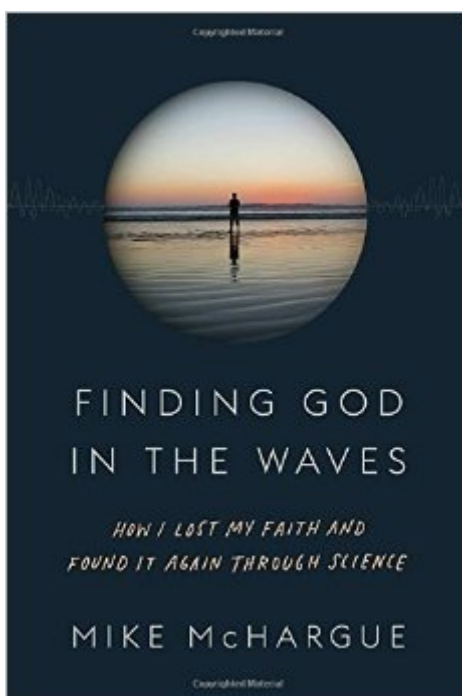


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Finding God In The Waves: How I Lost My Faith And Found It Again Through Science



Synopsis

From the host of the popular podcasts, The Liturgists Podcast and Ask Science Mike, a story of having faith, losing it, and finding it again through science—revealing how the latest in neuroscience, physics, and biology help us understand God, faith, and ourselves. “What do you do when God dies? It’s a question facing millions today, as science reveals a Universe that’s self-creating, as American culture departs from Christian social norms, and the idea of God begins to seem implausible at best and barbaric at worst. Mike McHargue understands the pain of unraveling belief. In *Finding God in the Waves*, Mike tells the story of how his Evangelical faith dissolved into atheism as he studied the Bible, a crisis that threatened his identity, his friendships, and even his marriage. Years later, Mike was standing on the shores of the Pacific Ocean when a bewildering, seemingly mystical moment motivated him to take another look. But this time, it wasn’t theology or scripture that led him back to God—it was science. In *Finding God in the Waves*, “Science Mike” draws on his personal experience to tell the unlikely story of how science led him back to faith. Among other revelations, we learn what brain scans reveal about what happens when we pray; how fundamentalism affects the psyche; and how God is revealed not only in scripture, but in the night sky, in subatomic particles, and in us. For the faithful and skeptic alike, *Finding God in the Waves* is a winsome, lucid, page-turning read about belonging, life’s biggest questions, and the hope of knowing God in an age of science.

Book Information

Hardcover: 288 pages

Publisher: Convergent Books (September 13, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1101906049

ISBN-13: 978-1101906040

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.9 x 8.6 inches

Shipping Weight: 14.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars 183 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #45,951 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #50 in Books > Religion &

Spirituality > Religious Studies > Science & Religion #249 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs >

Leaders & Notable People > Religious #602 in Books > Science & Math > Biological Sciences >

