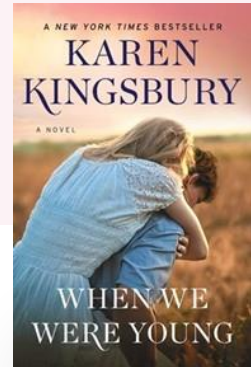




LEADER'S GUIDE

WHEN WE WERE YOUNG BY KAREN KINGSBURY



"A love like ours is worth fighting for... I'd be crazy to walk away from you and me without at least trying."

EMILY CARTER

THEMES

Family Fatherhood Miracles Prayer Love Social Media Disability Loyalty
Consequences Sacrifice

HEADS UP! (TRIGGERS AND DELICATE TOPICS)

Death Drug Use Eating Disorders Divorce

CHARACTERS

Noah, an up-and-coming football star, is entranced by the beautiful girl at the cafeteria table. Witnessing the way Emily sacrificially cares for her disabled sister changes the course of his life. He is on the path to becoming a professional football player and battles with the direction of his life. Overcoming severe head trauma and debilitating injuries, Noah decides to reject a professional football career and instead falls in love with Emily and embraces the concept of living for God. As a young man, he chooses life and love over football, fame, and money. But as Noah ages, he somehow loses sight of what is important. He exchanges love and faith for fame and money. In a desperate situation, he is gifted a 'do-over' from the Lord. When it really matters, he chooses to forsake all for his family and saviour.

Emily is a woman who has endured more as a young adult than most would in a lifetime. After her father's abandonment, and mother's death, she is left the sole carer for her disabled sister Clara. While most would feel burdened, Emily counts it all joy. She pursues college, love, and a family, all the while pouring the depths of her heart into Clara's life. After her mother and Clara pass away, the light in Emily's world goes dim. She battles how all of this makes sense if a loving God is really in control.

Clara, despite her disability, proves herself to be a strong, brave, and faith-filled young woman seeking after the Lord's heart. Being passionately joyful, her simplicity and abandonment towards life brings peace and

cheerfulness to all those around her. Although her words are few, her sixth sense of discerning subtle or unspoken feelings shows the fruit of the Spirit living in her. Her powerful and few words direct those she fiercely loves towards their Father in Heaven. Clara is a beautiful, tender, and precious soul.

Kari and Ryan are a lovely, authentic, and faith-filled married couple who inspire and encourage those around them. They not only role model faith and demonstrate the fruit of a marriage with Christ at the centre. Their relationship is not immune to the stresses of the world. As they pour their energy and time into others around them, they also travel faithfully through the journey of joyful submission and sacrificial headship - all within a healthy God-honouring relationship.

STORYLINE

Following the lives of the internet-famous couple Noah and Emily, we jump back and forth through the past, present, and future of their lives. Reliving the days of their youth, the heartbreaking reality of their present, and the tragic possibilities of their fate should they continue down the current destructive path.

When We Were Young;

Visiting the romantic and hope-filled past of young Noah and Emily takes us back to college, where they met. Noah, an up-and-coming football star, and Emily, an aspiring college graduate (who cares for her sister Clara with cerebral palsy), meet in the cafeteria. Noah is mesmerised by the care and compassion Emily displays for her sister. Despite Emily's reluctance to engage in a romantic relationship, they fall deeply and passionately in love.

Growing together in their faith, battling through Noah's football injuries, and caring for Clara, the two eventually commit to sharing a life together. After a very public engagement, they begin their journey full of hope.

Internet Famous;

The post that started it all (Noah's very public engagement) and rejection of a football career in preference of a life with Emily and Clara becomes a defining moment in their relationship. One post after another, one sponsor after another, becomes Noah's priority as his marriage and children become casualties in the pursuit of that 'perfect' update. Noah lies to himself, believing if he can keep up appearances and that his marriage will magically improve. But every photo, every comment, is killing what was once so precious to him - an actual happy marriage full of life and love. Refusing to quit social media, he instead decides to quit his marriage as he blindly seeks fame and accolades from strangers - instead of from the only people who truly matter, his family.

What Lies Ahead;

"I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore, choose life, that you and your children may live" (Deuteronomy 30:19)

The Lord miraculously takes Noah on a journey into his future, where he has walked away from his family. He has rejected the blessing offered by the Lord and instead walks the path of death. As Noah's memory becomes broken, he staggeringly visits random times and events that will pass if he continues on his current path. Noah watches the destruction of his daughter's innocence (which is ruined by drug addiction and his abandonment), his son's resilience through faith to become a youth pastor, and his cherished Emily is remarrying. As a broken man mourns what could have been, the Lord miraculously takes him back to that defining moment in his life when he chose to walk out on his family. Noah is given a second chance to stay, and to fix what has been broken.

The Path of Life;

Noah chooses to stay, love Emily and his children, and work at their marriage through faithful obedience. Although the path of life is not an easy one, Noah knows in his heart that it is the only path worth living.

When Noah deletes his social media accounts, a new hope is birthed in their lives, and anticipation falls afresh on their once ardent love; a beautiful life is set to be lived before Noah and Emily.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS & TALKING POINTS

1

Q. Which character did you relate to the most? Why?

TALKING POINTS

Some reasons we may relate to a particular character could be;

- 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. Two powerful and interlinked themes in the book are Miracles and Prayer. Have you ever experienced a miracle as a result of God answering the intercessory prayers of your church family? Share your experience.

TALKING POINTS

Answers may vary and could include;

- Miraculous healing (spiritual, emotional or physical).
- Marriage or family relationships unexpectedly restored.
- Provision of a job, finances, material needs.
- Removal of debt.
- The return of a wayward child to the faith.
- Declaration of faith from an unsaved friend/family member.
- Broken cycle of sin.

