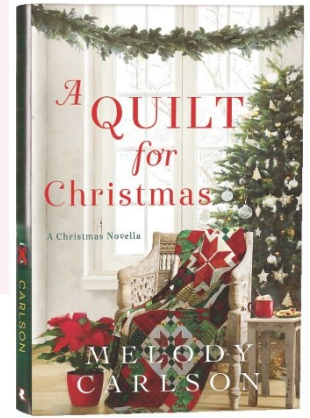




LEADER'S GUIDE

A QUILT FOR CHRISTMAS BY MELODY CARLSON



"In the same way this quilt is comprised of different shapes and colours, we four women were different too. We sometimes had our differences, but God has miraculously stitched us together in love."

VERA SWANSON

THEMES

Friendship

Family

Generosity

Poverty

Loss

Transformation

HEADS UP! (TRIGGERS AND DELICATE TOPICS)

Death

Divorce

CHARACTERS

Vera Swanson is a lonely older woman. After the death of her husband and recent move, she doesn't have any family or community close by. She feels disheartened at the prospect of Christmas, church, and even God. As Vera dwells hidden in her apartment, it takes little Fiona, her next-door neighbour who enters her life with a desperate plea for help, to breathe life and purpose back into her heart.

Fiona Albright is a bright and affectionate 4-year-old girl who manages to convince Vera to make her mother a Christmas quilt. Fiona is cheerful and observant. Her thoughtful words and ideas are powerful and plant seeds of change and generosity in those around her.

Josh and Kerry Albright, parents to little Fiona, Nolan, and Maureen, are struggling financially. After Kerry's health scare, they must rely on help from those around them – total strangers – who God provides in their time of need.

Tasha Ellison is a young creative type who works in her aunt's florist shop. Her Jamaican heritage comes from a father she's never met, and after her short, failed marriage, she's become sceptical of love and men. Tasha is an honest and kind soul and finds a fast friend in Vera as she commits to joining the quilting club.

Eleanor Rasmussen is an abrasive, impossible-to-please and difficult woman. Once a licensed therapist, she has now retired and although her tone and attitude towards the quilting club oozes disapproval, she joins anyway. Her negativity is oppressive, but little Fiona sees that behind the front, there's pain.

Beverly Clark joins the quilting group with the desire to continue her grandmother's quilting legacy. She always wanted to learn and join her grandmother's quilting circle at church, but her grandmother passed before she had the chance. Beverly is a ray of sunshiny happiness and the quilting group's resident baker.

Evan Rasmussen, Eleanor's son, is an accountant who plays in a band on the weekend. The total opposite of his mother, he radiates a hopeful heart, despite the loss their family has endured. Evan looks for the beauty in things and is a sensitive and loyal guy who takes an interest in Tasha and her quilting group's journey of assisting the Albright family.

STORYLINE

Vera Swanson has lost her Christmas cheer. The holiday, once her favourite, full of family, love, decorations, and joy, has become lonely and depressing. After the death of her husband Larry, she decided to sell the family home and move to Fairview, East Oregon, to be closer to her daughter and grandkids. But when she unpacked her final box, her daughter relocated to California for her husband's work, and Vera was left utterly alone. Five months later, it's time to set up the Christmas decorations, but she still hasn't made one friend, and she has no one to celebrate the season with.

When little Fiona knocks on Vera's door, seeking help for her sick mother, Vera immediately decides to act and get the woman to the emergency department. Upon returning home and caring for little Fiona, the two come across Larry's patchwork quilt, and Fiona hatches a plan for Vera to make a Christmas quilt for her mother. It'll be a miracle if it comes together in time, and Vera is both sceptical and hesitant even to try. But with some coaxing from the Albright children, she is convinced to advertise locally for some quilting help.

To Vera's surprise, it isn't long before she's hosting the quilting club's first gathering around her table and planning to see if the miracle quilt can be made before Christmas. Working alongside young creative Tasha, baking extraordinary Beverly, and complaining Eleanor, the three set to work on the quilt, and it's decided Eleanor's large spare room will be home base.

As tensions flare between Eleanor and the group, Tasha meets Evan, Eleanor's son, and begins to form a romantic attachment. It becomes more and more apparent to the quilting group that the Albrights need much more help than they initially realised. As Kerry recovers from her surgery and her husband continues to work away from home, the children become familiar with the quilting group, which makes plans to assist with childcare and clothing for the Albright children.

