

## TRANSCRIPT

## TIM KELLER SERMON

*Modern people have taken a perfectly great idea, and that is democratic political self-determination. Democratic political self-determination. We should be able to choose our own governments, choose our own leaders, a democratic political self-determination, a great idea, and we have elevated it to an ultimate spiritual reality and the very meaning of life.*

*We feel like, "I have to be me. I have to live my way. I have to live as I decide is right or wrong. If I don't have the freedom to live as I want to live, my life is meaningless." That's how we are. That's what our culture tells us.*

*If that's your understanding of life, and it is our understanding of life here, the omni-God, the all-powerful, all-knowing, all-present god is a nightmare, an absolute nightmare.*

## JOHN DICKSON EDITORIAL

Tim Keller is the founding pastor of New York's Redeemer Presbyterian Church and the author of several New York Times bestselling books. I think it's also fair to say he's something of a Christian prophet for our secularizing 21st century.

## TIM KELLER SERMON CONTINUES

*Sartre said in Being and Nothingness, if there is a God, we can't be free. If there's a God who sees everything, then we're dehumanized. If there's a God who controls everything, that's unconscionable. If we're free, then there's no God. If there's a God, then we're not free, period. That's the reason why David, that's the reason why Jonah, and that's the reason why so many of us don't want to ... We want to escape this ever-present God. We don't want to be around. We don't want to believe he exists.*

## JOHN DICKSON EDITORIAL

Tim's preaching is kind of weird. It has none of the rhetoric and celebrity flare you might expect from a big name American evangelical, and yet believers and sceptics alike will often say they find themselves hanging on his every word.

What's especially strange is that when you strip it all back, Keller is preaching a kind of old-fashioned gospel of human sin, divine judgment, and Christ's offer of salvation. He's fond of saying you are more sinful and flawed than you ever dared believe, but more accepted and loved than you ever dared hope.

He's the co-founder of the Christian think tank and media outlet The Gospel Coalition, and he established the Redeemer City to City organization, which mentors pastors and assists in church planting in urban centres all around the world. This may actually prove to be his most significant legacy. City to City is doing amazing things in surprising places.

But in 2020, Tim revealed that his work might be cut short. He was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, a disease that normally proves fatal in just a few years. So, it was a real privilege to talk with him on my recent trip to the US.

On medical advice, we couldn't be in the same room, but I was grateful for his openness, his generosity, and stamina. We accidentally recorded 83 minutes with him. I was keen to get his perspective on, well, pretty much everything, but especially the future of Christianity in the west.

At times, this is an intimate conversation. At one point, I even find myself asking him for pastoral advice. But mainly this is a chat with one of the world's most trusted undeceivers. Whether you believe or doubt, I'm sure that what you're about to hear will bring fresh clarity about the Christian faith in doubting times.

I'm John Dickson, and this is a masterclass in Undeceptions.

Undeceptions is brought to you by Zondervan's new book, *Good News of Our Limits* by Sean McGeever. Each episode, we explore some aspect of life, faith, history, science, culture, or ethics that's either much misunderstood or mostly forgotten. With the help of people who know what they're talking about, we're trying to undeceive ourselves and let the truth out.

#### JOHN DICKSON EDITORIAL

Tim Keller's reputation for preaching on the world's stage for theological rigor and cultural analysis find a delightful balance in this self-effacing pastor at the microphone.

#### INTERVIEW BEGINS

Tim Keller:

Hi John.

John Dickson:

Thank you so much for giving us your time.

Tim Keller:

I am glad to be with you.

#### JOHN DICKSON EDITORIAL

Keller is a graduate of Bucknell University, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, and Westminster Theological Seminary. He was ordained by the Presbyterian Church in America and served for nine years in Hopewell, Virginia, a town very different from where he ended up in Manhattan.

John Dickson:

You began your ministry in a small town at a time when America was often described as a Christian nation. What hindrances to genuine Christian faith did you encounter in that context?

Tim Keller:

Well, in that context ... And I was also in a southern town. So, the way America works is the south, the southeast, is the most conservative part of the country. I'd have to say the hindrances of genuine Christian faith were moralism. In other words, an understanding of Christianity as being a matter of following moral codes, going to church all the time, or even being sold out for Jesus. It was very, very clear when you talked to the people, they were very much in an evangelical Christian culture, and yet at the same time it was also very clear there wasn't much actual spiritual vitality at all.

So, it was a moralism. Also, it was deeply enculturated. So, to be a Christian was to be a flag-waving American. It was very God and country.

The other thing is, I would say, even though it was a very blue-collar town, the town I was in, only 5% of the high school graduates of Hopewell High School went on and went to university or college. Only 5%. So, there was also an anti-intellectualism about the place, so that people's understanding of the Bible is very common-sense. In other words, if the Bible says this is very clear, it just says that, therefore, don't tell me that there's some other way of reading it. So, you might say, frankly, moralistic fundamentalism was the real barrier to a vital Christianity.

John Dickson:

It might surprise some to think that was a hindrance, but, yeah, it makes sense. Was it very different ...? Over the next decades in New York, was the scepticism you faced way more sophisticated, which would be the cliché, of course, or was it the same, just dressed up differently?

Tim Keller:

Well, John, the way your question is phrased, I almost have to say yes and no, because on the one hand it was very different. It was more sophisticated. It was secularism. You say, well, that's totally different than fundamentalism, but there definitely is of secular fundamentalism.

First of all, it's moralistic. It's like if you're not bigoted and you care about the poor and you vote for the proper enlightened political movements, then you're all right. So, there's a moralism against we're the enlightened ones, you're the bigoted ones.

I'd even go as far to say there's a kind of anti-intellectualism, which sounds really strange. I mean my church in New York, at one point we did a survey. We had something like 2000 people coming...

JOHN DICKSON EDITORIAL

Tim's now talking about his time with Redeemer Presbyterian Church, which he and Kathy planted in Manhattan in 1989. Fun fact: I'm told he was actually the third choice to head up that church plant. A pretty good third choice, it turns out. It's now a thriving multi-campus, multifunction ministry engaging thousands of New Yorkers.

