, leaving you wondering what you can really believe in and how you can be sure. If you haven’t felt the doubts and anxiety associated with spiritual vertigo yet, you probably will—regardless of what you believe.

Our culture is bent on the idea of questioning everything, including whatever it is you’re currently trusting in. The process of examining your beliefs can be very unsettling. On the other hand, it can force you to refine your assumptions and beliefs in order to make sure you know where they are pointed and why.

This happened to me years ago, when I took my Introduction to Philosophy class in college. I felt like I was in way over my head. As a business major, I wasn't sure I should even be *trying* to interact with what seemed at the time to be such lofty and out-of-reach ideas about knowledge, truth, "metaphysics," and faith.

Then one day our professor stood in front of our class and systematically challenged what he called the traditional view of God. He proclaimed that the concept of an eternal, unchanging, all-powerful God was based on ideas from a book—the Bible—that was written by hopelessly flawed human beings, had been edited and embellished over time, and was full of factual errors and contradictions.

If that's a view you hold, keep reading. But although things might be different today, at that time most of the students in class had grown up with the "traditional view," including me. I wanted to refute what the professor was saying, but the thought of getting up and challenging this learned teacher made my knees grow weak and mouth go dry. Worse yet, I realized I didn't really know what to say. I didn't agree with him,

but I didn't know how to refute his claims. I felt intimidated and spiritually insecure.

What bothered me most as I left class that day was the realization that I hadn't ever thought deeply about many of the beliefs I'd grown up with. I'd accepted most of them by simple trust, expecting that my parents and teachers had told me the truth. But now I needed to know, in real terms, whether it made sense to hold on to my beliefs about God, Jesus, the Bible, and the message of divine grace and forgiveness. I wasn't anxious to throw away what I'd been taught, but I didn't want to take it all on faith, either. In short, I needed—and maybe you need—to find out whether there is a real basis for believing any of these things. Put another way, I needed to know *the reason why*.

You may have grown up with a background similar to mine. Or you may have been taught to hold very different religious views, or none at all. You might be reading this and realizing that you, too, have accepted most of your beliefs by simple trust, expecting that your parents and teachers have told you the truth without considering the claims seriously for yourself. But

no matter what we grew up thinking about existential questions, the truth is that we all believe *something*. And as I did back in Intro to Philosophy, at some point we must each face the same issues: Is there meaning to life? Does faith make sense? Can logic or evidence point me toward a trustworthy set of beliefs? If so, which one?

• • •

The universal need for answers to these kinds of questions prompted Robert A. Laidlaw, an innovative and highly successful businessman in New Zealand, to write a powerful little book called *The Reason Why* a century ago. What he produced quickly mushroomed into a worldwide phenomenon.

Laidlaw initially wrote *The Reason Why* to explain his faith to his employees at the department store he founded in Auckland, Farmers Trading Company—a business that is still thriving today.¹ Initially he printed only 5,000 copies, thinking such a large quantity would probably last a lifetime. But there was such strong interest

in the book that he had to immediately reprint it, and this process was repeated over and over again. Since that first edition it has been published in numerous forms and translated into more than thirty languages, and there are now more than 50 million copies in print!²

I was first exposed to Laidlaw's book around the time I was feeling spiritual vertigo in that philosophy class. I found its information and anecdotes to be extremely down-to-earth and helpful. I read it through several times, as well as studying a number of other books that went into greater depth on the questions that most concerned me. This served to dramatically reinforce my faith. The irony is that after that rocky foray into the field of philosophy, and after completing my bachelor's degree in business management, I ended up earning my master's degree in philosophy of religion—and I have been speaking and writing in this area ever since.

But I keep going back to the simple brilliance of *The Reason Why*, and as a result I have given away literally hundreds of copies to people with all kinds of faith-related questions. I've found that its stories still pack a punch, but

over the years I have increasingly realized that its language and some of its examples needed an update—and that its repertoire of reasons needed an expansion to address more of the issues being asked in our current culture. It was out of that awareness that the vision grew to write a new and expanded version of *The Reason Why* for a new generation.

With inspiration and some of the stories drawn from the original—mixed with many of my own approaches and examples—this is my humble attempt to present to my contemporaries the same important truths that Robert Laidlaw so effectively presented to his.