During the final quilting gathering, Eleanor has an unprecedented outburst, which little Fiona realises is a response to pain. In her attempt to console Eleanor, she calls her the "bottom mole snowman". As Eleanor soaks in her words, her frosty façade melts away, and in a shocking and rapid transformation, she decides to make this Christmas one to remember. She donates her deceased daughter's furniture to the Albrights to furnish their home, lends Fiona a Christmas angel pageant costume, flies Kerry's father in from Ireland, and opens her home and her heart to her new and unexpected family for Christmas.

As Vera presents Kerry with her Christmas quilt, all four women know they've been "stitched together in love".



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS & TALKING POINTS

1

Q. Who was your favourite character from 'A Quilt for Christmas'? Why?

TALKING POINTS

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

- We may feel empathy or sympathy for their circumstances.
- We may share similar character traits or personalities.
- We may share similar desires, hopes, or dreams.
- We may have made similar mistakes or poor decisions in our own lives.
- We may like or dislike particular characters because of our experiences with others.

2

Q. How can we prioritise our faith, family and generosity when Christmas may be lonely or disappointing for us?

TALKING POINTS

Christmas time can often bring out the best or worst in us. If Christmas is a time of loss, grief and loneliness, how can we redirect our hearts and gaze to something more?

These notes from 'Treasuring God in our Traditions' by Noel Piper are helpful. While preparing our hearts for special occasions, we can consider the following (p87) ;

- Am I my Father's child? Do I resemble Him in my generosity?
- Am I focusing on God's gift of His son so my appreciation for Him grows?
- Am I celebrating Christ?

Too often, we can become consumed with everything we're required to do during Christmas. How can we make time for what's most important? Traditions can help us re-focus our busy hearts as we slow with our loved ones to take part;

Noel suggests some of these Christmas Traditions;

- Advent activities (these begin four Sundays before Christmas Day) such as candles, calendars, and books.
- Manger scene (either as toys for children or ornaments).
- Symbols that represent the life of Jesus, history, and prophecy.
- Christmas dress-up box (for children).
- Jesse Tree & Decorations.
- Scripture or a daily Christmas story over breakfast or dinner with the whole family for the month of December.

3

Q. "Vera knew a patchwork quilt wouldn't be the answer to the family's problems, but what if she could make Mrs Albright a quilt by Christmas?" (p21). Discuss.

TALKING POINTS

"This family was definitely struggling... Vera wondered what she could do to help them" (p40).

This little seed of an idea taking root in Vera's heart (despite her initial reluctance) transforms not only her own Christmas but also Eleanor's entire life and the lives of the whole Albright family. So, in a sense, the patchwork quilt did hold the answer to all the family's problems because it doesn't matter that things seemed humanly impossible; with God, all things are possible. The quilt was simply the instrument used to bring God's plan together. The quilt was God's Christmas miracle to path the way for His love and hope to shine through in the lives of the women in the quilting club.

4

Q. There's something unique and special about homemade gifts. What is the most cherished handmade Christmas gift that you've received?

TALKING POINTS

Occasionally, store purchased gifts can feel impersonal. Gone are the days of handmade treasures, trinkets, knitted baby blankets and clothing. When we receive a handmade gift, we understand that it is valuable because of the time invested in creatively making it. A homemade gift says to someone, "You are worth my time, energy and creativity".

5

Q. "I've been hoping to get to know my neighbours, and it seems God set this opportunity quite literally on my doorstep..." (p26). Can you share a time when God has unexpectedly answered your prayers?

TALKING POINTS

"Wanted: People who want to make a Christmas quilt." (p31). Vera commits to caring for the children until Josh can return from work and making a Christmas quilt for Kerry. Both require a sacrifice of her time, energy and resources, but this proves to bless Vera in so many ways, and it's incredibly unexpected.

Encourage the women to share a joyous experience of God's unexpected blessing. Answers may vary and could include;

- The salvation of a loved one (family or friend).
- The provision of a new job or career.
- A new direction for your life (study, career change).
- New friendships or relationships.
- Unexpected material blessings (home, finances).

6

Q. On page 45, Kerry says, "You're truly an angel of mercy" (p45). Can you share a time when you've helped a person in need? Or perhaps someone has helped you?