Tim Keller:

I discovered that 15% of the people either had doctorates or were working on them. I thought, "Oh, wow." Well, that actually was very, very typical of centre city Manhattan. In spite of all that, there

definitely is an anti-intellectualism. There was a cancel culture in New York City a long time before it got a name, where if you just didn't have the right views, you were just shut out, period.

Oh, by the way, don't forget, the new atheists, Dawkins and Hitchens and those folks, they came out 15, 20 years ago almost, 15 years ago, I guess. Boy, even a lot of secular people called them secular fundamentalists because of their combativeness and their anger and their unwillingness to speak civilly.

So, there's a sense in which it was very different. The objections to Christianity were different. But on the other hand, there really is a kind of fundamentalism of the secular left.

JOHN DICKSON EDITORIAL

PhDs and Manhattan intellect are not necessarily a path to reality. The American social psychologist Professor Jonathan Haidt has shown that high IQ and extensive education don't necessarily predict better access to true beliefs. What they do predict is a greater capacity to rationalize our existing beliefs to ourselves and to others. What role do you think intelligence and education play in people's engagement with Christian faith, positively or negatively?

Tim Keller:

Well, it's true in a place like Hopewell, Virginia, which is the small town we were talking about to start with, it's an anti-elitist, anti-intellectual. It was a blue-collar community in which people didn't trust the elites. They trusted their friends, their neighbours. There was a strong confirmation bias.

JOHN DICKSON EDITORIAL

You probably already know this, but confirmation bias is a psychological term for the way we tend to interpret information in a way that conforms to what we already believe. Christians do it, of course, so do atheists. We do it in our intellectual pursuits and, of course, in our personal lives,

Tim Keller:

Don't bother me with books or scholarship. "My friends say this," and that's just the way it is. Well, this is where Jon Haidt, who I do know somewhat actually ... A remarkable guy, by the way. Secular Jewish guy, but, boy, does he understand, I think, religion better than an awful lot of religious people.

Tim Keller:

What he would say is because so many secular people say, "Well, we actually inhabit the heights of culture. We are in charge of Harvard, Yale, Princeton, The New York Times, The Washington Post, and Hollywood," ... And, by the way, they are. And so, that's where they get their confirmation bias. We don't have to think about it, because we occupy the heights of culture.

And so, they can rationalize their scepticism because they say, "Well, look at all these smart people and look at all the best universities believe what we believe."

Oddly enough, that's really not that different than my blue-collar people in Hopewell saying, "Oh, don't tell me what the scientists tell me about vaccines," for example. "Don't tell me what the scientists tell

me. All I know is that Uncle Joe says that it's a con," and that's it. I don't really see that as a whole lot different than saying, "Well, the entire sociology department at Harvard says this."

#### NEWS TAPE

It's not uncommon for people to seek God during times of hardship. In some ways, the pandemic has been no different. But even before COVID, a growing number of Americans were moving away from organized religions, and the pandemic didn't do anything to stop that trend. A survey this month from the Pew Research Centre found 29% said they had no religious affiliation. That's up six points from 2016, with the millennial generation leading that shift. So, with the pandemic ...

#### JOHN DICKSON EDITORIAL

So, the west is apparently becoming a less religious place. In 2018, the Pew Research Centre found that although the vast majority of people around the world still say they're religious, young adults are often much less likely to see themselves as religious. Out of 106 countries surveyed by Pew, young adults were significantly less likely to say they were religious in 41 of those 106 countries. No prizes for guessing that includes places like the US, Canada, and a bunch of European countries. So, is this an irreversible trajectory?

Tim Keller:

Well, okay, Europe, then Canada and Australia, then the US. So, you might say the western world, in that order, seemed like Europe went very secular. People just left the church. Canada and Australia lagged a bit, but they were ahead of United States. Even 10 years ago, I think most people are saying ... Maybe 15 years ago, for sure ... that the United States was very different, that Australia, Canada, Europe was going secular, but America is strong. Evangelicalism actually grew to almost ...

I know it's hard to believe in Australia, but probably there was a growth there that went on from about the '70s to the '90s. At least people who identified as born-again evangelicals were something like 30% of the population, which is just hard to imagine, as late as 1990, '95, something like that. But then, of course, we seemed like we have started to go the way of all ... Not the way of all flesh, but the way of all west flesh.

But here's my thoughts why I just don't believe it just continues to go down and down and down. One reason is that, as you know, in the non-white and the non-western world, Christianity's grown quite a bit. I do believe that the future of ... Evangelical Christianity is that ... Increasingly the leaders and the theologians will be non-western and non-white. It's going to take a long time. It just does. You know that. It takes time to produce the same kind of theologians and so on. But what that's going to do is it's going to create a credibility for evangelicalism that it doesn't have right now.

Number two, I do think ... I guess this is going out and somebody's going to crucify us both, but the fact is Australia, Canada, United States, and Europe are going to be increasingly non-white because our fertility rates, the white people's fertility rates, goes down. The fact is that non-white people are less individualistic. They're less secular. They're more community-minded. They're more open to religion. And there we go.

Thirdly, I would say that secularism ... I believe what Ross Douthat ... He's a Catholic guy, bit of a friend of mine. I wish I knew him better. He's just too busy to get to know well. But writes for The New York Times, he would say secularism is half-exhausted, that the relativism of secularism, the anti-supernatural, the anti-spiritual, the old-fashioned hard secularism to some degree is dying off in spite of Dawkins and Hitchens and people like that.

I would say, John, 30 years ago, if after a church service ... Or 40 years ago, after a church service, I said, "I'm going to meet people down front if anybody wants to ask me questions," I get a lot of questions about how could there be miracles? Hasn't science disproved that? Those issues started going away. Younger people are not quite as secular in that sense. They're more open to the spiritual. They're not as rationalistic, we know that. They just aren't.

On the other hand, you might say the secular self, the idea of a completely emancipated identity self that I have the right to define my own reality and my own morality, that's still very, very strong, even though it looks like it's destroying our community, it's undermining the family, it's making people incredibly lonely.