It is my sincere hope that what you read on the pages that follow will provide you with the reasons you need in order to find a clear and confident faith. Please read it with an open heart and a receptive mind. And as you proceed, be mindful of the promise Jesus made in Luke 11:9-10:

And so I tell you, keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on

*knocking, and the door will be opened
to you. For everyone who asks, receives.
Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone
who knocks, the door will be opened.*

Mark Mittelberg
Denver, Colorado

Matters of Faith Really Matter

MAYBE YOU REALLY *will* live to the ripe old age of eighty, ninety, or even higher. Actuary tables say that these days your chances are fairly good. By most standards that would be a pretty long life span.

But have you ever thought of that length of time against the backdrop of eternity? Try plotting those eighty years on a chart next to eternity and you'll soon realize that your entire earthly life is represented by a tiny dot that's barely visible next to what follows it! What if all your days here are mostly just preparation for the life that comes next—the *real* one? How would knowing that now affect your priorities and daily decisions?

Let's look at this from another angle. Suppose

a young man sends his fiancée a beautiful diamond ring that costs him \$15,000, putting it in the little case that the jeweler throws in for free. Just imagine how shocked he would be if she responded by saying, “Thank you, sweetheart—that was such a nice little box you sent me! To take special care of it, I promise to keep it wrapped up in a safe place so nothing will ever happen to it.”

That seems ridiculous, doesn't it? Yet isn't it just as foolish for people like us to spend all our time and energy on our bodies, which are only containers of our real self, the soul, which, according to Jesus and the writers of the Bible, will persist long after our bodies have turned to dust?¹ When you think of it that way, it's easy to see that the soul has immeasurable value.

In fact, Jesus—known for his ability to speak directly to the heart of a matter—asked in Mark 8:36-37: “And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? Is anything worth more than your soul?” Our response to his question today is the same as it was when he first posed it: awkward silence, because the obvious answer is, “No, nothing!”

A person's soul—my soul or your soul—according to Jesus, is incomparably more valuable than the entire world of possessions, pleasures, power, and prestige.

Maybe you aren't so sure about matters of the soul at this point in your life. Perhaps the whole realm of the spiritual seems unreal or unimportant to you, or like something you'd rather not think about until later—like when you get closer to that seemingly distant age of eighty or ninety.

Staying Open

May I encourage you to think again, and at least to say, "Maybe"? Admit to yourself that if these things are true, then Jesus' point about the importance of the soul is valid—*big time!* Do you doubt that? Then at least be consistent enough as a skeptic to also doubt even your own doubts—and keep reading. As you turn the pages, keep saying to yourself, "Maybe God *is* real"; "Maybe the Bible *is* God's message to us"; "Maybe Jesus truly *was* the Son of God"; "Maybe I *need* what Jesus offers me"; "Maybe

God is speaking to *me*.” I’m not asking you to take any blind leaps of faith, just to be open-minded enough to genuinely consider the possibility that these things could be true.

Could I also suggest that you offer a can’t-miss prayer? You may not be comfortable with prayer, so move on if you need to. But you don’t have to try to sound religious to pray. You can just sincerely say something like this, whether silently or out loud:

God, if you’re there and if these things I’m reading are really true, please show me. If you’ll make it clear to me, then I promise to respond to you accordingly. Amen.

God loves answering straightforward prayers like that! A man once came to Jesus, having enough faith to ask him for a miracle—but enough doubt to second-guess whether his request would really do any good. Jesus said to him, “Anything is possible if a person believes.” The man responded with wonderful transparency: “*I do believe, but help me overcome my unbelief!*” And guess what? Jesus honored that

sincere doubter's prayer, performing the miracle for him right then and there.²

So be honest about your spiritual perspective—but also active in your pursuit of truth and answers for your life. I'm confident God will meet you somewhere in the middle.

Key Faith Issues

Let's talk about some of the central questions that relate to the part of us that Jesus called our most valuable possession, our souls. I think it will quickly become clear that these matters really do matter—not just for some future life in the hereafter, but for the nitty-gritty realities of daily living, as well. These include the following:

Is there a God?

Can the Bible be trusted?

Are we accountable to God?

Who was Jesus and what was his purpose?

Is divine forgiveness available?

What do I need to do?

These are some of the questions that most perplex those who think seriously about spiritual matters, their own lives, and their future.