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Customer Reviews

Through the lens of neuroscience, McHargue makes his case for valuing religion not for its factual explanatory power but rather for its ability to give meaning to human existence . . . For those who fear science will rob them of both God and Christian community, this work may offer much-needed hope that Christianity and science can coexist. • Publishers Weekly • Mike McHargue tells you about the science of everything in a way that is both interesting and immediately applicable. In *Finding God in the Waves*, he employs this gift on a whole new scale by explaining the science of how to walk with God "especially for those who doubt God is real at all." • Donald Miller, bestselling author of *Scary Close* and *Blue Like Jazz* • "One of the most original and moving accounts of faith I have read in recent years. Anyone who has tussled with doubt" and who hasn't "should read this book." • Tanya Luhrmann, professor of anthropology, Stanford University, author of *When God Talks Back* • "More than your typical "science vs. faith" book, *Finding God in the Waves* is a deeply engrossing story about the experience of doubt, the thrill of discovery, and what it means to be human. Mike is the rare storyteller who can make you laugh, tear up, and feel a sense of wonder, all on the same page" and in this delightful book, he has delivered an essential, unprecedented read on the role contemplation plays in how we can know God, even in an age of skepticism. • Richard Rohr, author of *Falling Upward*, founder of the Center for Action and Contemplation • "Extraordinary. It's so rare to find a book that is both this important and this much fun to read. Funny, intelligent, and disarmingly honest, *Finding God in the Waves* gives voice to a generation of faithful skeptics and masterfully navigates the tricky terrain of faith, science, belief, and experience in a way that honors the humanity of atheist and believer alike. It's the kind of book that forever changes how you see the world and yet reads like a comfortable conversation with an old friend. With this work, Mike McHargue has established himself as one of the most thoughtful and necessary Christian voices of our time." • Rachel Held Evans, author of *Searching for Sunday* and *A Year of Biblical Womanhood* • "No one merges science and faith, mystery and reason better than Science Mike. It's magical. They should call him Magic Mike, if that's not already taken. Read this book!" • Pete Holmes, comedian, star of the HBO comedy *Crashing* • "Mike McHargue's life has straddled two diametrically opposed worldviews: conservative Christianity and secular humanism. His fearless search for the truth led him out of the strict confines of his Southern Baptist upbringing, but his persistent experience of God wouldn't let him remain an atheist. In *Finding God in the Waves*, McHargue offers a vulnerable, relentlessly logical account of the deconstruction and reconstruction of his faith that's sure to challenge skeptics and believers alike. His story will resonate with anyone who's ever doubted, been the odd one out, or struggled to make sense of their faith. And by giving readers this intimate

window into his own journey, he will both help doubters grow in their respect for faith and help believers grow in their respect for science." — Matthew Vines, author of *God and the Gay Christian*, executive director of The Reformation Project "This fascinating book is unlike any other I've read. *Finding God in the Waves* is one part story, one part science, one part theology, and taken altogether it sings of truth and wonder. Rather than placing facts and meaning at odds, Mike invites us into the freedom of both." — Sarah Bessey, author of *Out of Sorts: Making Peace with an Evolving Faith* and *Jesus Feminist* — "Faith and doubt exist more closely than many of us acknowledge. We want to relate to a God we can neither touch nor completely understand. In *Finding God in the Waves*, it feels as if Mike is sitting at a table inviting the reader to bring questions and fears to a conversation about how our doubts can actually bring us closer to God and not further apart. This book is for the believers and the doubters, the nerds and the creatives, the skeptics and the faithful. The message of hope and beauty in this book is for all of us." — Amena Brown, spoken word poet and author of *Breaking Old Rhythms: Answering the Call of a Creative God* — "This is the best book on navigating the tension between science and faith that I've ever come across. For any who desire to have some sort of faith or spiritual practice, but who also love science and don't know how to navigate the apparent conflicting claims of both, *Finding God in the Waves* may be one of the most important books that they will ever read." — Michael Gungor, musician, author of *The Crowd*, *The Critic*, and *the Muse* — "This is the most honest, challenging, and insightful book on reclaiming a lost faith that I've ever read" — "utterly unique and unexpected. I had one ah ha moment after another as Science Mike cast my faith and my doubts in a more hopeful and encouraging light. I couldn't put it down." — Peter Enns, author of *The Sin of Certainty: Why God Desires Our Trust More than Our "Correct" Beliefs* — "A rare and needed voice, McHargue reminds us that science and faith are not opposites, but allies. Brimming with honesty, vulnerability and a deep appreciation for the mysteries of the universe we inhabit, *Finding God in the Waves* will mean so much to so many." — Ryan O'Neal, *Sleeping At Last*

Mike McHargue, also known as "Science Mike," is a Christian turned atheist turned follower of Jesus who uses his story to help people know God in an age of science. Mike is the host and co-host of two podcasts--Ask Science Mike and The Liturgists Podcast--that have attracted a curious following among Christians, the spiritually interested, and the religiously unaffiliated. He is an in-demand speaker at conferences and churches around the country, and he writes for the Storyline Blog, Sojourners, and Relevant magazine.