Ross Douthat, I think he's right in saying that ... You might call it the modern self is still very, very, very strong. It's seductive. I can be whoever I want to be. I want to live any way I want to live. Even though it's really harming us, it's still pretty strong.

So, there's a certain amount of exhaustion with secularism. It's not dying. And yet I wonder about its long-term ability to really serve the human race. So that's the limitations of secularism, the demographics of both secularism in the west, the inevitable multiethnic future of the leadership of the evangelical church. All these things, I think, bode fairly well.

John Dickson:

You mentioned a moment ago that some of the questions are changing, the sorts of questions that they ask you at the front of church. Do you think the classical intellectual questions like the existence of God, the reliability of the Bible, et cetera, have any currency amongst doubting folks today, or have these really faded to the background?

Tim Keller:

Neither. They're not primary. They're secondary now. So, one of the things I found interesting was more and more I'm booting my evangelism and apologetics off of Pascal's famous *Pensées*, where he says ...

JOHN DICKSON EDITORIAL

Tim is referring to *Pensées*, literally thoughts written by the famous French mathematician and philosopher Blaise Pascal. Pascal is often ridiculed by sceptics today because of what's called Pascal's wager. In passing, he once wrote that if Christianity turns out to be false, Christians and sceptics, neither win nor lose very much at all. There's no downside in believing, in other words. But he said if Christianity turns out to be true, the Christian wins big time and the sceptic loses badly, if you know what I mean. So why not go with the assumption that Christianity is true? What have you got to lose?

John Dickson:

Now it's unclear Pascal intended this as a formal factual argument in favour of Christianity, but it's not a bad argument for deciding to investigate the proposition that Christianity is true. I am hoping to convince professor Sam to help us do a whole show on Pascal. So, I'll keep you posted.

Anyway, Tim is talking about another of Pascal's pieces of advice about Christianity in the public square. namely that humans need to know both, that Christianity is rationally defensible and that it is desirable.

Tim Keller:

First, show people that Christianity is rationally respectable. It's reasonable, that's all, number one. Number two, get them to want it to be true. In other words, that means show its personal offers, the things that it can do. Then, finally, he says and then show them that it is true.

So, I have found that, for example, the first layer ... And I'll give you a couple examples of why this would ... The first layer I try to work with is leveling the playing field. So, I want to get a nonbeliever off this idea that I've got faith and he or she doesn't. I want to say you do realize that everybody basically has a view of the world based on a set of assumptions that you can't prove. Therefore, in a sense, all knowledge starts with faith.

But I said that doesn't mean that you can't rationally weigh the different worldviews and say which ones are more consistent, which ones within themselves, which ones actually explain the world the way we see it, which ones are best even at being liveable. They say you can't prove a worldview. Therefore, you might say the burden of proof is kind of equal and nobody can prove it. And yet at the same time you can weigh them.

So, I start that way, and even I get a lot of ... Especially from some guys, and I mean guys, a lot of young white men, really just don't believe that ... They believe they're totally objective and absolutely rational and so on. Actually, I point them to Alasdair MacIntyre's book *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* their head starts to hurt.

JOHN DICKSON EDITORIAL

Just quickly, Alasdair MacIntyre is regarded as one of the most influential moral and political philosophers of the last half century. He is openly Christian, but he is not easy-going.

Tim Keller:

Let's say what are you-

John Dickson:

So did mine.

Tim Keller:

Yeah. "What do you mean which rationality?" But, anyway, so you level the playing field. Then rather than go, most people aren't immediately, I think, as ready. Their eyes glaze over if you really go into too much ... Both you and I have written a lot of these books, brother. But if you just go too much into the proofs of God or even the evidence for the resurrection, things like that, they're just not there. The real

question is why would I want this thing to be true? They very often have a very poor understanding of what Christianity actually offers.

And so, there I guess you might call it existential or apologetics, where you're saying, okay, well, how do you get meaning in life? Here's what Christianity does. How do you get an identity? Here's what Christianity does. How do you face suffering? Here's how Christianity helps.

Then if eventually they get to the place where they say, "Huh, this is actually pretty nice, but I mean how do I know it's true?" finally they're motivated. Then, actually, even if they don't want a little bit of a rehearsal of the evidence, they ought to get it, because they're going to have a bad time ... Even if somebody says, "I want to be a Christian," I think you do have to rehearse the fact that there's not proofs, but pretty strong evidence.

JOHN DICKSON EDITORIAL

And Tim reflects on some of the common blockers to belief after this short break. \

SPONSOR AD: ZONDERVAN

This episode of Undeceptions is sponsored by Zondervan's new book, *Good News of Our Limits* by Sean McGeever. Can I ask you, in one sentence, what is the book about?

Sean McGeever:

Yeah. In the book, I help people find greater peace by explaining how inadequacy is not a bad thing. It's actually how God designed us.

John Dickson:

Okay. Why did you write it? Did it come out of a personal sense of inadequacy or something else?

Sean McGeever:

Absolutely. Yeah. The school of hard knocks.

John Dickson:

Yeah.

Sean McGeever:

Yeah. Yeah. I mean it didn't take a lot of deep thinking to recognize that I just couldn't do it all. I learned a couple tricks along the way, but no matter how hard I tried, I was never able to do it enough. So just the school of hard knocks taught me that there was a limit, that it's not just me. There's something behind this, and I started to ask the question why?

John Dickson:

Because you can start to think maybe it's the next book on productivity. That one will have the key.

Sean McGeever:

That's right. Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah, yeah, that's right.

John Dickson:

And there's no end. Who should read the book?

Sean McGeever:

Anyone who is worn out, which is a lot of us right now, but also especially those who are feeling a bit guilty. They are comparing themselves against others. They are trying and it's not good enough, and they think that the problem is themselves. While we all have personal work that we can do, I think anyone who just is at the end of the rope and doesn't know if there is a better book that's going to come out about productivity should take a step back and think maybe there's something that is beyond productivity. It's maybe that the Lord ... Maybe I'm designed this way, and I could think a little bit better about that. That's what my book attempts to help us do.

