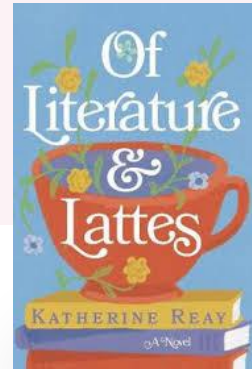




LEADER'S GUIDE

OF LITERATURE & LATTES BY KATHERINE REAY



Right in the mix of books and story, with her two best friends beside her, she got to create art - and through art she found herself.

JANET

THEMES

- Fear
- Home
- Perspective
- Mother-Daughter Relationships
- Trauma
- Memories
- Reconciliation

CHARACTERS

Jeremy is a highly-strung coffee shop owner on the verge of losing everything. His new shop, *Andante*, was his ticket to achieving his 20-year dream of creating not just a shop but a home - something he has craved his entire life since he was orphaned at ten years old. Choosing the little town of *Winsome* to be closer to his daughter, he battles with a yearning for others approval and the genuine possibility that his shop is about to go bankrupt.

Alyssa, although she cannot admit it - is not okay. After her mother's affair was exposed, she fled *Winsome* and her pain to resettle in *Palo Alto*. Believing her new career at *Vita XGC*, 15-hour workdays and busy life meant she had it made, and she is reeling from the sudden FBI investigation into the corruption at *Vita XGC*. Shaken to the core, riddled with guilt about her role in the corruption, suffering from 'stomach ulcers' and completely broke - *Alyssa* swallows all her remaining pride. She returns to her hometown for a second chance.

Janet is a new Christian overcoming the darkest time in her life. After journeying alongside the *Printed Letter Bookshop* women and finding her creative rest in her artwork, she finds freedom from her weary and angry 'old self'. *Janet* still struggles with the hard truth that not everyone will accept her apologies and extend forgiveness, but she faithfully and with hope looks to her bright future - eternally grateful for what the Lord has done in her life.

STORYLINE

Alyssa Harrison reluctantly returns to her hometown of Winsome in a sorry state; broke, unemployed and being investigated by the FBI for her part in a collapsed start-up company. Riddled with shame and guilt for being associated with the company and angry at herself for her naivety, she seeks refuge with her father. Assuming everything would be as she left it; her parents divorced, her mother a broken, bitter, and unhappy person, the landmarks unchanged - she is horrified to find that everything feels different. Especially the people. Her father is dating her mother to her shock and insists she move back into their family home to reconcile their broken relationship. As Alyssa is left with no choice, she begrudgingly moves back in with her mother and discovers she lives with a stranger. As Alyssa and Janet begin to repair their broken relationship, Alyssa catches a glimpse of the transforming power that faith in Jesus has on a life and slowly opens her heart to her mother again. Taking odd jobs here and there around town, Alyssa takes on some work for local coffee shop owner Jeremy, whose business is at a breaking point.

Jeremy is in a constant state of fear and anxiety over the possibility of losing his brand-new coffee shop Andante. Having recently moved to Winsome to be closer to his daughter, he struggles to see clearly under stress. Battling with his demons - the death of his parents at a young age, memory loss and feelings of rejection - he is also in a constant struggle with his ex-wife Krista to get his daughter the help she needs for her reading issues.

Crossing paths in the coffee shop, Alyssa and Jeremy become fast friends. They form a much-needed life-giving friendship over a mutual love of literature and lattes - which soon blossoms into more. As the two begin to share their lives openly, suddenly, the challenges of life no longer immobilise them. Andante recovers its losses after it is discovered that a staff member has been stealing the profits. Krista changes her mind about moving across the country with Becca after Jeremy's adamant show of commitment to being a present father for Becca, despite finding out she is not his biological daughter. Jeremy slowly begins to recover cherished memories of his parents, whom he thought he had forgotten forever. Alyssa bonds with her mother, changes her perspective to believe that people can change and welcomes her mother and father's re-commitment to their marriage. Having been cleared by the FBI for any involvement in the Vita XGC scandal, Alyssa takes on a new local job. Together, Alyssa and Jeremy discover the 'beauty and romance of second chances' (blurb).



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS & TALKING POINTS

1

Q. Which character from *Of Literature & Lattes* did you relate to the most? Why?

TALKING POINTS

These are some reasons we may feel connected or drawn to a particular character;

- Empathy/Sympathy.
- Pity.
- Similar character traits.
- Similar circumstances.
- Similar desires, hopes, or dreams.
- Similar mistakes made in our own lives.
- We may like or dislike particular characters.

2

Q. "Homes and moms are very emotional topics." (p11). What kind of emotional response do these words stir in you?

TALKING POINTS

These words will likely stir strong negative or positive emotions within us - perhaps both. Please keep the conversation life-giving by ensuring women share their experiences in a way that honours their mothers (despite her sinfulness or mistakes she has made).

