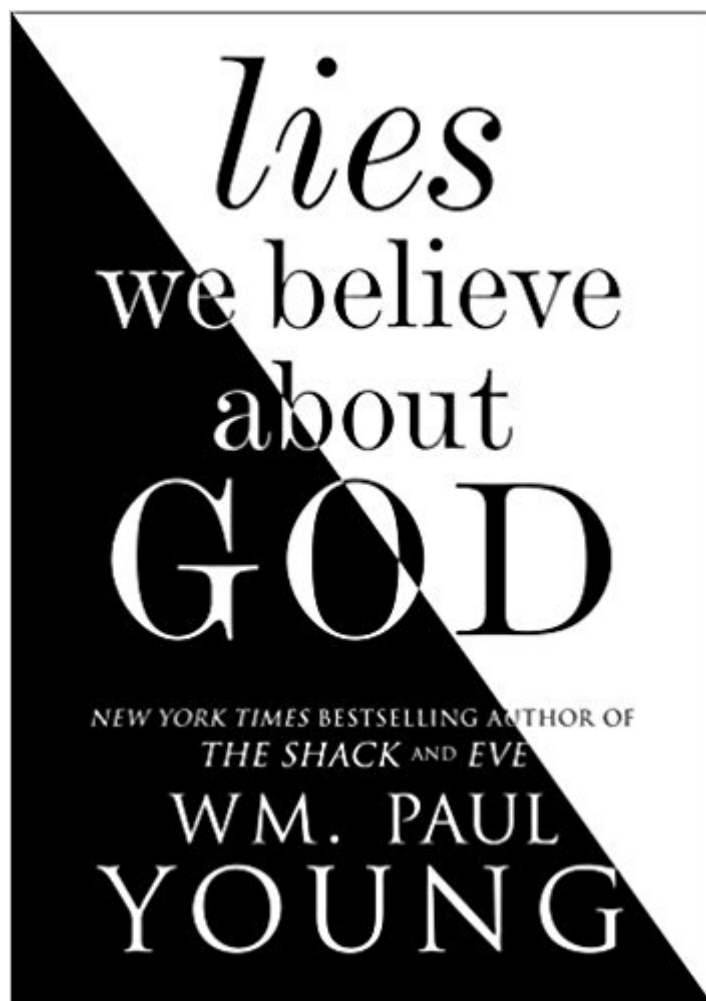


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Lies We Believe About God



Synopsis

From the author of the twenty million plus copy bestselling novel *The Shack* and the New York Times bestsellers *Cross Roads* and *Eve* comes a compelling, conversational exploration of the wrong-headed ideas we sometimes have and share about God. Wm. Paul Young has been called a heretic for the ways he vividly portrays God's love through his novels. Here he shares twenty-eight commonly uttered and sometimes seemingly innocuous things we say about God. Paul exposes these as lies that keep us from having a full, loving relationship with our Creator. With personal anecdotes and sharing the compassion readers felt from the "Papa" portrayed in *The Shack*—now a major film starring Sam Worthington and Octavia Spencer—Paul encourages readers to think anew about important issues including sin, religion, hell, politics, identity, creation, human rights, and helping us discover God's deep and abiding love.

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Customer Reviews

William Paul Young was born in Canada and raised among a Stone Age tribe by his missionary parents in the highlands of former New Guinea. He suffered great loss as a child and young adult and now enjoys the "wastefulness of grace" with his family in the Pacific Northwest. He is the author of New York Times bestsellers, *The Shack* and *Cross Roads*.

Lies We Believe About God > > It is the middle of winter in northern Alberta, Canada. The temperature is well below zero, one of those days that is so cold your nose hairs feel like little sticks

