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Blue Like Jazz: Nonreligious Thoughts On Christian Spirituality



Synopsis

"I never liked jazz music because jazz music doesn't resolve. I used to not like God because God didn't resolve. But that was before any of this happened." ?Donald Miller In Donald Miller's early years, he was vaguely familiar with a distant God. But when he came to know Jesus Christ, he pursued the Christian life with great zeal. Within a few years he had a successful ministry that ultimately left him feeling empty, burned out, and, once again, far away from God. In this intimate, soul-searching account, Miller describes his remarkable journey back to a culturally relevant, infinitely loving God. For anyone wondering if the Christian faith is still relevant in a postmodern culture. For anyone thirsting for a genuine encounter with a God who is real. For anyone yearning for a renewed sense of passion in life. Blue Like Jazz is a fresh and original perspective on life, love, and redemption.

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Customer Reviews

"Blue Like Jazz" questions the very notion of what it means to be a Christian. Donald Miller writes about faith with a variety of topics on coming to faith, why to have faith, how Christ can transform, what to do with that faith and how to live a life as a Christian. Other than the last chapter of the book where Miller writes that if Ani Difranco wasn't a lesbian he would marry her, what interested me most was how Miller's perspective on being a Christian did not really come from a sense of organized Christianity as an institution. While he was a Christian and went to church and was even

a youth group leader Donald Miller knew that there was something lacking. He believed in his head and he knows that Jesus was God, but he didn't truly believe in his heart. He didn't truly believe with his life. The organization of the church was telling him one thing, but it wasn't quite right for him. There are several very interesting chapters dealing different aspects of faith that focus on Miller's time at Reed College. Reed is a college that people at his church and other believers declared was extremely immoral and that the college was voted "most likely to not believe in God". That much is true, but it was also a strong intellectual school. When Miller started attending, he met up with some Christians at the school who were essentially an "Underground" group of believers. They talked seriously of what it meant to believe and live for Christ and it was a transformative kind of living, more than just attending church on Sunday it was living as a follower on Monday and Tuesday and every other day.

I've been hearing much of late about a Christian author with a rather plain-sounding name: Don Miller. With my curiosity being sufficiently piqued, I set out to purchase and read a couple of Miller's books over the Christmas holidays, one of which was *Blue Like Jazz*. I have to say right at the start that I like the format of the book. *Blue Like Jazz* is an essay-style work, each chapter more or less standing on its own. Yet they all tie into the central theme of "nonreligious thoughts on Christian spirituality," as the subtitle suggests. For these reasons, the book reminds me (ever so slightly) of some of C.S. Lewis' books (e.g. *The Weight of Glory*), which carry a similar format and also deal with Christian spirituality at a grass roots level, sans copious amounts of theological jargon. I enjoy the way Miller writes. Not only is he readable, Miller often finds the perfect image when describing an event. As one example, he says, "Cusswords are pure ecstasy when you are twelve, buzzing in the mouth like a battery on the tongue." (p. 5) Doesn't that capture the experience perfectly?! And listen to this one: "I am something of a recluse by nature. I am that cordless screwdriver that has to charge for twenty hours to earn ten minutes use." (p. 152) I love it! For me, Miller is someone with whom I resonate. Being a single guy and living with roommates, I can relate to many of the issues Miller raises (often laced with humor), which are associated with this particular lifestyle. Many times I find myself saying, "I've been there." Overall, I find *Blue Like Jazz* to be a fun read, with thought-provoking turns along the way. Miller's self-deprecating manner is effective at these junctures.

I entered into reading this book with a lot of opinions thrown to me from those who have read it. What I learned before I even opened the book is it seemed as though people either loved it or hated

it. I have some really close friends who loved the book and thought it was a breath of fresh air, and I also knew some of my friends thought that it's only good was to start a fire with it. So, because I trusted on both sides, I felt like I could come with no preconceived notions. It was like I heard each debater by themselves but couldn't make a decision until I heard them both at the same time. So, the only way to do this was to read the book. What kind of irritates me is that I landed right in the middle. I can see why people love the book, but I can also see why people hate the book. There are some great discussions in the book but some very bad views on some theology that I feel could hurt those not driven by the word of God for discernment. Donald Miller is a writer and a poet first, you can see that from the title of the book and in the opening pages. I like poetry when I am reading a poem but find poetry to be distracting when I am trying to read a book. What Mr. Miller does in this writing, in my estimation (although I am no expert) is try and use his poetry skills too much at times as one navigates through his story of redemption. It just isn't for me, that is, his way of writing. But I can get through that, not enough for me to put it down. The book is really Donald Miller's testimony. It is his writings of how he came to know Christ and how he has grown in Christ, for this it is hard to say, "it is good" or "it is bad." At times, Mr. Miller seems to be scattered in thought and goes from one topic to another without leading the reader to where he is going.

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