[WARNING: This review contains spoilers, if it is possible to spoil a memoir. If you prefer to go on Mike's journey via his book without my "giving it away," you may want to skip this.] I really got off on the wrong foot with Science Mike. My first encounter with this book came in a Facebook post promoting a personal appearance by the author at a Christian university, posted by my friend and former professor, biblical scholar Pete Enns. I think it was actually the subtitle of the book ("How I lost my faith and found it again through science") that set off alarms in my BS detector. I assumed FGitW was yet another book of Christian apologetics. As someone who spent 30+ years in deep evangelical faith, including long stints as an officer in several churches and eventually obtaining an MAR degree at a conservative seminary, I was well-versed in apologetic arguments. In fact, similar to Mike, I lost my faith when I realized that none of those apologetics ultimately held up. At best, they functioned as props for believers worried about challenges to their faith, to assuage their cognitive dissonance. That's what I assumed Mike was trying to do. But once I read the book, I realized I was wrong. It turns out Mike has no interest in converting me or anyone like me back to his faith. In part, that's because his current "faith" [SPOILER ALERT!] isn't anything that any "orthodox" Christian believer would recognize as truly Christian. So what is it? Put simply, after two years as an ardent atheist secular humanist, Mike realized that something profound was missing. The missing part was a sense of transcendence, of meaning beyond the purely rational, of inspiration, as it were. But his journey back to that was not really a return to the same faith he had left two years before (which I had assumed it would be from his subtitle). So what "faith" did he come to? That it doesn't really matter if the God of the Bible (and all that comes with that) is "true" in the sense that traditional Christians think of that truth (God an actual, personal, being; Jesus's divinity, atoning death, and physical resurrection; God answering prayer, etc.). What matters (to him) is that the God-concept imprinted in his brain is beneficial and useful to him, and pursuing that God brings him peace and makes him a better person. That's why Mike doesn't care if he converts me. He's perfectly happy if I find the same things without having to pursue any God-concept. In this book, he's sharing his journey and his choices. He never presses for them to be anyone else's. What he does hope to accomplish, though, is to provide a way for those who want to believe (in whatever way) in the Christian God to do so without sacrificing science or ethics. My real reason for giving FGitW five stars, though, is for the surprising, almost brutal, honesty of this book. There is absolutely no attempt by Mike to sugar coat anything. Unlike any "case for faith" book I've ever read, Mike lays out the reasons for skepticism and unbelief clearly, with no attempt whatsoever to explain them away or deny their validity. This was the most shocking and at the same time delightful

aspect of the book, and the part that disarmed my initial skepticism toward it. In the end, this book did not change my current belief. I am still an agnostic-atheist (agnostic epistemologically--I embrace uncertainty, and thus the possibility of gods; but atheist in that I find it highly improbable that such gods actually exist as our religions conceive of them). But as I said, converting me was never Mike's aim. What I did gain from this book is a deeper appreciation of the parallel things I now pursue, though I call them by different names than Mike does.

I remember years ago sitting around a campfire talking with some kids I mentored about God and the questions that surround this mystery. One child shared a story about how his church had brought in a creationist to "totally destroy science." In other words they brought in a man who held very strictly to the biblical teaching of a six day created, 6,000 year old universe. Anything that taught otherwise was to be rejected. I remember sitting through the Religion Program at Florida State University and hearing lecture after lecture that revealed that the Bible didn't behave the way I had always been taught it did. I remember going through the pains of deconstructing and aimlessly trying to reconstruct my own Christian faith; the painful process of unlearning my spoon-fed theology and seeking deeply to identify the truths about Jesus and God. When you work in ministry, belief is kind of a big deal. When you lead bible studies people have expectations that you teach a certain way. But when you don't line up with those expectations, it can be a very scary and isolating place to float. Whenever you try to explain, people often push you out or try and conform you back in. But you can't unlearn certain things. What I've been finding in recent years has brought such freshness and beauty to my life. I've found that I'm not alone. In *Finding God in the Waves*, Mike McHargue tells the beautiful, hilarious, and absolutely heartbreaking story of his own journey through faith, atheism, and a return to God through science. He has so beautifully captured a place and isolation that so many people have found themselves in as we learn more about ourselves and the world. With each new discovery our old definitions and language come into greater tension. What Science Mike has done here, is create a book that will make a lasting impact on the great debate of faith and science. What Science Mike has done here is create a book that will humble every person who reads. Imagine being a Deacon of the Southern Baptist Church; leading Sunday School, playing in the worship band, baptizing believers, and leading people to the Lord. Now imagine that coming to a heartbreaking, life-crumbing realization that there is no God. What would you do? How would you respond to this? Who could you tell? Mike's story places each of us in the painful world of being a wolf among sheep. Your whole community believes something passionately that you no

