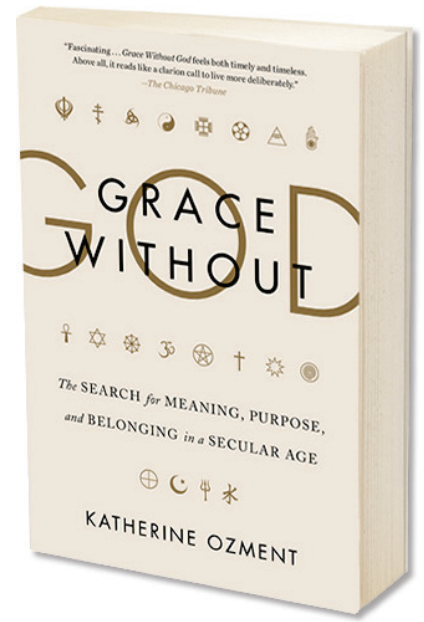


READER'S GUIDE QUESTIONS

Katherine Ozment takes readers on a journey across the country to discover why millions of people have left organized religion and what they're doing instead to form communities, create rituals, and imbue their lives with meaning and purpose. Part memoir, part cultural exploration, part musing on how to live a meaningful life, *Grace Without God* delves into one of the most urgent issues of our time: widespread religious loss and reinvention. Along the way, *Grace Without God* compels readers to consider their own choices on their spiritual path and what part they've played in the seismic changes taking place across our national religious landscape.



FOR DISCUSSION

- 1 In the introduction, Ozment asks, “Could my family and I find valid alternatives to all the good religion provides?” What is the “good” she is looking for? Does she find it? Do the many people she interviews find it?
- 2 Religion offers answers to the big questions—Who are we? Why are we here? What happens when we die? How do the people Ozment interviews answer those questions outside the structure of religion? How do you answer them for yourself?
- 3 For many Christians, saying grace before a meal is a ritualistic practice of gratitude, one that people often continue even after leaving religion. What rituals does Ozment take from religion and make secular in her life? What role do rituals play in your life and how do those rituals express your values and beliefs?
- 4 Religions provide a moral framework, with rules for behavior and structured reminders for how to act. How is this a good thing? How is it a bad thing? Without religious moral structures, how do we cultivate morality for ourselves, our children, and our larger communities?
- 5 Ozment laments the loss of religious literacy, saying, “It’s impossible to understand Western art and culture without religious literacy.” What are Americans, especially younger ones, unlearning about religion, and at what cost? What, if anything, should we teach children about religion?

- 6 End-of-life rituals and beliefs about the afterlife provide solace to many religious people. Ozment says that when her brother died, she didn't have a "container for my grief." After experiencing a loss or moving through your own grief, what rituals, people, or beliefs gave you comfort? Where did you turn for guidance and insights?
- 7 Ozment describes how a visit to the Grand Canyon provided a sudden moment of awe for her and her family. How does Ozment use research on awe to develop a framework for what she calls "secular spirituality"? What was a recent moment of awe in your life? Would you describe it as spiritual? What does spirituality mean to you?
- 8 In the Epilogue, Ozment writes a letter to her children in which she lists ten things she most wants them to understand and embody. Of the ten things she lists, which do you think are the most important? What would you add to the list? What would you subtract?
- 9 In a section on identity, Ozment explores the idea of labels as a key component of belonging. Many of the newly nonreligious wrestle with what to call themselves. Marci Olsen, for example, was raised Mormon but now calls herself "an agnostic with atheistic and Buddhist tendencies." What label, if any, would you use to describe yourself? What are the benefits and drawbacks of using any label at all? How does the experience of religious disaffiliation make finding the right label particularly challenging?
- 10 When Ozment asked Robert Putnam, author of *Bowling Alone*, if the many secular humanist communities sprouting up across the country would eventually replace organized religion for people like her, he replied: "We won't know for another 300 years." Why does he say this? What are the challenges faced by such groups as they try to bring the Nones through their doors? And what do you think the religious landscape of the U.S. will look like in 300 years?