



Clear Winter Nights: A Journey into Truth, Doubt, and What Comes After

Trevin K. Wax

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Searching for Real Faith - or No Faith at All

What happens when a young Christian dealing with disillusionment and doubt spends a weekend with an elderly, retired pastor? They talk. And no subject is off limits. *Clear Winter Nights* is a stirring story about faith, forgiveness, and the distinctiveness of Christianity. Through a powerful narrative and engaging dialogue, Trevin Wax shows the relevance of unchanging truth in an ever-changing world.

When his life comes apart, will the center hold?

Chris Walker has everything. A career, a beautiful fiancée, a promising ministry opportunity, and a faith instilled in him from a young age. But when a revelation about his family comes to light at his grandmother's funeral, Chris finds himself facing questions he didn't even know he had about...well, everything.

Fighting a battle within and without from those that don't understand his sudden doubts, Chris seeks refuge in a weekend with his grandfather to ask the tough questions and sort through the issues where faith meets life and disillusionment collides with truth.

For those searching for the historic Christian faith that is relevant to life today, or for those who believe that a completely new faith is called for, this stirring tale is a deep and powerful exploration of what being Christian has meant and still means today.

Clear Winter Nights: A Journey into Truth, Doubt, and What Comes After Details

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From Reader Review Clear Winter Nights: A Journey into Truth, Doubt, and What Comes After for online ebook

Tim Chavel says

I bought this book because the author's dad and I were college friends. I had also read a couple of the authors articles and blogs, <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/t....> Knowing Trevin's dad I knew the book would be a good read. It turns out it is an excellent read. It is a novel with great spiritual truths. The story is about a young man who is struggling with his faith and moves in with his sick grandfather to help care for him. The grandfather is a retired pastor. I highly recommend this book to anyone looking to grow in their faith. I trust you will enjoy the "Clear Winter Nights" quotes below:

Just bring the right person to the right place at the right time for the right meeting, and everyone would be stronger. ~Trevin Wax

You can't hold on to a childlike faith if you don't grab hold of a grownup every now and then. ~Trevin Wax

I guess sometimes you have to stand still to really see. ~Trevin Wax

I may be a little more limited than I would like, but I'm finding if you put your limitations to good use, they're like the frame around a portrait. They enhance everything around you. ~Trevin Wax

Your very existence is only because of grace. To be is to be graced. ~Trevin Wax

So Christianity is about giving up? No, it's about giving in. Giving in to God. Handing your heart and life over to Him and casting yourself on His mercy alone. ~Trevin Wax

Why manage in the dark when you can thrive in the light? ~Trevin Wax

Chris didn't remember much about Third Baptist as a kid. But in hearing his mom and grandparents reminisce and tell stories, he was impressed by how well the people knew one another. Really knew one another. Struggles were out in the open. Sin was dealt with privately and publicly. These people loved one another, and their love was tough. There were grudges and catfights and all the kinds of things you expect wherever people live. But through all the stories, Chris could sense the genuine love these people had for one another. ~Trevin Wax

Who you are in Christ matters more than what people think of you. ~Trevin Wax

Don't trust in your strength, because there is such a thing as pride. Don't despair in your weakness, because there is such a thing as forgiveness. ~Trevin Wax

The true rebellion is in the heart of the Christian who follows King Jesus by swimming upstream against the current of the world. ~Trevin Wax

You may feel alive when you go with the flow, but any old dead thing can float downstream. ~Trevin Wax

The world says, "Be true to yourself." King Jesus says, "Be true to your future self." ~Trevin Wax

Augustine was awed by the truth that God reveals Himself to us. Listen here: “And, when You are poured out on us, You are not thereby bought down; rather, we are uplifted.” ~Trevin Wax

Listen to this [from Augustine] about his sinful past. “You were always by me, mercifully angry and flavoring all my unlawful pleasures with bitter discontent, in order that I might seek pleasures free from discontent. But where could I find such pleasure except in You, O Lord – except in You, who teaches us by sorrow, who wounds us to heal us, and kills us, that we might not die apart from You.” ~Trevin Wax

The greater your acknowledgment of your sinfulness, the greater your appreciation of God’s grace. ~Trevin Wax