Sean McGeever:

I think that the Christian gospel has something to offer them that they're not finding anywhere else, which is that you can keep refining things over and over and over. I think what you'll find out is there's a limit, and we need to step back and ask the question why? Why is it there is a common trait among humanity where we can only literally run so fast, like on a track? Why is there a common trait that we all have to sleep? Why is there a common trait that it doesn't matter how much you try to hustle, someone else will be appearing to do more than what you can do.

Sean McGeever:

This is ubiquitous. Every person, you don't have to be a religious person, runs into this. Step back and say why is this? Is there something that is common? I think if you'll look into that, you'll start to ask why is it that humans are designed in such and such a way, that we have capacities that are limited?

John Dickson:

Sean McGeever's new book, *Good News of Our Limits*, really is good news. You can find it on Amazon right now, or head to [zondervan.com](http://zondervan.com) for more information.

Rowan Atkinson:

Ah, hello. It's nice to see you all here. Now, as the more perceptive of you've probably realized by now, this is hell and I am the devil. Good evening.

EPISODE CONTINUES

TAPE: ROWAN ATKINSON SKIT

Rowan Atkinson:

Now you're all here for eternity, ooh, which I hardly need tell you is a heck of a long time. So, you'll all get to know each other pretty well by the end. But for now, I'm going to have to split you up into groups. Will you stop screaming! Thank you.

Now murderers. Murderers? Over here, please. Thank you. Looters and pillagers, over here. Thieves, if you could join them. And, lawyers, you're in that lot.

JOHN DICKSON EDITORIAL

That's comedian Rowan Atkinson, of course, playing the devil, overseeing his audience's first day in hell. It's a sketch that neatly summarizes how people today think of hell. It's either a big joke or it's an idea so monstrous as to prove the cruelty of religion.

It's one of what Tim Keller calls the defector beliefs that he addresses in his bestselling 2008 book *The Reason for God: Belief in An Age of Skepticism*. Tim says hell is near the top of the list in a range of questions that challenge the fairness of Christianity. If God is a God of justice, how on earth can he condemn people to eternal punishment?

Tim Keller:

C. S. Lewis' basic understanding is that hell is something you choose. You know what's interesting, I read Don Carson. Don's no liberal.

John Dickson:

Indeed not.

Tim Keller:

Indeed not. Indeed not. But I tend to read Don's ... His reflections on ... He's got about two-thirds of the M'Cheyne reading calendar. He's got those reflections called *The Love of God*. Fairly often he points out that, like in Revelation, the judgment of God comes down on people and they still don't repent. The judgment comes down and they still don't repent. Of course, even in Luke 16, it's a parable, but the rich man in hell is not saying, "Let me out of here." Instead, he's just saying, "This is unfair."

I think there's a lot of credence behind the idea that if we live forever, in other words if our souls go on, we have a tendency to keep going in the same direction. The idea I would rather rule in hell than serve in heaven is something that people choose. I mean it's also, by the way, unfair if there is no hell for a lot of ... I mean the reason why I've ...

Here's what I would say is that 20 years ago, the very idea of a God of judgment and justice just did not fly with secular people. But younger people are much, much less willing to forgive. They feel like that's a lack of justice.

My biggest problem right now in pastoring people is that younger people feel that forgiveness ... I'm actually writing a book about it right now, John, if I ever get it done. But that forgiveness is being

undermined by modern secular understandings of justice. You're never supposed to forgive somebody who's wronged you because that would be unjust.

So, I'm actually finding that the idea of a God of judgment that sends people to hell is not quite as unpopular as it used to be. That's what makes me sad. I do think the idea of hell, if you're able to cast it as something that people choose ... And in a way they're there because they continue to choose it. I do think you can get some traction with that.

#### JOHN DICKSON EDITORIAL

I know I'm changing gears here a bit, but there are some other fairness questions, like why would God, and especially Christians, be so interested in who I can and can't love?

Tim Keller:

At this point, the biggest reason why people find traditional Christianity unpalatable is because of its attitude towards sex. Therefore, I do think that going forward, it is not that hard for Christians to admit racism, admit injustice of the past in the church.

There's an awful lot of things that the Bible says about justice. So, when people say the church has been on the side of injustice, you repent, you admit where it has been, and then you go to the word the Bible says, and you show what great resource the Bible has to be seeking social reform, et cetera.

Sexuality's different. Therefore, it's really the place where ... Many people believe that because expressing myself sexually is crucial to being an authentic self, therefore, Christianity is essentially an enemy of healthy identity. It's an enemy of healthy selfhood.

Actually, that is the biggest the apologetic issue. I do think it's the biggest one we have. I can see ways forward in almost every other place. This one's the hardest one. I can give you a couple ideas.

Several years ago, just before our American Supreme Court decision legalizing the same-sex marriage, I was invited by two people. One was Gabe Lyons of the Q Conference. You may have heard of him. The other one was Andrew Sullivan, who is a gay Catholic. I don't know how devout a Catholic, but he's a gay Catholic man who was a big proponent of same-sex marriage.

The two of them brought together gay activists and evangelical leaders to just have a kind of discussion about just the subject. It was only two weeks before the big decision.

What was interesting was there were two gay men there who were all about the saying we've got to learn to live together. We've got to realize that just like there's different races and there's different worldviews and different religions, we believe in pluralism. We shouldn't be steamrolling every single religion that has any kind of moral problems with homosexuality. We just can't do that. We need to learn to live together.

Those two guys, one was Catholic in background, the other one was actually an atheist who was Jewish. But the other seven or eight people who were there said, "No way, no way, no way. It's them or us. We're going to have to destroy the church or we're going to have to make it illegal for them to talk about homosexuality." They actually said that, make it illegal to speak up against it. There's no compromise.

What was interesting is when we went around and said, "What's your background?" the other six, or seven, if I remember correctly, all had come up in evangelical churches. They'd really been mistreated really badly. I heard all of their testimonies, you might say, and they were just really badly mistreated. They're the ones who were out for no compromise. Yes.