Mothers and daughters have a unique relationship, and despite a mother's best efforts, our brokenness means many of us carry 'mother wounds'. These wounds can range from minor to trauma;

- My mother was always very loving, and we've enjoyed a healthy relationship all my life.
- I have a great friendship with my mother now that we are both adults, but it was hard during childhood/adolescence.
- My mother and I have always had a tense/strained relationship.
- My relationship with my mother is broken.
- I have hurts I've been able to let go of/I am holding onto hurts I can't or won't forgive.

Home can be a place where we live, or more importantly, a feeling of belonging, safety and acceptance;

- I had a home that was warm, loving and safe while growing up.
- I moved around a lot as a child and didn't have a house to call home, but I had a family which made me feel like I belonged.
- My home was not a safe place, or somewhere I felt accepted.
- I grew up without a home or anywhere to belong.

3

Q. Both Alyssa and Jeremy share a similar desire to "make a home in the world... and yet still yearn for the approval and acceptance" of others (p30). Are these feelings something you've experienced in the past or are struggling with now?

TALKING POINTS

Answers may vary and could include;

- I am a people pleaser and struggle with needing acceptance and praise from others.
- I've never had a place to call home or belong, and I struggle with this.
- I want to be free from caring about others opinions, but I struggle when it's people I care about or look up to.

A few things to remember;

- The world is not our home, heaven is our home, and we do not want to get too comfortable here.
- Even someone who grows up in a safe and loving environment still pines for heaven and that deep desire of acceptance and belonging which we will experience in the welcoming arms of Jesus.

How can we battle people-pleasing?

- Get our validation from God alone.
- Remind ourselves that we are Children of God.
- Aim for a 'Well done good and faithful servant' from our Father in Heaven, instead of worldly success or accolades which fade here on earth.

4

Q. A critical aspect of the book is judgment and how we perceive others, often without knowing or understanding the complete story. How can this be detrimental to us?

TALKING POINTS

Before we make assumptions, we should remember it is important too;

- Try and understand both sides of the story.
- Do not project what we would have done onto the situation.
- Offer grace and support to those who we believe have made poor decisions.
- Acknowledge we are all only human and make mistakes.
- Acknowledge that we all have limitations.
- To assume the best of people.
- Correct out of love for the individual.

The consequences of harsh and/or quick judgments are often;

- Misunderstanding.
- Miscommunication.
- Misinterpretation of the situation.

5

Q. "I am not okay. She repeated the words to herself, unable to deny their truth" (p70). Have you ever found yourself in a situation where you weren't okay? Was it hard to admit it to yourself and others?

TALKING POINTS

"You don't need to be Okay because Jesus has made you all right. He's paid the bill in full. He's covered your "not okay-ness". Okay doesn't live here, but Jesus does. All He looks for in us is a willingness to take the next step" - Sheila Walsh

Answers may vary and include;

- It was very hard to admit I needed help and was not okay.
- I hid the fact that I was not okay from others (out of fear, shame, guilt, hopelessness).
- When I realised I was not okay, I was able to seek the help I needed.

What can we do when we don't feel 'okay'? (Adapted from 'It's Okay to not be Okay' by Sheila Walsh);

- Remember that God is not asking for us to be enough. He is enough for us.
- Christ meets us where we are, but He does not leave us there; this is just where the journey begins.
- It is not okay to pretend to be okay because healing requires us to move forward and a step into the healing journey with Jesus.
- We can endure trials and still experience God's peace, joy and hope.
- We need to learn to lament to God, to turn to him with our broken hearts.
- We can surround ourselves with life-giving Christian friendships, people with who we can take the journey and who can pray for us to keep us accountable.
- If we read the word regularly, we can continue to speak Biblical truth into our lives and protect our hearts from the enemy's deception.
- It is okay to seek professional help when needed.

6

Q. Throughout the story, we see characters lives transformed through the power of a good book. Can you share the title of one of your favourite books and explain why it so profoundly impacted your life?

TALKING POINTS

Answers may vary and could include;

- Spiritual growth book
- Theology
- Fiction
- Autobiography or biography
- Poetry
- A book from my Childhood (bedtime story, fairy-tale or family read-a-loud).

7

Q. "He knew a wounded soul thrashed as violently as a bitter or broken one. But once made safe, that soul healed well and was all the more beautiful for the hurt it once carried" (George - p174). Have you experienced emotional healing from trauma or pain in your own life? How important was it to find a 'safe' space to take the journey?

TALKING POINTS

A safe space could involve a place, people or the loving presence of our Heavenly Father. Ideally, all of these things would be available to us as we begin the difficult process of healing from hurt and trauma;

- Often healing begins when we feel safe enough to admit we've been hurt, that we have trauma, or that we can't keep going anymore.
- When we have no safe space, we may be so busy trying to survive that there is no room or emotional capacity to deal with the past; so it remains buried but still festering within. These issues left undealt with continue to impact our emotional wellbeing, decision making and relationships.
- Until we can recognise and admit something is wrong, we can bury our pain or feelings, which are then displayed through bitterness, anger, anxiety or depression.
- Being a part of a Christian sisterhood is important for healing. In a community, we can share our hearts without judgement. We can receive prayer and comfort. Our sisters can mourn with us, speak encouragement and life into us, correct our wrong thinking with scriptural truth and overall love us into health and happiness as the Holy Spirit guides them.