Gil put his hand on top of Chris’s, closed his eyes, and quoted Augustine from memory. “Lord, You called and cried out loud and shattered our deafness. You were radiant and resplendent. You put to flight our blindness. You were fragrant, and we drew in our breath and now pant after You. We tasted You, and we feel nothing but hunger and thirst for You. You touched us, and we are set on fire to attain the peace which is Yours. Amen.” ~Trevin Wax

We don’t believe the gospel because it’s helpful. Or because it’s prettier. Or because it’s our upbringing. We believe the gospel because it’s true. Not just a preference but true. Truth about the way the world works.
~Trevin Wax

Proselytism is about getting someone to change from one religion to another. Evangelism is proclaiming the evangel – the gospel. It’s an announcement. ~Trevin Wax

Whoever says we should just keep our faith to ourselves and not evangelize – they’re really saying we ought to follow their instructions and not King Jesus. That is the height of arrogance, in my mind. Trying to be over Him. ~Trevin Wax

People rarely fail to evangelize because of their intellectual questions. Failure to evangelize is almost always a worship problem. It’s not that we don’t know what we ought to be doing. We do. We’re just not doing it. That’s a sign that we’re not overflowing with worship. Whenever you are completely taken with something or someone, you can’t help but talk about it. Love can’t stop talking about the beloved. Fix the worship problem, and evangelism starts coming naturally. ~Trevin Wax

The old, old gospel is the newest thing in the world; in its very essence it is for ever good news. ~Charles Spurgeon

No one ever woke up and decided, “I want to have a bad temper.” Or “I want to be addicted to pornography.” You don’t always choose your temptation, but you do choose your behavior. ~Trevin Wax

We are not defined by our temptations. We are defined by our redemption. ~Trevin Wax

Every conversion is a miracle, a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit. ~Trevin Wax

You know, Jeremiah 31. “For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.” Isn’t that a glorious promise? That God won’t ever bring up our sin again? Takes a lifetime of determination to get that truth planted in your heart. We commit to memory. God commits to forgetfulness. ~Trevin Wax

I've fought my entire life to find my worth and value in what Christ has done for me, not in what I do for Christ. ~Trevin Wax

He hoped Chris would put all his troubles in eternal perspective, placing his questions and doubts on the scales of eternity in order to see how one's vision for the future affects one's actions in the present. ~Trevin Wax

Come, for creation groans,
Impatient of Thy stay,
Worn out with these long years of ill,
These ages of delay.

Come, for love waxes cold;
Its steps are faint and slow:
Faith now is lost in unbelief,
Hope's lamp burns dim and low.

Come, and make all things new;
Build up this ruined earth,
Restore our faded Paradise,
Creation's second birth. ~Horatius Bonar

Melissa Bowers says

I wanted to read this book because I was intrigued by the concept of "Theology in Story," as it says on the book's cover. Clear Winter Nights largely consists of conversations about faith and life between a retired-pastor grandfather and his college-aged grandson. I think there is value in this book, but the writing style put me off. It is very simplistic and not "literary" at all. I felt like the author had a checklist of all the issues he wanted to insert into the story and was marking them off one-by-one as he wrote. There are just too many topics covered in rapid-fire succession over the course of 147 pages.

The book's greatest strength is probably the extensive "Conversation Guide" in the back. I can see this book as providing material for discussion in a high school youth group or college-aged small group.

Disclosure: I received a free Advance Reading Copy of this book through the Blogging for Books program in exchange for my honest opinion. I was not required to write a positive review.

Joel Jackson says

Trevin Wax has picked up on a grand tradition in theological expression in his book, "Clear Winter Nights." The book follows the story of Chris Walker who has recently graduated college, is part of a church planting team, and is about to marry the girl of his dreams. Entering into this ideal picture of the Christian life in

American is the revelation that his father has been living a lie and the divorce between Chris' parents, that occurred some years prior to the story, is his father's fault instead of his mother's. In addition, Chris' grandmother has recently passed away and as the story opens his grandfather has a stroke. Because of these circumstances, Chris goes through a crisis of faith, he begins to question the foundations of his belief. The majority of the book explores Chris' crisis as he discusses his beliefs with his grandfather who is a retired minister recovering from a stroke and the death of his wife. In their discussion, they approach many theological issues that pertain to the post-modern Christian. They explore pluralism, sexuality, homosexuality, death, suffering, betrayal, forgiveness, reconciliation, evangelism, and healing. All of this exploration is done in the midst of an allowable doubt. Christians should allow themselves to struggle through the questions that come from being a faithful person who interacts with a fallen world.