plugging up your nostrils and every exhalation of breath becomes its own fogbank. I was born not too far from this city, up in the northern prairies. "At least it's a dry cold," someone offers, which is true, but not that comforting. We enter the building and I unwrap the layers of protection, trading them for the warmth of this place of incarceration. We are visiting a women's prison. The women who have asked me to come and speak said that dozens of copies of *The Shack* have been making the rounds and having an impact. The government has given these inmates a "time-out," an invitation to think about their lives and choices, something that people outside these walls have little opportunity to do. These women are here today to spend an hour with me, by their own choosing. Their presence is a gift. Those who have eyes to see will find much wonder beneath tough exteriors and callous hearts. Most of the women are here because of a relationship gone wrong, and their suffered betrayals and losses are visible in their bluster of defiance or barely concealed shame. I feel quite at home here, among the bruised and wounded. These are my people, our people. I don't remember what I talked about. It probably had to do with the prisons in my own life, places that became precious to me because they were all I knew. About how we hold on to the certainty of our pain rather than take the risk of trusting anyone ever again. Deeply wounded souls in the room began to weep. Bruce Cockburn, the Canadian poet and musician, would call these "rumours of glory." Lost coins, lost sheep, lost sons, but not just any. These are my sons, my sheep, and my coins. I finish my talk and only a few leave. Others wait to have me sign a book. I hug everyone, which I am certain is a violation of all sorts of rules. But I have been breaking such codes for a while, and no one ever interferes with these sacred encounters. A woman stands waiting, her body tense with emotion. When I simply take her in my arms, it is as if I set off a charge that lets the dam burst. She sobs uncontrollably, for minutes. I whisper that it is okay, that I have other shirts, that I have her and she is safe. I can't comprehend all the misery and humanity that is flooding through this one small touch, but it is real and visceral and wrenching. Finally, she stops the heaving enough to find some words. "Do you really think," she whispers in short bursts, "that Papa is fond of me?" And there it is, the question. This tender human being is entrusting me with this monumental question. Even those who don't believe that God exists are desperate to know that love does and that love knows who we are. More, we are driven from within to take the risk to ask of someone or Someone, Do you find anything in me that is lovable, that is enough, that is worthy of being loved? There is a scene in *The Shack* in which the main character, Mackenzie, is having his assumptions challenged. Mack is face-to-face with Sophia, the Wisdom of God, and she is asking him about the love he has for his children. In particular, she asks which of his five children

he loves the most. Even moderately healthy parents would tell you this question is impossible to answer. My wife, Kim, and I have six children. When our eldest was born, we couldn't imagine ever having the capacity to love another child. Our first used it all up. But then our second arrived, and suddenly there was a new depth of love that either hadn't existed or had been dormant before his arrival. It is as if each child brings with him or her a gift of love that is deposited into the hearts of the parents. In the religious subculture in which I was raised, we all knew that God is love. We said it and sang it all the time, until it didn't mean that much. It was simply the way that God is. It is like the grandchild who says, "But you have to love me. You're my gramps. But saying "God is love" doesn't capture our question, does it? So I've made a habit of rephrasing the line "God loves you" and instead of making it about God, I make it about the object of God's relentless affection—us. So throughout The Shack, Papa would say, "I am especially fond of her or him." There is a world of difference between saying "I love you," which is about me, and saying "I am especially fond of you," which is about you. Both are correct, but the latter somehow pierces the disquiet of our souls and says, "Yes, I know you love me, but do you know me and do you like me? You love because that is the way you are, but is there anything about me that is worth loving? Do you see me, and do you like what you see?" "Do you really think," she whispers in short bursts, "that Papa is fond of me?" I squeeze her tight. "Yes," I whisper back as we both dissolve into torrents of tears. "Papa is especially fond of you!" Minutes later she regains a semblance of emotional control and looks up into my face for the first time. "That's all I needed to know. That's all I needed to know." With another hug, she exits, leaving me thinking, Darlin', that is all any of us needs to know!

Below I will share my overall thoughts on WM. Paul Young's book *Lies We Believe About God* in summary format. I will utilize a green light, yellow light, red light format in my critique. Green Light (Stuff I really liked....GO!) 1. The Tone- I liked the humble tone of the introduction (and carried through to the rest of the book). Young is not being dogmatic. He is sharing his thoughts. He is creating questions which are, of course, healthy to discuss. 2. The Jesus Centered Approach- In theory, this is the right approach. I think Young attempted to keep Jesus at the center. But that's not as easy as one might think. At times it seemed that Young might be leaning more on a certain interpretation of Paul or even certain statements of Jesus (while ignoring others). But overall, I

