

Lenten Study Guide

Love Like Christ Loves

AN "EAT, PRAY, LOVE" EXPERIENCE



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Introduction

Welcome, dear friends, to "Love Like Christ Loves," a six-week Lenten Bible Study where we embark on a transformative exploration of the theme of love through the lens of the book and movie "Eat, Pray, Love." As we enter the sacred Season of Lent, a time of self-reflection and spiritual examination, we invite you to join us on a journey that goes beyond introspection. Together, let us align our lives with the profound narrative of Christ's love and the inspiring tale of self-discovery found in "Eat, Pray, Love."



The Lenten Invitation



Lent is often regarded as a period to get our spiritual houses in order, a time of sober reflection on our lives. However, we want to go beyond self-examination in isolation. Instead, we invite you to lay your lives alongside the life of Jesus. It's a daunting but enriching exercise, one that reveals not condemnation or recrimination, but the overwhelming depths of love that Jesus has for each one of us.

Course Overview

Over the next six weeks, we will explore different facets of love, guided by both the biblical teachings and the lessons presented in "Eat, Pray, Love." Each week will focus on a specific aspect of love – in relationships, for oneself, unconditional love, compassionate love, God's love and forgiveness, and love in community.

Our discussions will be rooted in scripture, supplemented by the wisdom and challenges presented in "Eat, Pray, Love." As we journey together, we'll engage in prayer, reflection, and shared exploration, aiming to renew our commitment to love as Christ loves.

May this study be a transformative experience, an opportunity not only to examine ourselves but to respond to the invitation to love as Christ loves. As we dive into the themes of love, let us open our hearts to the lessons found in both the timeless words of the Bible and the modern narrative of "Eat, Pray, Love." Welcome to a season of growth, reflection, and a deepening understanding of the profound love that binds us all.



Chapter 1: Love in Relationships

"The Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.'" ~ Genesis 2:18-24 (NIV)

Clip from 2010 movie "Eat, Pray, Love" https://youtu.be/iUIYdx_jt28

Welcome to the first chapter of our Lenten journey, "Love Like Christ Loves." This week, we're delving into the intricate theme of love within relationships, drawing insights from both the sacred verses of the Bible and the captivating narrative of "Eat, Pray, Love." Together, we'll explore the divine design for companionship and unravel the profound significance of love in partnerships. My hope in this study is to provide a bit of myself, a bit from the book/movie, and scripture to reflect on and immerse our Lenten experience. I've never put some of these thoughts to paper, and I hope that it helps you open a bit more of yourself up to reflect on your journey in life, love and faith.

I'll be straight with you—I'm no love expert. When it comes to romance and relationships, let's just say I've had my fair share of learning experiences. Since November 2014, I've been flying solo, divorced, single parenting, and navigating the complexities of life alone. There have been more times than I can tell when I felt the overwhelming crush of loneliness. These moments hit when there is a crisis with the kids, or I need to make a big financial decision. It makes me often wonder God's plan in all this.

Genesis drops a truth bomb, saying, "It's not good for humans to be alone." But let's not skim the surface here. It's more than just finding a sidekick. It's like God wired us to thrive in connection. Drawing from my doctoral

research on multigenerational communities, it's evident that isolation is detrimental to the human condition. In some of this research from inmates in solitary confinement and babies isolated in orphanages, I have learned that isolation and loneliness can increase stress. It's also associated with an increased risk of certain mental health problems. For example, depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, and sleep problems.

In this week's scriptural narrative from Genesis, being a helper, a partner, a spouse—it's not merely about having a companion for Netflix nights. It's a nod from the divine, reminding us that we're not built for solitary living. I've always found my groove in collaborative settings (even if I still grumble about group projects—just like my marriage, where it felt like I did all the heavy lifting). But it's worth pondering how this dynamic aligns with our own experiences in relationships, whether familial, romantic, or platonic.