8

Q. During Devon's eulogy, he says, "My mother was the gentlest soul... But a loving and gentle soul is made by and through fire." (p235). Discuss.

TALKING POINTS

As we endure trials and hardship, often we become more compassionate towards others. As our hearts draw nearer to the Lord, we become sensitive towards others and their needs. We desire to bless them just as the Lord has blessed us during our suffering;

- Trials and suffering join us in Christ's suffering.
- Trials develop endurance, endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation (Romans 5:4).
- Trials refine us and reveal the areas of our hearts that need attention.

- If we allow them, trials help us to be conformed to the image of Christ.

Sometimes our suffering seems too much to bear, and those who suffer become hardened in heart and grow to distrust the Lord. God intends us to grow during suffering, seek our peace, joy and hope from Him, and ultimately mature in our faith. This is a challenging process and only made possible through the faithfulness of Christ, who promises to finish His good work in us. If there is someone in the group in this dark place, pray that the Lord would show them the better way, that He would help them to forgive and heal, ultimately taking their hurt and using it to comfort others, pointing them to Christ.

9

Q. "How do I know I've changed enough?" (Chris p236). Many Christians experience a common battle between deeply desiring change, yet still seeing their sin, faults, and flaws. How can we be sure that we've been made into a new creation?

TALKING POINTS

Some of the reasons we may doubt we have been made new are;

- The fruit of the Spirit seems absent in our lives; fruit begins as seeds; we need to allow the Holy Spirit to nurture the seeds, to grow them and allow them to blossom in our lives.
- We doubt we're truly saved because our sin seems unforgivable; if we declare with our mouth and heart that Jesus is Lord, we will be saved - once we repent, we're truly forgiven and rest in Jesus and His forgiveness.
- Other's may mock us or tease us and cause us to question what we believe.

How can we accept God's forgiveness?

- Truly repenting; understanding that repentance is a total transformation in our hearts to come into agreement with the Lord that our sin is wrong, and a confession that we turn from that wrong towards God.
- Believing God's word, when we have truly repented and asked for forgiveness, we are forgiven through Jesus sacrifice on the cross.
- Acknowledging Jesus as Lord of our lives and surrendering to Him; admitting God is sovereign and all-powerful.
- Forgiving others as God forgives us, understanding that forgiveness is a choice, not an emotion and that Bible says God will forgive us in the same way we forgive others - unforgiveness is a sin.

10

Q. How did you feel about Alyssa and Janet's reconciliation? Did it encourage you to reach out to someone in your own life in the hopes of restoration or peace?

TALKING POINTS

Living in a broken and sinful world, many of us exist with hurts, unforgiven offences and damaged relationships with others. The Lord calls us to forgive and cancel the debt owed to us, and where possible, reconcile the relationship.

Before a relationship is restored, we need first to repent and forgive. This is true in most cases whether we are the receiver of the hurt or the person who has sinned;

- When relationships are damaged within families, churches and friendships, we often find both parties have unknowingly hurt and offended the other; to reconcile, both individuals need to say sorry and forgive the other person for the pain they have caused.

- It takes maturity and trust in Christ to seek forgiveness from someone we have unknowingly or unintentionally offended.
- When done with sincerity, our repentance and forgiveness are always acceptable and pleasing to the Lord, whether the person chooses to forgive us or not.
- We cannot force someone to accept our apology. We can live in freedom knowing the Lord forgives us and how to avoid similar mistakes again.
- Someone may accept our apology and offer forgiveness yet choose to remain at a distance from us while trust is rebuilt.
- Sometimes reconciliation never happens. As long as we have followed the Lord's prompting to repent and seek restoration, we cannot be held accountable for another person's decision.
- There are of course exceptions to this general rule (repent and forgive). One example would be survivors of abuse who have done nothing wrong and need the Lord's help to forgive the perpetrator but do not require an act of repentance themselves.
- Forgiving a person who has not repented does not condone their sin; it hands their judgement over to God, who will seek justice on our behalf.



ADDITIONAL NOTES FOR LEADERS

Discussion questions from the author are available at the back of the book. You may like to encourage your group to reflect on these questions before your monthly meeting and keep a reflective journal to record their notes. These questions will allow your book club sisters to examine the text before the meeting. As the month progresses, you may like to discuss these through your group's online platform (a Facebook group/messenger or whatsapp chat group etc.) to keep connected and engaged throughout the month.

Disclaimer: Thanks for supporting this essential ministry impacting the lives of women the world over! We pray that our Heavenly Father blesses both you and the women you lead. This Leader's Guide has been prepared by Blossoming through Books and is protected by copyright law. Please seek express permission from Blossoming through Books before making copies by contacting blossomingthroughbooks@gmail.com. Please share your experience and feedback with us!