

Week Four

Read chapters 8-9 and the appendices

Do you find yourself usually living in the past, present, or future?

In recounting her daily ten minutes of honesty to her pediatric oncologist friend, Kate says, “It feels like I’m hungry and I’ll never be full again.” Who is the person in your life with whom you could share your ten minutes of honesty? What makes them that person?

Kate is frustrated that Lent is to be a time when the church has demanded that everyone stare death down with her, yet, “Everyone is trying to Easter the crap out of [her] Lent.” How do the rhythms of the church year inform your faith? What is your favorite feast or season and why?

Everything Happens for a Reason is a story to comprehend a paradoxical life and faith; God is good, yet God permits suffering. Mothers beg for the life of their child to be spared, yet children die. How does Kate make sense of a seemingly paradoxical reality? How does your faith inform how you conceive of a life of both suffering and joy?

Do you see differently anything on the short list of things not to say in Appendix I after readings this book? Are there any of the short list of things to try in Appendix II an approach you might now take?

Bonus Materials

To listen to Kate’s podcast, *Everything Happens*, follow the links at <https://katebowler.com/podcast/>

For other resources under headings like *Illness Happens*, *Caregiving Happens*, and *Parenting Happens* visit <https://katebowler.com/resources/>

EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF GEORGIA

1Book1Diocese for Advent 2023

Everything Happens for a Reason

by Kate Bowler



At the age of 34, Duke Divinity School professor Kate Bowler learned she had stage IV colon cancer. An able guide through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, Kate is a faithful follower of Jesus who reminds us that none of us is spared coming to terms with our mortality. Stripped of certainty, Kate discovers that life is difficult, but beautiful in a way it never has been before. *Everything Happens for a Reason (and Other Lies I've Loved)* is not simply an insightful and funny memoir, but a exploration of theodicy, that is God’s justice. Through Kate’s story, we see how God does not fail us even as every pat answer falls flat.

Scheduling this study for 2023

With Christmas Eve 2023 falling on the Fourth Sunday in Advent, some adjustment is in order to use this four-week study. One option is to begin the discussion on the week before the First Sunday in Advent, which will have the study ending the week before Christmas. To begin the study the week following the First Sunday in Advent will mean completing the discussions in the week before the Epiphany.

Questions for every week of the study

Each week, the group may use the following prompts as an icebreaker:

How have you seen or experienced God’s love in the previous week? Put another away, what was your moment closest to Christ?

After working through the questions for the week, as time permits close with the following questions:

- What else stood out in this week's reading?
- How have this week's readings (or this discussion) changed your understanding of suffering, love, grace, and redemption?

Week One

Read the preface and Chapters 1-3

When you, or someone close to you, experienced the grief of an illness, divorce, death in the family, or job loss what do you wish friends and family had said or done?

The prosperity gospel offers one way to see pain and suffering, attributing them to unconfessed sin and a lack of faith. What do you think is the root or source of loss, suffering, or pain? How does your faith inform this view?

Kate wonders about letting go of the part of the American Dream that says, "You are limitless," in order to acknowledge that not everything is possible. If we are simply people with Good News—God is here; We are loved; It is enough—how is life different?

Have you ever buried a St. Joseph statue to sell a house, prayed to St. Anthony to find a lost item, or done something else that might be considered superstition or magic? What happened?

Kate describes a friend whose loved-one died young and a group gathered and to pray fervently for resurrection. When have you prayed hard and the prayer seemed to go unanswered?

Week Two

Read chapters 4-5

When have you experienced a season of waiting for something that was not within your control?

Oprah Winfrey's statement, "Nothing about my life is lucky"

contrasts with Kate feeling those around her were the world's luckiest people. Is winning the lottery chance or fate? What about having a healthy baby or getting a promotion? How do you see chance and destiny?

Kate is pleased to find out that some of the most serious scholars she has known cried snotty tears as they pleaded with God to extend her life. When have you experienced others holding you or someone you love in prayer?

Kate writes that we are all floating on the ocean, holding on to our own inner tubes, and we're all sinking. How might the knowledge that we will die help us as we live our lives?

How does surrendering fit into your faith? To what degree are we to stay in control and when do we let go?

Week Three

Read chapters 6-7

How did your family observe Advent and Christmas when you were growing up?

Kate confesses that she tried to hide the ugliness of chemotherapy in posting pretty self-portraits on Facebook. To what degree should we share even the harsh reality of our lives with friends and family? Is there harm in curating our self-presentation on Social Media?

Why might Kate cling to the idea that she can save herself?

In response to her op-ed for the *New York Times*, Kate received hundreds of letters from readers expressing fears and grief. Why do you think these readers were compelled to write a stranger? What do these readers seek? What would you have written?

Kate writes, "According to some, compassion can be doled out only by the teaspoon." How can you dole out more compassion to yourself? To your loved ones? And in what amounts? What makes it hard to be generous with compassion?