appreciate the Jesus centered approach.³ Emphasis on Genesis 1- I like that Young talked about the inherent goodness of humanity. We need more voices that take Genesis 1 and the anthropological predecessor to Genesis 3.⁴ A Non-Controlling God- Young is right, it seems to me, to move away from meticulous sovereignty and toward a God who is purposefully non-controlling. Surprisingly, it seemed that Young departed from this a bit in the chapter about coincidences, but overall I thought he was solid on this point. I'd be interested to know what Young would think of the work of Thomas Jay Oord.⁵ Caution Toward Religion- Young stated that Jesus came to end religion in a very real sense. I agree.⁶ God and Gender- I never had a problem with Young's portrayal of the Trinity in *The Shack* so far as it concerns gender. In this book, he does a good job of stating his view. I concur.⁷ Magic Christianity- I think Young did a very good job of describing how some Christians have a magical view of faith and performance. This is something I come across in local church ministry quite often.⁸ Sex- I think was on point in the chapter on God's relationship to sexuality.⁹ Politics- With the exception of not fleshing out (or even mentioning) Romans 13, I think Young did a great job of discussing the Christian relationship to the state (especially considering how short a space he devoted to this).¹⁰ Hell- As someone who wrote a thesis paper on hell, I felt Young's treatment of the subject was fair. I don't agree with his view (Christian Universalism), but I don't consider it heretical either.¹¹ Atonement- I think Young did a good job of critiquing some forms of penal substitution theory that pit God the Father against the Son.¹² Trinity- I appreciated and share Young's thoughts on the Trinity. I do believe that 'God is love' is a true statement because God is a plurality of unified persons. It's wonderful to know that love is at the very core of reality.

Yellow Light (Stuff I'd be cautious about... SLOW DOWN!)

1. View of the Fall- I was not thoroughly convinced that Young had a thoroughgoing view of the depth of human depravity. His best statement of it was in chapter 22, but overall he seemed to view the human condition as one where our goodness is just buried deep inside us rather than that it is actually distorted.

2. Christian Universalism- I consider General Universalism to be heresy, but I wouldn't say this about Christian Universalism. In the latter, I would distinguish between dogmatic universalism and hopeful universalism. Young seems basically certain that all will be saved. I would be more open to hopeful universalism. I actually think Young's certainty on this point goes against some of his basic operating principles.

3. Unclear Writing and/or Thinking- On a number of points, Young's position is either unclear or doesn't make sense to me. For instance, he says that our salvation is secure, but that participation in it is necessary. I'm not sure how those statements could both be true. He seems sure that all will be saved, but emphasizes the importance and eternal nature of the gift of free will. Again, those statements seem to exist in some degree of tension. On the problem of pain, Young

says God is able to intervene miraculously, but doesn't usually do this. Nevertheless, Young says he would if he were able. He leans on mystery here, I guess. The coincidence chapter didn't seem to fit with some of his other thinking. You can't really say God doesn't control stuff (when talking about bad stuff especially) and then say He's behind every detail (when talking about the good stuff). Red Light (Stuff I didn't like... STOP!) 1. We're Already Saved- I don't think Young is right about this. I think he has focused on a possible interpretation of some verses at the expense of both better interpretations of said passages AND the context of those passages AND a multitude of other verses that suggest otherwise. I don't think this is just semantics. There is truth in telling fellow Christians that they need to keep their new reality (they are a new creation!) in mind, but it's inappropriate, in my view, to say the same to non-Christians (for they are not yet a New Creation). What needs to happen in the life of a non-follower of Jesus isn't simply to stop believing lies. They need to come to The Truth (Jesus). 2. We're All God's Children- Much the same here. I think Young was wrong to ignore the necessary nuance on this point. He literally dismissed the opportunity to add good nuance (top of 205). It is true that we are all children of God in the sense that we are all God's creation. It is also true that we are all loved by God. But it is not true in every sense that everyone is a child of God. And some of those senses are important (life and death stuff). Overall, I thought the book had (much) much more true teaching than false teaching (from my perspective). Specifically, I think Young is wrong to label the following statements as lies: Chapter 13 "You need to get saved" Chapter 24 "Not everyone is a child of God" That's not to say that everything Young says in those chapters is wrong. It's just to say that I think there is actually more truth in the supposed 'lie' than there is in his rebuttal.