All believers should read this book and allow themselves to explore the issues. Each of us may or may not agree with the conclusions of the text, but each of us has an opportunity to doubt and then grow through our doubts to become better disciples of Jesus Christ.

I received this book as part of Multnomah's Blogging for Books Program.

Norman Falk says

A book I guess I needed to read.

Nathan Albright says

[Note: This book was provided free of charge by WaterBrook Multnomah Books in exchange for an honest review.]

This particular book, written by a Christian minister in Middle Tennessee [1], is marketed as "Theology in Story," and that is a fair way of describing this book's contents, which are a deep theological and philosophical conversation between a grandfather (retired pastor Gil) and his searching grandson trapped in his own doubts and righteous indignation (Chris). At 150 pages, this particular novel, which begins with Chris in a period of crisis where he is not sure about education, about his desire to work in the ministry of a church, and where he calls for a break in his engagement with a lovely and faithful fiance named Ashley. The rest of the novel takes places over several days when Chris is taking care of his grandfather, who has suffered a stroke and is deeply lonely after the death of his longtime wife.

The book as itself manages to deal with topics such as grace, open-mindedness, God's moral standards on sexuality (particularly relevant to our times), and the hypocrisy of Christians through history. It is to the author's credit that the book itself does not shrink to discuss the failings of Christians throughout history even as it presents the obligations of Christians to live according to the Bible's commands. Specifically, the book presents a mostly baptist perspective, and looks at the statements of "King Jesus" and not necessarily the whole corpus of biblical law (absent is any serious discussion of the Sabbath, for example), while including a few hymns, a paen to the need to respect all human beings, sinners of whatever stripe, as beings created in the image and likeness of God, and some high praise for Augustine's Confession.

Like many novels of this stripe, there will be some people who appreciate its obvious apologetic aims and others who will think the plot and dialogue a bit too tidy and neat. Nevertheless, for its topical relevance in the lives of many believers familiar with broken families and problems of trust, this book ought to have some

appeal. Given that many young people retain a moral worldview based on the claims of Christianity but are upset over the widespread hypocrisy and moral laxity of many churches, this book's aim to seek a robust faith that is grounded on both grace (both from God and with each other) as well as righteousness ought to strike a strong chord with its intended reading audience.

One aspect of this novel that is highly worthy of commentary, given my own writings, is the fact that this particular novel plays on the concept of the "dark night of the soul." The struggle for genuine faith in a world of corruption and sloth is a serious struggle that many believers face. This novel is merely one of a series of works, both fiction and nonfiction, that seek to challenge believers about their faith and its practice in a corrupt world, looking at the obligations for graciousness and righteousness, a difficult balance to maintain. Nevertheless, for those who wish to attempt that balance between faith and practice, between loving God with all our heart, all our mind, and all our strength and loving our neighbor as ourselves, despite the bad examples around us and the slanders we face, this book should provide some encouragement.

[1] <http://waterbrookmultnomah.com/author...>

Tzigane Monda says

This is a great read! Very thought provoking and shows how Gods unchanging truth is relevant in a world that is always changing.

"No Christian who truly understands grace can feel superior to anyone else. Grace shatters any sense of superiority."

Leanne Koren says

Terrible

This book has no mystery, no plot, no meat. Extremely boring.

I got several chapters in and began skipping chapters like crazy. Didn't feel like I missed a thing.
Very disappointed.

Oscar Maquito says

*5/5

Audrey says

Chris is struggling with his faith and wondering what he truly believes. One icy weekend he goes to visit his grandfather who is a staunch Baptist pastor. They have deep conversations with no topics off limits. Chris discovers that his faith is renewed and is able to face life again with courage. This is a must read for any Christian facing challenging questions.