So, I keep thinking almost like it's ... I don't know what's going to happen. It could be that as time goes on, there will be a calming down. I think the one advantage here, of course, is the gay activists are not really only against evangelical Christians. They're also against Muslims and Orthodox Jews and Hindus and a whole lot of other people. Hopefully reality will bring them down to the idea where there will have to be some kind of compromise.

But the other thing, just to say quickly, is when I've spoken to people is I try to say, well, two things. Christianity, first of all, believes in practicing gender diversity in relationships. This is my story.

Right now, in California, if you have more than a certain size business with a certain number of employees, and if you decide you're going to go public and be stock traded in public, you have to have at least one woman on your board of directors. So, in other words, they don't want all-male board of directors.

You say now why would that be? So, you ask the person, "Why do you think it's that crucial to have a woman on board of directors? Why is it illegal to have only men on a publicly traded company?" They usually say, "Well, the female ... " "Okay. So, well then why can't it be illegal to say we don't want a family or a marriage without a woman? What'll be wrong with that?"

In some ways, Christianity is practicing a kind of level of diversity that our culture doesn't want to admit is necessary. The second ... Now you know what I'm doing there, John. I'm using their own ... It's called subversive fulfillment. You're using the person's narrative against them. It's a little bit of like a judo move. The other thing, though, is consent.

John Dickson:

Judo means the gentle way.

Tim Keller:

It's the gentle way, yes. The other thing would be consent, and that is the idea of no sex outside of marriage. I say, to my surprise, I can pull out three or four articles in The New York Times in the last two years where women felt that just giving consent at the moment ...

What they said was at the moment ... This guy was saying, "Can I do this? Can I do this? Can I take off this? Can I unhook this? Can I do this?" and they said, "Yes, yes, yes, yes. Then a month later, or even a few weeks later, this guy didn't show me any ... I thought that we were going to have a relationship. He just used me." He said, "I want to take my consent back. I know I can't do that. I know I can't charge that man now, under our current laws, with non-consensual sex. And yet I feel it was."

This one woman was writing and talking to her girlfriends about the fact that, "I feel like consent has to be more than just at the moment. It's got to be more than physical. It's got to be a whole life consent," and they were just laughing at her. I'm reading this thing and saying, "Uh."

I really think you can make a case, and I think women are going to be the ones who are going to believe this, that consent can't be just momentary and it can't just be physical, and that we can make the case ... Also, by the way, the Christianity ...

Kyle Harper's book *From Shame to Sin*, on how Christianity changed the old classical Roman world when it came to sexuality, non-consensual sex was a very Christian idea. He says the ancient people believed ... There was such a thing as rape, of course, which was really violent. But he says the reality was that any man of a higher class could actually have sex with almost anybody he wanted, and there was really no way to say no. By modern standards, there's all kinds of rape happening. The reason why we have a modern standard is because of Christianity.

So, I feel like the consent and the diversity are two ... You might say they're weak spots in the dragon, if you're trying to find a place in the dragon scales where there's a sensitivity. I actually could say Christianity is a view of consent and of diversity that I think will serve you better than the secular version.

I've actually had people say ... You know what? They smile. They think it's clever. They say, "That's interesting." It's still just almost ... I don't know. It's a long way from being a really strong argument. But, anyway, I would say to anybody listening to this, that's how you could develop that.

#### JOHN DICKSON EDITORIAL

I had to ask Tim if he reckons there will ever be a happy coexistence between traditional Christian views of sex and the secular vision of sex. What has to change on either side for that to happen? You'll have to head to our new bonus content for that one. More about that later.

One thing that seems clear from my conversation with Tim is that he reckons the church has a lot of work to do. Christians have not led well on controversial questions like sex. In many cases, they've lost all moral credibility on this and other questions. I don't know how many times someone on social media has reacted to something positive I've said about Christianity with something like, "Why would I trust anything from the organization that trashes same-sex love and covers up child abuse?" Part of me wants to reply, "Hey, that's not entirely fair," and part of me says, "Yeah, fair enough."

Anyway, Tim Keller remains a huge fan of the institution of the church, or at least the millions of little institutions around the world that we call the local church. He's pretty chipper about what might lie ahead for churches in our secularizing world. That's after the break.

#### SPONSOR AD: SCOT'S CHURCH, MELBOURNE

John Dickson:

Hey, and here's a quick shout out with a difference. Support for this particular episode was given to us by Scots' Church in the central business district of Melbourne. They like what we do here at Undeceptions, and they love Tim Keller. So, they generously helped us out to make this episode, and I'm really grateful.

I know the pastor there. Good day, Phil. I know they're trying to teach the Bible in a way that makes sense in the 21st century. It's a church that's full of history and full of life. Why not check them out at [scotschurch.com](http://scotschurch.com)

SPONSOR AD: ANGLICAN AID

John Dickson:

In Tanzania, people living with a disability suffer discrimination and social isolation. They also have trouble finding employment and education opportunities. Nearly half of people living with a disability in Tanzania can't read or write. In some cases, they're even denied medical care or access to services that offer food and shelter.

Anglican Aid is changing this by supporting the Karagwe Disability Program in the Kagera region of Tanzania. The program offers dedicated medical care and rehabilitation to people living with disabilities, as well as giving them access to education and a pathway to employment. It's fantastic.

You can help Anglican Aid. Support the life-changing work of the Karagwe Disability Program by visiting [anglicanaid.org.au](http://anglicanaid.org.au). That's anglicanaid dot O-R-G dot au. Thanks so much.

EPISODE CONTINUES

TAPE: ESSENCE MAGAZINE VIDEO

Voice 1:

To me, being woke means that you recognize that the world is not a simple place, that everything is not all equal, that justice has not happened yet for everyone, and that there's a lot of work to be done.

Voice 2:

Being woke is like as wide open, everything is clear. You can always see things that other people can just ignore, or they just don't know.

Voice 3:

Woke for me is just being outraged all the time and being able to stay human and feel outraged about injustice that is happening around me,

Voice 4:

It's being uncomfortable all the time and making sure that I'm speaking on behalf of those that can't speak up for themselves.