Lies We Believe About God is creating a stir. Martin Luther listed 95 Theses. Paul Young only lists 28 Lies. You would be hard-pressed to find another product on with Customer Reviews so evenly divided between 5-star and 1-star ratings, and nothing in between. Rotate the familiar yellow bar graph 90 degrees and it looks like football goalposts (or some would say devil horns). Black-and-white polarization is a sign of the times. America is divided again. If there's no such thing as bad publicity, then God must be pleased by controversy the book is generating. I hail from Tennessee, the Scopes Monkey Trial state. The hoopla back then (1925) was about denial of the biblical origin of life (Creationism) and teaching evolution (Darwinism). Now it's about denial of biblical orthodoxy and embracing universalism. Boiled to their essence, both disputes test presuppositions regarding the authority of the Bible (i.e., "God's Word" as inerrantists call it). Both disputes are showcased in movies, albeit separated by 57 years. I enjoyed The Shack (Sam

Worthington) as much as *Inherit The Wind* (Spencer Tracy). When I read the 1-star reviews I'm reminded of that scene in *Inherit The Wind* when the alarmed townspeople, protest-signs in hand, march around singing Give Me That Old-Time Religion. When I read the 5-star reviews I wonder the same thing I did when the credits rolled for *The Shack*. As I walked into the theater's parking lot, I said to my wife, "What did God do with Missy's killer?" That seems to be the rub. Nobody should get away with murder. There's no shame in wanting justice; for him or me. For a religion to succeed, apparently it needs a hell to fear more than a heaven to enjoy. And to read the comments, not just some annihilation kind of hell where everything just goes black, but a perpetual-pitchfork-'n-the-rear hell, a place of eternal conscious torment. Orthodox religion presumes people must be incentivized by reward/punishment to live right. Paul Young holds a higher view, as do I. Don't so-called atheists commit less crimes than Christians? That's odd. I'm going to break new ground and give *Lies We Believe About God* 3-stars. On the downside, it's too brief, too shallow. and omits dozens more lies that should have been included. The book doesn't touch topics such as eschatology, militarism, feminism, or homosexuality. On the upside, it gets people thinking outside the numbing narrowness of their indoctrination and group-think conditioning. The book is a great discussion starter. I'd give *The Shack* 5-stars hands down. Fiction is harder to write, but what non-fiction books lack in character development and plot must be made up in depth of research. I will not repeat the commentary I posted in other threads on this forum, but if there is one component sorely missing in all the what-happens-to-us-when-we-die salvation schemes (e.g., unconditional election/damnation, free-will altar-call decisions, or all good dogs go to heaven-ism) its justice, not grace. Deep inside, above all else, we want a God who is fair, because life isn't. We yearn for a corrections institute in-the-sky (e.g., purgatory, a restorative hell, rehabilitation, and yes, some form of do-the-crime-do-the-time punishment). We want justice, not pardons. Soteriology should be 50 shades of gray because life is too. We want proportionality. God's all-knowingness is equal to the task of being a perfectly fair judge of our lives. God is an irresistible beacon to our souls that draws us in...all of us...even the most recalcitrant...eventually. That's a beautiful thought, even if it is unbiblical according to some people. I only care what's true. Who knows? The familiar judged-once-to-heaven-or-hell-forever model pitched by religion is overly simplistic, cynically gamed, and irrationally feared. Paul Young's theology takes religion out of the loop. The lucrative religion industry stands to lose customers. Ouch! No wonder they're up in arms. The Nones and Dones are the fastest growing category. Can you skip church altogether and still go to heaven? Is Gandhi in heaven? Is it how well you love, or affirming correct doctrines that matters to God? One day, we'll see, we'll see. Jesus flattened hierarchies. Human institutions build them back. We're all

about power over others, establishing pecking orders, forming cliques, collecting dues, having our egos stroked, assuaging guilty consciences, defining them versus us, always looking to exclude rather than include. Paul Young seems above the fray. His worldview is more horizontal than vertical. He's relational...egalitarian. I love that. I hope he writes a sequel to The Shack.

This is a most extraordinary book. I highly recommend it to everyone because it's such an enjoyable read, especially for those who have been scarred by a "religious view" of Who God is, & how He sees & feels about us. Many lies will be explored and explained, and the reader will come away with a new and pleasant understanding that makes sense to their souls.

Great book. Will change your view of God, especially if you have been beat up by the typical modern day church - any denomination or non-denomination or so-called christian or otherwise.

Very thought provoking, which is good for all of us I think.

I found it to be most informative.

Informative and edifying.

I have to say I just love Paul Young--everything he writes seems to have the fingerprint of the Almighty on it. Mr. Young taps into the supreme truth seen in both the Old and New Testaments--that God is love...

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