TALKING POINTS

"If there's room in your heart, you'll make room in your home" – Karen Ehman, 'Listen, Love, Repeat' (p136).

Do we live a life of welcome and hospitality? Our homes can become our primary ministry base and be used to help build the kingdom. Here are some things we can remember and draw encouragement from as we open our homes or seek to be generous to others;

- Who truly owns our stuff? (God).
- We should be willing to be good stewards of our stuff; this includes sharing what we have with others.
- When we stop stressing about our homes being perfect, we can focus on blessing others and sharing Jesus. Most genuine people do not care whether our homes are perfect or up to display home standards.
- It's OK to present a house which is well-loved and lived in – clean and somewhat tidy is enough.
- If you can't open your home, you may consider hospitality or organising fellowship for those in need in a different capacity. For example, a regular catch-up at the local coffee shop or perhaps some baked goods – or even purchased snacks – dropped at someone's door with an encouraging card.

7

Q. Eleanor is an argumentative and negative person. How does God help us to love others when they feel unlovable?

TALKING POINTS

Notes from Karen Ehman's book, 'Listen, Love, Repeat';

It is counter-cultural to love the unlovable, but it is God's plan for us (p177-187);

- The only way to love a difficult person is to expect nothing in return.
- We must recognise that we are not perfect and easily lovable ourselves.
- When we operate from a heart posture of humility, it is easier to love those who are difficult.
- We must begin the journey with prayer, especially for their hearts and our approach to them.
- Be cautious entering the relationship, do not move too fast or come on too strong in your attempt to show the love of Jesus.
- Be curious; ask them about themselves and practise active listening.
- Serve them where possible (with your time and resources).
- Love out of obedience to God and leave the results to Him.
- Keep in mind the difference between the *weak* (those who are difficult because of tragic circumstances – trauma, abuse, mental health) and those who are *wicked* (deliberately unkind or pursuing evil). Carefully consider which group this person belongs to and ensure you do not put yourself in a dangerous situation (see pages 184 – 187 for more in-depth information).

8

Q. "Since losing Larry she'd been uncertain about church... and perhaps uncertain about God." (p32). Can you relate to Vera's response to suffering? How can we be sure of God's presence during grief?

TALKING POINTS

Sometimes our suffering seems too much to bear, and we may become heartbroken or begin to distrust the Lord. God intends to grow us during suffering and for us to seek our peace, joy and hope from Him, ultimately maturing our faith. This is a challenging process and is only made possible through the faithfulness of Christ, who promises to finish His good work in us.

Some truths we can remember to give us hope are;

- God PROMISES never to leave us or fail us (Hebrews 13:5); despite our feelings, we can declare with confidence, "The Lord is my helper, so I will have no fear." (Hebrews 13:6).
- 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, reveal the areas of our hearts that need attention, and help us become more like Christ.

If there is someone in the group in a dark place, pray that the Lord would show them His enduring love, that He would help them to forgive and heal, and rest in the hope of heaven.

9

Q. Psalm 68:6 says, "God sets the lonely in families", and throughout this story, God provides a family for the lonely, brokenhearted and sick. Has this book challenged you to think about family – or how you could be a family – to others in need?

TALKING POINTS

The Bible says as believers in Christ, we are;

- Children of God.
- Brothers and Sisters in Christ.
- To live in community.
- To rejoice and mourn together.
- Build one another up in the faith.
- Not to believe ourselves as better than anybody else.
- Welcome, all believers, into the family.

We strive to ensure no believer is excluded or left out in the Body of Christ. We ensure each person is connected, pastorally cared for, and feels connected and a part of the family. Is there someone in your church who seems lonely? Maybe you and a friend could reach out to them, invite them to your Christmas celebrations, or arrange to catch up.

10

Q. What is one new Christmas tradition you could add to your Christmas calendar which would bless others?

TALKING POINTS

There are many ways we can bless others at Christmas time. Here are a few things we could do that are not too difficult and could transform someone's Christmas;

- Host a Christmas lunch or dinner for church friends or community members who might be lonely, widows or the elderly, single friends, and isolated families.
- Homemade Christmas gifts; cookies, Christmas tree ornaments, cards, and knitted things.
- Drop a meal box to a family in need.
- Offer to help with child care for a day, particularly for single parents or parents with little children who may feel tired.
- Arrange to go carolling to bless your neighbours.



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