Alexis Neal says

Would-be church-planter Chris Walker is having a crisis of faith. The recent discovery of his estranged father's repeated infidelity has left him reeling. Between his father's hypocrisy and his own conflicting ideas of truth, religion, and morality, Chris doesn't know where to turn. Before he knows it, he's broken off his engagement to Ashley and is considering backing out of the church plant he's been involved with. Then, on New Year's weekend, he finds himself on the doorstep of his recently bereaved grandfather, a retired Baptist minister currently recovering from a stroke. Over the course of their many conversations, Chris begins to work through his doubts and questions about faith, truth, sin, and forgiveness.

For some time now, I've enjoyed reading Trevin Wax's posts on the Gospel Coalition blog. So when the opportunity arose to review his new work of fiction, *Clear Winter Nights*, I was pretty stoked. Unfortunately, as is often the case with Christian fiction, good theology does not always walk hand in hand with good storytelling.

Not that it's all bad, mind you. There are some definite strengths to the story. The protagonist, Chris, is a very common type in the church today. He wrestles with the exclusivity of the gospel in the face of other faiths, struggles to reconcile the Bible's uncompromising teaching on sexual morality with his affection for and commitment to his gay friends, and questions the nature of religion and truth. He clearly reads a lot of Rob Bell, is what I am saying. And, like so many who find themselves confronting doubts like these, he is dealing with the very real emotional aftermath of personal betrayal by someone he loved and admired--someone who claimed to believe in the Christian faith, and yet who nonetheless acted in a deeply sinful and hurtful way toward those who trusted him. At times, Chris does feel a bit like a caricature rather than a complex character, but given the book's 'Theology in Story' descriptor, he may be intended to be more of a parable than a fully-drawn, realistic picture of a human being. (The 'Theology in Story' label also explains why the book is long on theology but short on story--it was intended to be that way. Which means I shouldn't--and won't--ding it for the lackluster nature of the story.) Indeed, the familiarity of Chris's character makes the story immediately and clearly applicable for most readers. We all know people like this, and many of us have been there ourselves.

Chris's grandfather, Gil, is a bit more three-dimensional. Sure, he's the old Baptist minister, solidly rooted in the faith, who is called upon to help his erring grandson overcome his youthful doubts. There's a measure of cliche inherent in the character. But Gil is not perfect--he struggles to remain content despite his declining health and strength, the adjustment to retirement after a life of pastoral ministry, and the still-fresh grief at the loss of his beloved wife. Sometimes, he loses his temper, and his weakness and dependence on others frustrates him no end. He doesn't always know what to say to his grandson, though he cares about him deeply and is concerned about his doubts. But there's a cookie-cutter quality here, too--many of his responses to Chris's questions feel slightly canned. He trots out the same arguments that we've heard so many times, and these arguments, though true and theologically sound, are unlikely to chase away the doubts of the Chrises of the world.

Indeed, the theology here is orthodox and clear, and Wax is addressing a situation that is extremely relevant for Christians today. But I don't know that the theological arguments are presented in a way that would, so to speak, convert the uninitiated. In other words, I already agreed with Gil's points before he defended them; if I disagreed with him, I don't know that I would have been persuaded to change my mind. Fortunately, the book avoids the inauthentic 'epiphany' moment--Chris isn't suddenly and miraculously cured of his doubts,

but merely begins to engage with them in a healthier way. And in the end, it seems that his grandfather's *life* and *example* and *attitude* have proved as influential as his arguments, if not more so.

Ultimately, the biggest weakness of the book is that it's just ... not that good. The writing is clunky and prone to hyperbolic and overly poetic language ('Chris felt a wave of joy crash into a shore of guilt', etc.), and Wax is more fond of telling than showing--he keeps the reader constantly apprised of Chris and Gil's respective emotions and their reactions to one another. This may be a function of Wax's inexperience as a writer of fiction--the 'show, don't tell' rule doesn't really come up as much in the nonfiction context. Indeed, pastors and those who write pastoral works are called upon to 'tell'. It may be that with additional experience in fiction, Wax will develop a more nuanced style of writing.

At the end of the day, the story (such as it was) felt like a vignette you'd read to a bunch of youth group kids--one of those cheesy parables about peer pressure or whatever, that illustrated some biblical truth. Heck, he even includes the same sort of discussion questions. But Chris's struggles are much more representative of the college or post-college Christian, not the junior high or high school student. Maybe the book would be of use to college students (in the early years), who are being exposed to such doubts for the first time; I suspect most older, more mature readers would be unmoved by the rather simplistic method of addressing their questions.