JOHN DICKSON EDITORIAL

There are some of the women behind Essence Magazine. For them, the term woke just means being awake to justice. If you are asleep, you're just drifting through life. But if you're awake, if you are woke, you'll be outraged at communities and organizations that stifle progress toward fairness.

The church, it seems, is an easy target here. Christians are seen as patriarchal, heteronormative, climate-ignorant, and, yes, even racist. So, I had to ask Tim about this cultural moment.

John Dickson:

You mentioned a moment ago that the church has historically been at the forefront of justice and equality. But now those things are often clubs wielded against the church. So, my question is how do you think the church can navigate so-called wokeness culture? I'm pretty sure using the word wokeness in that pejorative sense isn't going to help. But how does the church navigate these very strange times we're in?

Tim Keller:

Three things. Number one, Christians do have to not in any way airbrush or whitewash their past. So, we have to be totally honest about egregious injustices, past or present. Number two, we need to really do a better job of preaching justice in a way that's not moralistic.

I know I'm opening a big can of worms here, but I would just say I hear a lot of good young evangelicals trying to preach justice, but it can come across at the end kind of like a moralistic sermon, in the end saying, "Oh, we just need to go out there and help the poor and really care about justice." In the end, okay, how does grace work? How's that gospel ... In what way is that ...

I do think there definitely are ways to do this, by the way. I know there are ways to do it. But I do think that younger evangelicals are going to have to figure out a way of talking about justice that doesn't end up being another moralistic guilt trip.

But, number three, there is an over-wokeness. I'm not saying you've got to read The New York Times to find it, but basically in the last four or five months, The New York Times is really backtracking over the way so many of its younger authors and journalists were writing the year of the George Floyd death and all of the demonstrations and the writing, where they were saying things like ... And I saw it. They were saying things like the idea of crime is a racist, capitalist idea, which is kind of what Marx did believe. If you were a criminal, it was society made you that.

Or things like that punctuality is being white. Good grades are being white. We need to get rid of standardized tests for doctors because only white people pass them.

Now, what's happening in the last four or five months, The New York Times is actually starting to walk that stuff back enormously. They're also saying, because there is a backlash against it, a lot of it was very over the top.

I do think that there's going to be some reckoning. Maybe you know, in America, there was a very, very, very major movement to cut police departments in half, and all that's being walked back. It's all being walked back, by the way, generally speaking, by African American mayors now who are just hearing from their own people saying, "Are you crazy?"

Anyway, so I feel like in a way, instead of going after the most egregious overreactions by the progressive left and saying, "Ha, see how stupid that is," let them work it out. They're going to walk a lot of it back. We should be thinking about ourselves. We should be admitting where we were complicit with injustice. We need to figure out ways of preaching what the Bible says about justice in a grace and gospel-oriented way.

John Dickson:

So, do you think there also needs to be a walking back on the evangelical side of its anti-wokeness, its anti-critical race theory, it's anti-social justice warrior rhetoric?

Tim Keller:

Yeah. Yes. In fact, see, we're being sucked into the conservative news media, because it's a form of pornography. In other words, look at this incredibly stupid thing that this person said. This woke person said this unbelievable ... And, boy, there's a lot of them.

Just this last week, there was an article in New York Times, it was kind of end-of-the-year editorial. The editorial said, "Who's afraid of critical race theory?" The man who's very much a liberal said, on the one hand, what the right wing is doing is they're trying to find every single stupid thing that people have said on the left, and woke people said, in order to say we don't have to talk about racism as a problem anymore.

But then he said the reality is, however, that he felt like the news media was willing to take a lot of young woke people who were saying crazy things over the last year or two that were really outrageous, were really wrong, and have actually, in a sense, undermined the progressive movement because they have themselves platformed people who were just angry, who were saying extraordinarily unkind things, things that actually were, in a sense, anti-white racism. He even admitted that that was happening. He says now we've damaged ourselves because you've given conservatives all this ammunition.

I think Christians ought to just put the ammunition down. That's just not how we do it. We're supposed to be lifting up another way of going. I'm not sure just simply saying we don't have a race problem, like the conservatives are saying in America, or the left ... Which is almost a hopeless feeling like there's no way out because everything in society is hopelessly racist, and it's unconsciously so. I think those two groups are what we definitely are looking at putting out there a different way.

You know what? Even though ... I'm not a Pentecostal, John. Pentecostal churches are the most multiethnic human organizations in the history of the world. I do believe eventually evangelicalism will be that, too. I think that's going to create credibility for talking about justice.

5 MINUTE JESUS, JOHN DICKSON

Let's press pause. I've got a five-minute Jesus for you.

In His provocative Parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke chapter 10, Jesus tells how a Jewish man was robbed and left for dead on the road between Jerusalem and Jericho. It's an ancient road still visible and walkable to this day. I'd love to take you there sometime.

A temple priest walks past in Jesus' story, unwilling to assist a Levite. His priestly assistant also walks past and does nothing. Then a Samaritan turns up and he stops and cares for the man. He bandages his wounds, pays for lodging in a local inn, and returns later to check on the patient and to pay for any further expenses.

Then a Samaritan turns up, he stops and cares for the man. He bandages his wounds, pays for lodging in a local inn, and returns later to check on the patient and to pay for any other expenses. As a result of this parable, we now use the proverbial good Samaritan to mean someone who does similar acts of charity.

But one of the keys to the story in Jesus' day is that Samaritans were the ethno-religious enemies of the Jewish people. Jesus and his first followers were all Jews. So, by making a Samaritan, not a fellow Jew, the hero of his parable, Jesus was simultaneously critiquing his own people for not living up to God's Commandments. He was insisting that his followers were to show their compassion across ethnic, cultural, and even religious boundaries.

Some interpret this parable as a metaphor, as if Jesus is the true Samaritan and he came to save us who were left for dead on the side of the road without him. Frankly, and I'm probably going to annoy people here, I think that's nuts, and certainly a departure from how the parable has been read throughout history. Okay, off my pet peeve there.