longer can accept. And worse, they now believe that because you deny the faith, you will be separated from God forever in hell. Now imagine your entire marriage and identity existing around this faith you no longer hold. How would you go on? This is what happened to Science Mike after he began to see that certain declarations of his Southern Baptist faith didn't behave when looking closely with logic and reason. So Mike faked it for two years. In the book we see the story of loneliness and loss as Mike tries to keep his secret from his community. After all he's a leading member of this Church. What would you do when you hold information that could cripple the faiths of all of your congregants. Do you go in with a baseball bat and tear down all the idols? Or is there still beauty in what they believe? Finding God in the Waves is a beautiful opportunity for each reader to play the skeptic and understand the isolation we often put on people when their beliefs begin to shift from orthodox. Are there ways of knowing God that are compatible with what science has revealed about ourselves and the universe? And Can the church bring into question some of its more traditional beliefs with this new information? This book has a power to it. Mike's life has been crafted in a way that robs his search from the venom that comes into the conversation of Science and Faith. In Mike's atheism he found that there are many Christian claims that simply had no basis for validity when truly observed and thought through. But what happens when you experience God as an atheist? Do you return to all the things you used to believe even when the facts don't add up? For many believers these "facts" are essential to following Jesus. But what if you can't unlearn what once led you away from God? No matter how hard you try to make it work? How do you move forward? What Science Mike has done here is what many atheist writers have done before. Mike tells you the story of how he lost God. Mike deconstructs the Christian faith in ways similar to Dawkins, Bart Ehrman, Hitchens. He brings to light the inconsistencies of the faith and he challenges you to process the information. But anyone can deconstruct something. As a believer in God, Mike challenges each of us to ask what actually is the point of all of this. In his search for truth in the midst of mystery, Mike brings each of us to reconstruct our faith through the lenses of science and reason. Not rejecting all that we are learning about our brains and the universe, but bringing it along with us. Mike has created a book that honestly could stand for decades to come as an end to the divisiveness of certain faith vs. scientific arguments. Mike has invited all of us into a holy tension. Mike's story is beautiful. I laughed so loud I scared those sitting around me at my local Starbucks and I hid in the same corner as I cried my eyes out. I'm not sure I've ever read a more honest and purposeful book. His life has been weaved a certain way that allows him to speak from a seemingly "no reason to bullsh*t" perspective and I think this book will do great healing for the church. I

don't believe that anyone could walk away from this book without being humbled. Mike shows us a grace-filled way to approach our differences and to be okay with both sides of these discussions. Not to mention, you'll sound so much smarter knowing the information he loans you so freely! Mike invites us all into the waves of his life, and in them we find God more beautifully than ever.

I believe this book has had a profound impact on me, and I have only just finished it. It was disappointed when it ended. Though it wraps up nicely. I teared up several times while reading it. I have been following Mike for a year now. Through his podcast Ask Science Mike and the Liturgists Podcast. I knew his story as well as anyone that follows his online work. I've listened to every podcast he's been on, and read almost everything he's written on the internet. So I did fear this would be repetitive and frankly unnecessary to read, already knowing the story and even most of his current beliefs on spiritual things that he discusses in the book. Boy, was I wrong! True, I knew the story. I knew what was going to be on the next page sometimes. But I never knew what I'd feel as I absorbed the black letters on the white background. Mike believes the Bible is art. And this book is too, in my opinion. Is this book true? I don't know. It is as true as art. I recommend this book to anyone struggling with faith, or to anyone that wants know how to talk to someone that is.

Reading this book from Mike McHargue felt a lot like sitting across a table from him, slowly enjoying a cup of coffee and an amazing conversation. This book comes at just the right time in the history of humanity and offers something of substance for those who feel like the floor of faith has dropped out from beneath them. I laughed and cried, often times within a page of each other. This book is so well written and I can't wait to read more from this author.

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