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Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry In Your City



Synopsis

Today many pastors are struggling to adapt to a post-Christian culture without abandoning orthodox theology. How do we communicate the concepts of grace and substitutionary atonement in our globalized culture and context? In *Center Church*, Timothy Keller offers challenging insights and provocative questions based on over twenty years of ministry in New York City. This book outlines a theological vision for ministry - applying classic doctrines to our time and place - organized around three core commitments:

- Gospel-centered: The gospel of grace in Jesus Christ changes everything, from our hearts to our community to the world. It completely reshapes the content, tone and strategy of all that we do.
- City-centered: With a positive approach toward our culture, we learn to affirm that cities are wonderful, strategic and underserved places for gospel ministry.
- Movement-centered: Instead of building our own tribe, we seek the prosperity and peace of our community as we are led by the Holy Spirit.

"In this important book, Tim Keller unpacks the gospel and gently but firmly reminds us that it is nonnegotiable. At the same time, he enables us to think through how we can responsibly interact with the culture, how we can - indeed, must - appreciate good things within it, and how we can firmly and faithfully apply the gospel to it." - D.A. Carson, research professor of New Testament, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

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Customer Reviews

The "secret" of Redeemer Presbyterian Church's fruitfulness does not lie in its ministry programs, according to Tim Keller in this book. Far more important than the particular forms of ministry expression are the process by which they are arrived at, a process involving thinking long and hard about the implications of the gospel, the culture of the city, and the sensibilities of both Christians and non-Christians in the city. The book is essentially a manual for creating a theological vision for a city, being a faithful re-statement of the gospel with rich implications for life, ministry, and mission in a type of culture at a moment in history. The book starts by discussing what the gospel is, and what is involved in gospel renewal. It then discusses the importance of gospel contextualisation and how it relates to a city, and finally movement dynamics including mission, institutions and integrative ministry. While leaders of established churches may not spend much time considering the theological implications of their church practices, church planters (unless they are merely following someone else's template) are inevitably faced with the task of thinking through what the new church is going to look like, how it is going to explain the gospel to the local people groups, and how it is going to embody Christian community. These are challenging theological issues, and the book provides excellent source material to assist in the process.

â ªIf you want a philosophy of ministry, I'm not your guy. I've written them. I've even assigned and graded them. I don't like most of them, though. Some are theological, but don't tell me much about ministry. Some are programmatic, and end up becoming too prescriptive. Neither is helpful. What we need, according to Tim Keller, is middleware. Middleware is like the operating system on your computer. It's neither the hardware (like theology), nor is it the application (the programs). In the church, this middleware -- a theological vision for ministry, really -- is more practical than doctrinal beliefs alone, but more theological than "how-to" steps for ministry. It is, it turns out, exactly what we need, and it's what Keller aims to deliver in his tome *Center Church*. Yes, it's a tome. The book is almost 400 pages, and the audiobook is almost 23 hours long. It's formatted like a textbook with lots of sidebars, and some tables and sidebars. As Mike Wittmer writes, "The only thing it's missing is a few pictures of U.S. Presidents, and I'd be back in high school."â ª (The sidebars are one reason why the print version is superior to the audiobook or the ebook format. There's no real way for the

sidebars to have the same flow on a Kindle, much less an audiobook.)â The book delivers exactly what you'd expect from Tim Keller: a scholarly but practical look at ministry. The book is broken into three sections: Gospel, City, and Movement. First, he begins with the gospel, helping us think carefully about what it is and what it isn't. He also describes how the gospel renews the church. Chapter 6, "The Work of Gospel Renewal," is worth the price of the book itself for any pastor who wants to see the church revived. Second, Keller writes on the city.

I love this book! Dr. Keller has given a wonderful resource to the church. Any leader or pastor who wants to become clearer and more relevant to the people they are trying to reach would be helped by this book. It is not a book to speed read or skim through. It is a book that requires reflexion and thought, hard thought especially to apply to your specific situation. Dr. Keller argues for a theological vision and then builds a matrix one can pick up and apply with effort to one's own place and time. Dr. Keller starts out asking a few essential questions; What is the gospel and how do we bring it to bear on the hearts of people today? What is this culture like and how can we both connect to it and challenge it in our communication? Where are we located, and how does this affect our ministry? To what degree and how should Christian lay-people be involved in civic life and cultural production? How do the various ministries in a church, word and deed, community and instruction, relate to one another? How innovative will our church be and how traditional? How will our church relate to other churches in our city and region? How will we make our case to the culture about the truth of Christianity? Next Dr. Keller fleshes out the answers in a clear and concise manner, making it simple for leaders to develop their own answers for their own situations. This is building what Dr. Keller calls a "theological vision" which he defines as "a faithful restatement of the gospel with rich implications for life, ministry, and mission in a type of culture at a moment in history." The one minor objection I had for this book (I now see it as an advantage) was that there are many large sidebars throughout the text.

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