Jesus ends the parable with the stark statement, "Go and do likewise." See, that's the point. Christians are to cross ethnic and cultural boundaries with their lives, their compassion, and mission.

This became one of the genuine peculiarities of Christianity from the time of Jesus to today. There were very few specific cultural badges people had to wear in order to be Christian. There was no sacred language that adherents had to learn. There were no dietary laws or dress code. There were no particular careers Christians should avoid apart from their immoral ones, nor were there categories of people, racial, credal, or even moral that believers shouldn't eat meals with. After all, Jesus himself would be known as the friend of sinners.

The church also had no distinctive ethnic profile. See, Christianity started for its first five to 10 years amongst Semitic peoples, Galileans and Judeans. But within about 20 years, it was embraced by Indo-Europeans in Asia Minor, Greeks and Italians, as well as North Africans.

Within 200 years, it had spread amongst Arabs, Gauls, that's the French, the Spanish, and the Celts of Britain. Even today, you'll find roughly equal numbers of Christians in, say Europe, 26%, Latin America and the Caribbean, 24%, and Sub-Saharan Africa, another 24%.

According to Pew Research, the largest cohort of professing Christians, even in the US today, is women of colour. Crossing boundaries from Jew to Samaritan and far beyond has been a Christian specialty from the beginning. You can press play now.

John Dickson:

Can you imagine there will ever be a Christian Renaissance or even revival?

Tim Keller:

Yeah, because monasticism, who would've thought that up? I mean monasticism was ... And I know a lot of people are thinking monasticism, retreat. All listeners, John knows the monastics were the missionaries. They're the people who won Europe. They're the reason why at least most of you in Australia are ... If you are a Christian, you are a Christian because the monks went up there, and it was brilliant. They didn't just show up and preach. They created communities. They created-

John Dickson:

Hospitals, schools.

Tim Keller:

Yeah, hospitals, [crosstalk 00:54:25].

John Dickson:

Poverty programs, farms. Yeah.

Tim Keller:

Absolutely. It's unbelievable ...

JOHN DICKSON EDITORIAL

Yeah, we really have to do an episode on monks and monasteries. I had a scholar from Columbia University in New York all lined up for this recently. But sadly, she got sick a couple of days before I was due to meet her. Anyway, stay tuned for that one. Monks changed your world, the whole western world.

Tim Keller:

So, the monastic movement, which also was a renewal movement, because Christendom comes along and everybody suddenly becomes a Christian. Instead of 10% of the population being Christian, suddenly everybody's a Christian. The monastic movement was partly a renewal movement. To get back to real Christianity was also a missionary movement. Who would've thought that up? Who would've thought the reformation up exactly? Who would've thought of the great awakening up? I mean put it this way, every new thing God does is unprecedented until it's not.

Tim Keller:

So, I can actually imagine reformations and renewals. But my guess is a really good one is going to be something you and I can't actually imagine exactly right now. But I can even imagine some, sure, because, look, the gates of hell will not prevail against the church, that there's no expiration date on that offer.

JOHN DICKSON EDITORIAL

Tim has been contemplating the ongoing life of the church in the world, even while he is staring down the barrel of his own mortality. He had thyroid cancer when he was in his 50s, and he recovered well from that. Now at 71, his pancreatic cancer has a very different prognosis.

He tells me that he and his wife have been managing pretty well for close to two years now. But with this cancer, he says, you don't know what's coming tomorrow.

But he says this balancing on the edge of eternity has helped him develop some really helpful habits. Now I know the word habit isn't a popular one today. We sometimes think of habits as mere routines that lack spontaneity and reality. But Tim says he's found three habits, three spiritual disciplines, that are pathways to authenticity and flourishing.

Tim Keller:

The one habit was actually having prayer and Bible reading more than once a day, Daily Office. Sounds awfully Anglican, I know. But in other words, morning and evening prayer as opposed ... Or midday prayer, whatever. But in other words, it's not just once. I just needed it to frame myself up.

Tim Keller:

So, I was going to read four chapters a day in the Bible, then read three in the morning and one at night, or something like that. It was much better than reading all four in the morning, number one.

Number two immersion in the Psalms. I know that's Book of Common Prayer, too. But actually, even though I'm Presbyterian, I do the ... Ever since the 50s, I mean ever since my 50s, I have done ... Not perfectly, of course, but I've basically done the Book of Common Prayer, all the Psalms, in a month, at least read through them or prayed through them once a month. Immersion in the Psalms for various reasons.

The third thing is John Owen has two books, Mortification of Sin and Meditations and Discourses on the Glory of Christ. He basically believes that sanctification has, you might say, a downstroke and an upstroke. The downstroke is mortification. That's not so much repentance for what you have done wrong, it's recognizing the besetting sins of your heart that basically trigger actual sins.

In other words, besetting sins are more like idols of the heart rather than an idol of approval, an idol of performance, an idol of success, or an idol of power. They're more like a sinful stance of your heart that issue in particular sins.

Mortification is recognizing those and finding ways of thinking about Jesus Christ in a way that actually shrinks those. In other words, actually having a monthly or a weekly time in which you actually look at your four or five or six most besetting sins.

Actually, I used to have four and then some ... Kathy knows, 10 years ago, it got so bad, I just hated getting older. She said, "I think it's time ..." See, that hatred of getting older actually does lead to certain sins. It's definitely is an unwillingness to admit things about ... It is definitely an unwillingness to accept that God is ... And not my health and my strength is my real hope.

And so, that's what I mean by ... I graduated that up as to one of the things that at least every month I looked at, repented of, sought God's help for, found Bible verses that helped me. So that's modification.

The other part of the down ... That's the downstroke. The other upstroke is thinking about Jesus Christ till his beauty and his glory comes through. Owen is amazing at that. He says, look, it's not enough just to say Jesus was exalted to the right hand of the Father. He says that's a fact.

But he says, if you love him, aren't you excited that the one that you love and who got so much rejection has got that kind of honour now? He'll say meditate on that so that it draws your heart out. Don't just say, oh yeah, he's ascended to the right hand of the Father. He said ...

