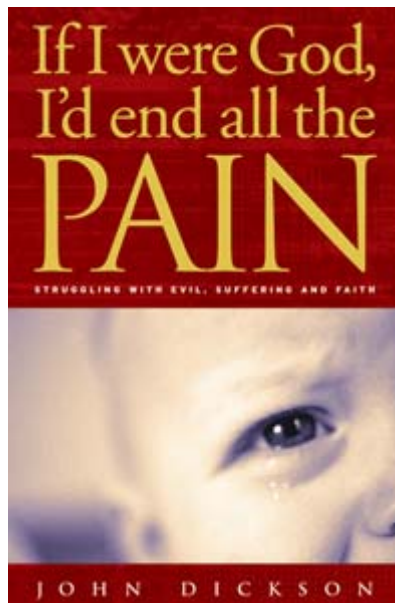


ANSWERING DIFFICULT QUESTIONS

Reviews of two helpful books by Peter Geldart



If I were God, I'd end all the pain: Struggling with Evil, Suffering and Faith

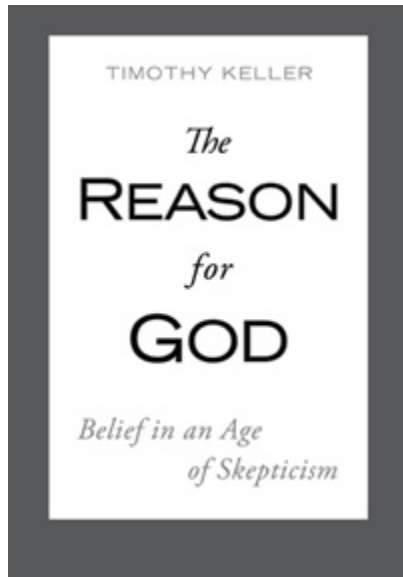
by John Dickson (Matthias Media, 2001)

If there is an all-loving God why does he allow pain, suffering and evil? How many of us Christians have had this question asked of us of us by nonbelievers? Come to think of it, how many of us Christians have asked this question at least one time in our life? John Dickson tackles this topic in his book *If I were God, I'd end all the pain*.

John talks about other worldviews and beliefs and their explanation of pain and suffering. John does not attack these worldviews as some apologist's might; he simply shows the shortfall of those beliefs and how in reality they cant work. John explains simply a Christian view on pain and suffering, illustrated sometimes with his own life stories. John's father died in a plane crash when he was 9 years old so he has had this question on his mind since a young age. The book is helpful for a non-Christian as well as for the Christian asking these questions. It is helpful also for Christians wanting to dialogue with those struggling with this topic.

I like the title, because if I were God I reckon I'd stop pain and suffering. I think the title might encourage a non-Christian to pick up the book and read it. It is non-threatening, it does not sound like a defence of the Christian faith, rather a statement of what we all feel at some time. It is only a short book, which makes an easy read.

I live in Alexandra, 40km north of Marysville. The ESA campsite that I work out of burnt down in Marysville. People we know around the area lost homes, businesses, all their possessions, lifetimes of work and memories, and some lost loved ones in those fires. Since the evening of February 7 I have had people ask me this question in some shape and it is a question I too have asked. Some parts of this book have been helpful to me as I have talked with people. I have given the book to people who have found it also worthwhile and in some ways encouraging to them after the fires.



The Reason for God: Belief in an age of scepticism
by Timothy Keller (Penguin 2008)

Timothy Keller puts forward some good reasons for God and for Christian beliefs, as you would hope, considering the title of his book. Keller is the Pastor of an inner city Church in New York.

The first part of the book deals with doubt. He uses questions that people have thrown at him over the years concerning their doubts and arguments about Jesus, the Christian faith and the people who call themselves followers of Jesus to introduce the topics covered. Keller covers topics like there can't be one true religion, the Church is responsible for so much injustice, how can a loving God send people to hell, science has disproved Christianity, and how could a good God allow suffering? Some of the illustrations that Keller uses are from USA politics and we in Australia may not understand the contexts of these, but these are only a few and that should not stop you from understanding the points he is trying to get across, and he does so in a logical and systematic way.

The second part of the book deals with the reasons for faith with topics like the true story of the cross, the reality of the resurrection and the knowledge of God. In this section Keller is not so much arguing for but putting forward Christian beliefs.

This book is helpful for Christian people to understand some of the arguments and reservations that non-Christian people have about our faith. Keller gives thoughtful answers that would help us talk to those with serious doubts. The book encourages us that what we believe has rational reasons with real evidence. We do not have a blind faith in some myth or legend. I think it is a useful book to give away to those who are really seeking after God and to those who do not think that Christianity is built on any solid evidence or sound thought.

I have used some of Keller's thoughts recently on a camp where I was on a panel answering 'hard' questions from an audience of Christian and non-Christian people. The questions and answers raised in the book would give a preacher or bible study leader a great resource and possibly inspirations for sermon/study topics.

Peter Geldart is the Adventure Camping regional staff worker for ESA Country Ministries (<http://esa.org.au/>), With his wife Wendy and two boys, Peter participates in a new Baptist church plant in Alexandra.