I received this book for free from WaterBrook Multnomah Publishing Group for this review.

Havebooks Willread says

I received this book as a gift and was afraid it would be a little too . . . obvious. And it was. Yet I thought it was a worthwhile read for all that.

I think what I liked best about it was that it was real and honest. In coming to our own faith (rather than some handed-down faith) we all have to ask the tough questions and maybe even go through a period of doubt and I'm glad this author wasn't afraid to ask the tough questions, even if the storyline was sometimes cheesy and obvious.

I had two favorite messages from this book.

NUMBER ONE:

The reminder that "This is the Christian life. It's war" (107). Oh how easily we forget this. I think I want to put these two sentences in vinyl above my kitchen sink to help me remember! :)

NUMBER TWO:

I was intrigued at the four options the main character felt like he had as he struggled with his questions. 1) slipping into hypocrisy as he realized he could not live up to the ideal christian life, 2) giving up on faith all together, 3) turning religion into an impersonal intellectual exercise (again bc he couldn't live up to the ideal in his own mind) or 4), the really tough choice, really living his faith.

Okay, and there was one other undercurrent that resonated with me. Chris had a strong, older male mentor, his grandfather, who he could go to for wisdom. Such a sage man this character was! We all need an older mentor to help us through these times when we're asking the tough questions.

Glad I got to read this one, and even more glad that it was part of a "thank you gift" (along with a 12-pack of Pepsi, lol) from some new friends. I think they are starting to "get me". :D

Ted says

Story is powerful.

Think about your conversation at dinner last night. Regardless of what you talked about, how did you talk about it? Chances are high your conversation—like mine—consisted of a string of stories that moved your group from point a to point b. "I had this friend in high school..." gets us to "The other day I..." then another "Today in english class..." and finally, "That reminds me of an article I read..."

We communicate in story because it's the way we live life. Our life is a story, and so when we communicate, naturally we do so with story. Similarly, it should come as no surprise, then, that story is one of the best ways we receive information as well. Because we ourselves live and communicate in story, it is easy to identify with a character, situation, or result. As we do, our minds subconsciously undergo the same journey as those we hear or read about—internalizing their story and their message.

This is why the "Theology in Story" concept Trevin Wax uses for his book *Clear Winter Nights* is such a wonderful concept. Taking theology—which has typically been relegated to didactic prose—and breathing fresh life into it by providing a context, a character, a story. Through the use of narrative, Wax, in *Clear Winter Nights*, interacts with and speaks to difficult topics like the exclusivity of Christ, hypocrisy in the church, marriage & divorce, faith and reason, homosexuality and more.

Wax drops us into the life of Chris Walker, a recently engaged soon-to-be college graduate. The recent news of his father's affair (which occurred years earlier, and caused his parents' divorce) and four years of questions from his unbelieving professors has Chris beginning to wonder if their questions and his doubts are starting to make sense. Within the first few pages, we see Chris give in to his doubt—breaking off his engagement and abandoning a church plant team.

All this sets the stage for the main focus of this quick and encouraging read—Chris's weekend with his aging, widowed grandfather, Gil. Wax's book provides a front row seat to the dialogue that occurs between this doubting millennial and his grandfather, a retired pastor.

Dialogue & Story

When judging a work of fiction, dialogue is typically the first and best indicator of its quality. If the spoken word doesn't have the ring of authenticity, the words and story around it will fall flat as well. It doesn't matter if the story is a sweeping epic—if the hero can't communicate, we won't believe in or identify with his character. Instead, the best dialogue doesn't call attention to itself, but instead fades to the background as it pulls readers further into the story.

The latter is what we see in *Clear Winter Nights*. Comprised largely of dialogue, the book sings with authenticity. The back and forth between Chris and his grandfather, Gil is natural—rarely feeling forced. For most of the book, I found myself lost in the argument and story rather than trying to determine who was saying what.

While dialogue is a good indicator of a good book, it cannot hold the book together on its own. If there's no reason for the dialogue, it won't make sense. The majority of the book consisted of theological and philosophical discussion between Chris and Gil, but Trevin did a great job of placing their discussions into context as well. The narrative elements present were aptly chosen to emphasize the discussion at hand.