Recently, my youngest son just got a big promotion. He now works for the city of New York. He is the deputy director of all urban planning in the borough of Queens. I don't know, John, I don't know where your kids are and all that stuff. When one of my kids gets honoured, because I love him, boy, do I get excited about that. It's just incredible.

Then I'm thinking, wait a minute, if I'm having these two or three really great days just because I found out that Jonathan got this promotion, here's John Owen saying why aren't you filled with joy over the promotion that Jesus got?

So about once a month, I try to take a couple of hours, usually on a Saturday morning, where I go back over my ... Do mortification and you might say contemplation of God's glory, Jesus' glory in particular, and just try to go deeper. So, a monthly retreat, morning and evening going through the Psalms, and just sticking with that no matter how horrible you feel. That's the main thing. It doesn't matter. Just don't stop it. Don't stop it, because you'll get the feelings back if you don't give up. But if you give up, then there's nothing.

JOHN DICKSON EDITORIAL

Well, no one could accuse him of giving up. Over these last two years of treatment and wondering, he's continued to preach, record things to camera, zoom with people, encourage and mentor and write wherever he feels he can do some good. I was moved and challenged, frankly. In a somewhat self-indulgent moment, I couldn't help asking him for some advice on walking through the darkness.

John Dickson:

Tim, earlier this year, I watched my best friend of 40 years die in my lounge room, after five months of palliative care. He was really strong in the Lord to his final breath. But I admit it has really hit me.

Now it's the frailty of things that I just find so disturbing, to watch my mate go down. So, I want to ask you, if you don't mind, tell us how you're journeying spiritually with stage four cancer. I'm not looking for my own private therapy session with Tim Keller here. I'm sure my listeners just want to know how does one walk through the darkness?

Tim Keller:

What kind of cancer did your friend have?

John Dickson:

It was a squamous cell carcinoma that presented in the jaw, and then took over his head.

Tim Keller:

Yeah. The horrible thing about when you get cancer, you become an expert. Kathy says there's two ways to become an officer. One was you go to military school and you get commission. The other is what she called field promotions. In other words, in the midst of battle, you can go from an enlisted man to being an officer just because of your experience.

What happens is if you actually have cancer, it's like you're kind of a cancer doctor. The min we found out that I had pancreatic cancer, which is not the same as thyroid cancer, which I had 20 years ago, when they immediately said, "Oh, we can treat this," the first time I talked to my doctor about the pancreatic cancer, he says, "You're going to die of this. We don't have any way, really, of curing this."

What that has done to both of us is it has just shown us that we were living in a veil of illusion that we would live forever. We actually really were. Everybody says, "No, no, no. No, no," but you are, you are, because what happens is the things of the earth grow strangely dim. When that happens, you say, "Gosh, God isn't really enough for me." I really don't have enough of a grip on God to get through the day. I was really living off of a deep denial of my mortality, and a belief that the things of this world are really the things that are going to satisfy me. But they never really have, and yet I keep back and keep going back.

There's a place in Tolkien where Sam is falling asleep after Frodo ... They're on their way to Mount Doom. At one point, he looks up and he sees a star twinkling. It's a very famous place where he says, suddenly, cold and clear like a shaft, the realization pierced him that the shadow, the evil of this world, is a passing thing. There's light and high beauty forever beyond its reach. He immediately just fell into a deep, untroubled sleep.

What happens is that having cancer, which means the things that you really were relying on for your soul's repose, they just don't do it anymore. It's God or nothing. When you go to him, guess what? There's a communion with God which is available, that at a level that you just never felt the need to push through to find. When you do and you push through, you find that it's there. There is not only enough for you to get through the day, but then actually the things around you, you recognize as greater gifts than you were looking at them before.

In other words, in some ways I'm happier than I used to be. That sounds very weird to say. In some ways, I can enjoy the water, the sun, a good meal, and say there's a level of communion with God that is available, that you really just have never been, I don't know, motivated enough to find. I think that's right.

John Dickson:

Tim Keller, you've been extremely generous with your time. I just want to say thank you so much. I think of you and pray for you. You're certainly in my mind, in a lot of people's minds. We'll continue to pray.

Tim Keller:

Yeah, please do. When my work's done, that'll be it.

John Dickson:

Yeah.

Tim Keller:

But I mean it has been 19 months since I was diagnosed, which my doctors say is extraordinary. But on the other hand, it could just turn around tomorrow and suddenly you're gone. I'm glad to live like that. I'm at a good spot where I say I actually might have years left. On the other hand, I might not at all.

It's really important for me to live with a certain amount of hope both ways. So, I've got absolute hope in Christ, but I've also got the possibility that God might say, "Yeah, I've got some surprises up my sleeve before I take you." That's kind of nice to have it both ways. So, in a way, I'm in a win-win situation, John.

JOHN DICKSON EDITORIAL

Well, I hope you found that as stimulating and challenging as I did. I have a confession to make, we recorded much more of Tim Keller than we could fit into this episode without blowing out the format completely. We've got another half hour with Tim exploring the state of Christianity in the world and how he reckons the church could address some of the key defeater beliefs of this moment.

If you want to hear that bonus content and tons more, we've started a new service here at [undeceptions.com](http://undeceptions.com). Right now, you can become one of our undeceivers and get access to uncut interviews like the one with Tim and a bunch more coming down the pipeline. You can get full episode transcripts, access to a private Facebook group where you get the inside running on what we're up to, plus invitations to special events, and a whole bunch more. Just go to [undeceptions.com](http://undeceptions.com) and click on the big link, become an undeceiver.

It'll set you back a lousy \$5 Aussie a month. That's about 35 cents US. Not really, but it's pretty cheap anyway. Every cent of this new subscription service goes back into the show. Along with the donations, this is how we're going to keep Undeceptions thriving.

While you're there, you'll also see that Laurel Moffatt's new podcast Small Wonders is underway and ready for your listening pleasure. All the buttons you need to subscribe to her insightful peace-inducing observations are right there next to the podcast logo, part of the expanding Undeceptions network. Now, next episode, we're talking about the kingdom come, heaven, what it is and what it isn't. See you.

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