3

Q. The impact of social media on families, relationships and individuals is becoming increasingly detrimental. Has this book changed your perspectives on social media usage?

TALKING POINTS

Answers may vary and could include;

- I am much more aware of how much time I spend on social media.
- I am trying to reduce the amount of time I spend on social media and devices.
- I have initiated phone-free times throughout the day, so I can properly connect with those around me.
- I have removed/limited social media on my children's devices.

- My social media habits have not changed, but I would like them to.
- I don't believe my social media habits are detrimental.

4

Q. "...you never left her side [Clara]... which was even more beautiful... it was something I looked forward to every day, watching the two of you" (p126). The sacrificial love Emily shows Clara becomes mesmerising to Noah. Have the good deeds of another captured your gaze?

TALKING POINTS

Answers may vary and could include;

- The simple kindness of strangers when it has been needed most.
- Truly sacrificial motherhood, parenting and/or marriages.
- Sacrificial care of elderly or disabled family/friends.
- Missionary and evangelism work.
- Those who seek justice for the oppressed and marginalised.
- Provision of daily needs; clothing, food, shelter and finances.
- Loving the difficult to love within the community.

5

Q. On page 313, Emily realises how much she needs her sister Clara for help while she is pregnant. Human life is often devalued, and those who are disabled are viewed heinously as 'less than'. How does this situation, where roles are reversed, remind you of the significance of every human life?

TALKING POINTS

Answers may vary and could include;

- God has a perfect plan for Clara's life, just as He does for all of us.
- Although there is much she cannot do, Clara has infinite possibilities of things she can do.
- Clara is blessed by the opportunity to give back to her sister and repay the kindness which has been so tenderly shown to her.
- We must never think of ourselves above any other human; we are all made in the image of God.
- We can receive help from those who are younger, frailer than ourselves.

6

Q. "Just because we lead the group doesn't mean we don't have our moments. Marriage takes work." (p348). Kari and Ryan's marriage shines the light of Jesus. This does not mean they are immune to suffering and hardship in their marriage, in fact, many marriages which radiate heaven in this way do so because while suffering and enduring trials, they have intentionally remained together. How does knowing this encourage you?

TALKING POINTS

Answers may vary and could include;

- It is nice to know that there is no perfect marriage, and I can stop striving for mine to be flawless.
- It makes me feel like I'm not alone, knowing that maintaining a good/healthy marriage is hard work.
- It has helped me to open up and share my marriage troubles with a trusted friend.

- It has encouraged me to keep fighting for my marriage during the trials.
- I trust God to use my marriage as a light to others, just as Kari and Ryan are to Noah and Emily.

7

Q. On page 338, we see the contrasting adult lives of Olivia and Aiden. Why do you think their lives turned out so differently?

TALKING POINTS

Both Aiden and Olivia experienced abandonment from their father, yet their lives become polar opposite. Some reasons for this may include;

Aiden;

- Remembers a time when his father was present in the family home.
- Remembers aunt Clara and her immovable faith.
- Remembers Clara's final words to him about loving Jesus and the importance of faith.

Olivia;

- A very young child when her parents divorced.
- Cannot remember her mother and father ever living together.
- Does not have words from Aunt Clara to hold onto as Aiden does.
- Feels constant and deep rejection from her father.

8

Q. On page 88, we see Noah's thoughts escalating as he imagines how his divorce might impact his children. As the Body of Christ, how can we come alongside our single-parent families to help meet their unique needs?

TALKING POINTS

Answers may vary and could include;

- Spiritual parenting (being a female role model to children who may not have a mother present).
- Spiritual mentoring (being a safe person for a child to come to for support and prayer).
- Being available for practical support such as child care, helping with getting children to activities and providing meals during difficult times such as illness or busyness at work.
- Being available for fellowship and spending time with the family.
- Ensuring we are NOT judgemental, gossiping or disapproving of these families.
- Be as loving and encouraging as we can and where appropriate. (It will be easier for a woman to support a single mother and vice versa for a male to support a single father).
- Uphold them in our prayers.
- Be inclusive; try and ensure our churches, connect groups and friendship circles make them feel welcome.

9

Q. "God really had set before him life and death, blessings and curses. And after today, Noah would never choose death again." (p361). After Noah is miraculously given a second chance at his marriage and fatherhood, he chooses life and deletes his social media accounts. Can you think of a time when you've needed to choose life? What did you need to let go of?

TALKING POINTS

Answers may vary and could include;

- Toxic relationships (friendships, family and romantic).
- Sin
- Life style or careers.
- Hobbies.
- Entertainment.

The Lord disciplines the child He loves, and the Holy Spirit will intervene in our lives - calling us to abandon our sins. Sometimes our obedience draws us away from things or people we like, but we must remember it is ultimately for our good. Nothing the world offers us is too good that the enemy cannot take and use against us. Social media within itself is not sinful - yet misplaced usage in a person's life may become unhealthy, sinful and wicked.

10

Q. Elizabeth Baxter's 10 Secrets to a Happy Marriage is a fantastic resource to encourage married couples. Out of the 10 points, which one surprised you, resonated with you, or impacted you the most? Why?

TALKING POINTS

Answers may vary and could include;

1. Keep God First.
2. Divorce is not an option.
3. Marriage is not 50/50.
4. Know your spouses love language.
5. Expect the best of each other, be patient, and forgive easily.
6. Keep dating.
7. Build each other up.
8. Laugh often.
9. Live within your means.
10. Fix yourself, not your spouse.



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, and 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.

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