Target Audience

At the outset, I wasn't sure who the book was targeted towards, and while, in some sense, it's for all Christians living in this distorted post modern world, the book is extremely well suited for late high schoolers and college students looking for straight answers to tough questions. Students who are simultaneously being told (by the world) to be true to themselves and (by their Church) to be true Christ. Students looking for a reason to hold on to the faith of their parents or to respond in faith in spite of their parents' lacking faith.

A Helpful Tension

Perhaps the greatest strength of the book is the untidy ending. Instead of wrapping the story in a bow, leaving us and Chris with all the answers, Wax presents the truth and encourages the reader to come to their own conclusions. In this way we're further encouraged to identify with Chris because we don't know whether or not ultimately marries his fiancé, helps with the church plant, or if he even holds to his faith. What we do learn is that faith is a fight, and just because it's hard or we have doubts doesn't mean it's worth leaving by the wayside.

One of the strongest pages in the book comes as a result of Gil finally revealing his own weakness and struggle to his Grandson. Amidst a bar and after Chris storms out, Gil, in a notably pastoral moment, reveals his own brokenness. "Faith is war" he declares, weary from a life of battle, "But we must go on, trusting in Christ's ultimate victory."

Conclusion

The reason we connect with story—especially stories of redemption—is because our hearts, minds, and souls long, themselves, for THE story of redemption. Is this not why we connect with Lewis's Chronicles of Narnia and Tolkien's Lord of the Rings? For in them we see glimpses of God's story of grace. While I'm not putting Wax's Clear Winter Nights on par with the works of Lewis or Tolkien, I do applaud his use of narrative to convey truth.

If you or a student you know are/is doubting faith, I encourage you to take a look at Clear Winter Nights. I pray you will be encouraged as Wax's story faithfully shows Christ to you.

Fergus says

A YA book for Believers - and for those who want to believe.

I wouldn't even say you have to be a Christian, but that could help.

If you're basically interested in following your own whims in life, more strength to you. But avoid this book if you're like that.

This book won't convince you to believe logically - because this is about the Way of the Heart, though as a story it is no-nonsense in its approach and can be a real tonic for your soul.

And it won't immerse you in religious thinking (it's much more of a book about human caring!); but it will introduce you to a square-peg-in-a-round-hole type of oldtimer who is happy he sees things differently than the World does.

An old guy who doesn't think a one-size-fits-all saccharine-hearted congregation
Is for folks who think outside of the box, like him.

He is a man who won't be railroaded into a herd mentality. He's happy to be different. But he has a Heart of Gold. And oblivious to his blood pressure, goes the extra mile.

Being about Grandpa Gil's age, I relished his crusty old mannerisms and innate decency.

But be forewarned, it's not all roses to read, because it touches thorny issues, and you'll have to grapple with them.

It's not a book to relax into.

But it does have its own down-home Southern charm, and the author's ear for dialogue is sharp. There's no place for the miraculous here, for it's a no-nonsense type of read.

As a kid I found myself spiritually uplifted by the mystical High Anglican ritual I was brought up in. There's no such sensory input here.

The prose here is lean and sharp, and it's not an easy read for dreamers - which I was when younger.

No - it's refreshingly astringent!

But if its author's hard work has paid off for you - if you feel alive and intellectually invigorated afterwards - then you're one of the lucky ones for whom it will have been a worthwhile book.

It's no cakewalk, but it works if you let it work.

And it worked for me.

John Wiley says

Introduction

The past decade has not been exactly produced a good amount of "Christian Fiction" books or novels. I hardly ever even browse the fiction section at Christian bookstores, mostly because I have no interest in Amish love stories or allegories/life stories, the kinds that have weak applications to biblical truths. I don't think "every" modern-day Christian fictional book has been a train wreck, but I certainly haven't been impressed with some of the New York Times' bestselling books that have some kind of Christian connection. Here are three that come to mind:

1) The Shack - I listened to the audiobook version, and really thought it was an intriguing plot for a while...but once the story introduced "God" in the shack, I was very irritated. Not to mention the clear inferences to a very anti-institutional, anti-doctrinal mindset that Young was trying to convey. This was not helpful to the Body of Christ, perhaps even heretical.

2) The Harbinger - This was another audiobook I listened to within the past couple of years. And another doctrinal dud. While I must admit that the mysterious character to the book with ancient hidden messages was somewhat intriguing, there is no excuse for such poor usage of the Bible, particularly in the book of Isaiah. This was just another "Bible Code" disaster.

3) Blue Like Jazz - This book was my favorite of the three mentioned (not fiction in this case, more of an autobiography). Donald Miller is a much better writer to be sure. However, this book was still very weak foundationally. It's not your typical Christian book, a little course at times, but it helps the listener wrestle with problems of doubt and hypocritical Christianity. For those that read this book, I would heartily recommend the book I have previewed and will review in this post: Clear Winter Nights.

Clear Winter Nights

Now that I have made my rant, let me introduce Trevin Wax's Clear Winter Nights...

Chris Walker is a recent college graduate, he's engaged, and is about to start the thrilling journey of working with a new church plant. Everything's wonderful, but really, it's not...From his college courses on religion, Chris is starting to have doubts about his faith. Why is so great about Christianity, anyways? This hits home to Chris, as his father was as hypocritical as they come. Before long, tragedy strikes his family with the death of a loved one. This situation leads Chris to spending a night with his grandfather, Gil. It just so happens that Gil is a retired, Baptist preacher. By now, Chris feels so distant from God and wonders if Christianity is even true. I invite you to enter into grandfather Gil's home for a few days and wrestle with your questions about God, the exclusive claims of Christ, the social ills and blessings that have resulted from Christians in times past, everything.

Pros & Cons

Trevin Wax does an excellent job of taking several contemporary "hot topics" relative to Christianity in today's culture and providing biblical solutions within his slim, 147-page novel. A majority of the book deals with Chris's conversations with his grandfather, Gil, and in those talks, issues such as religious pluralism, homosexuality, heaven and hell, and works vs. grace in salvation. For certain, one of the biggest praise for this book is how careful Wax expounds on Scripture through the gracious, grandfatherly figure that so many of us can probably relate to in our lives, but in the book it was, of course, Gil. This book is proof that you can be conservative in doctrinal usage while writing in a novel format.

Another great aspect of this book is in Wax's portrayals of his characters. There are so many "Chris Walker's" in the world, I would submit. He's the young 20-something, college graduate who, though raised in church, has several questions of doubt regarding faith. Plenty of readers will find a little bit of themselves in Chris Walker, I certainly did. His grandmother, Gil, as mentioned above, is very loving, gracious, and patient, but at the same time, he is presented as an imperfect, Baptist pastor, who doesn't have it all together. One word could define Gil: a sinner saved by grace. Chris's father, Chris Sr., is an all-too-common example of the hypocritical Christian figure - the kind of person who goes to church on Sundays, but abuses his wife Monday-Saturday. Other characters are important and well-described too, but in summary, this is a wonderful strength of the book. Everybody can part of themselves in one or more of these characters, which

leads to the relevancy of the Gospel's saving power.

While I do not have a great critical eye in novels, I would suggest one. A significant amount of this book is dialogue between Chris and Gil, thus, some readers might find Clear Winter Nights a little dry. Personally, I found it to be quite intriguing since I have a great burden for young Christians that have questions of doubt about faith and Christianity. But I also know that everybody has different burdens and tastes in genres.

Conclusion

Trevin Wax's book, in my opinion, can be described as a Blue Like Jazz type of book (one that might especially appeal to younger audiences about questions and concerns pertaining to Christianity and church hypocrisy) but unlike Donald Miller's book, Wax provides much greater substance. There are good answers to all of these questions people wrestle with, and throughout Clear Winter Nights the reader is given several reasons why churches can love all people in the world and still hold true to biblical convictions. Clear Winter Nights is scheduled to hit bookstores (hard-copy and digital) September 17, 2013.

"I received this book for free from WaterBrook Multnomah Publishing Group for this review."

See also:

<http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/t...>

<http://waterbrookmultnomah.com/blog/2...>

<http://waterbrookmultnomah.com/catalo...>

<http://waterbrookmultnomah.com/author...>

Joy says

This is a short book dealing with many of the questions young people (and sometimes older people) have about God, faith, and the application of the Scriptures to current issues and popular secular thinking. It also deals with disappointment in other Christians/family members. It's a pleasure to read, yet gives you much to think about. A very worthy book.