What's remarkable about working together is the sense of community it brings. It challenges our perspectives, propels us toward growth, and helps us become the best versions of ourselves. Reflecting on my relationships, be they romantic or platonic, has been a journey of self-discovery. I've learned more about myself and found ways to appreciate the unique qualities life and God have bestowed upon me.

Personal Reflections:

How do you interpret God's design for companionship as depicted in Genesis 2:18-24, and how does it resonate with your own experiences in relationships?

In the movie "Eat, Pray, Love," how does Liz's journey reflect the quest for love and companionship? Are there aspects of her journey that resonate with your own search for meaningful connections?

Consider the different types of relationships in your life – familial, romantic, platonic. How has love played a role in these connections, and how can you deepen the significance of love in these relationships?

Group Discussion:

In what ways does the biblical narrative of God creating a companion for Adam provide insights into the nature and purpose of human relationships?

Reflect on specific scenes or moments in "Eat, Pray, Love" that highlight the complexities of relationships. How can these cinematic portrayals guide our understanding of love in the real world?

Share examples from your own life or the lives of those around you where love has been a transformative force in relationships. How can we cultivate and nurture love in our partnerships, aligning our actions with God's design for companionship?

As we delve into the theme of love in relationships, may our reflections and discussions guide us toward a deeper understanding of God's intention for companionship and the transformative power of love in our lives.

Chapter 2: Love for Self

For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well. ~Psalm 139:13-14

Clip from 2010 movie "Eat, Pray, Love"

<https://youtu.be/bvITByUy5fA>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wBNAGs0SuMo>

Welcome to the second chapter of our Lenten journey, where we dive into the timeless and comforting Psalm 139. This psalm, a personal favorite among many, echoes sentiments of divine intimacy and knowledge that have resonated across generations. "You search me, Lord." "You know me." "Even before the words leave my mouth, you know what I am about to say." Sometimes, Lord, I might need a bit more help with that last one.

This psalm has been a steadfast prayer, a refuge during life's lows. Even in moments of solitude, it serves as a reminder of the constant presence of the divine, not as a distant figure but as a Creator intimately engaged in our lives, both collectively and individually.

Now, let's not envision a grandfatherly figure in the clouds; rather, it's more than that, it's a profound acknowledgment of a Creator who shares in our joys and sorrows. It's in these moments of solitude and reflection that the assurance of an ever-present God brings comfort—knowing that we are fully known and deeply loved.

In this week's clip from *Eat, Pray, Love*, we witness the unraveling of life and the

intentional practice of self-care and self-discovery, crucial components of our human condition. For me, this journey has unfolded through travel and the forging of lifelong friendships. Picture my 47th birthday, sitting on a Roman rooftop, sipping Aperol, and sharing laughter with a dear friend. While Rome may not be on my agenda every year, and friends may be scattered across oceans, I've learned to weave self-care into everyday moments—ensuring enough sleep, choosing healthy foods, and making time for activities like writing and journaling, like we're doing now.

How about you? How can you draw from everyday life to appreciate this wonderful creation God so deeply loves? What are the small, intentional acts of self-care and self-discovery that you can incorporate into your daily routine?

Psalm 139 invites us to reflect not only on our relationship with God but also on the love we extend to ourselves. As we ponder these questions, may we find a renewed appreciation for the profound love God showers upon us and the importance of cherishing ourselves in the process.

Personal Reflection:

Reflect on Psalm 139:13-14 and consider how it speaks to your sense of self-worth and identity. How does knowing that you are fearfully and wonderfully made by God influence your perception of yourself?

Think about the small, intentional acts of self-care and self-discovery mentioned in the chapter. What are some specific practices or routines you can incorporate into your daily life to prioritize your well-being and nurture a positive relationship with yourself?

Consider a moment in your life when you felt deeply known and loved by God. How does remembering this experience impact the way you view yourself and your worth?

Group Discussion:

Share your reflections on the significance of Psalm 139:13-14 concerning self-love and acceptance. How can understanding ourselves as fearfully and wonderfully made by God influence our attitudes toward ourselves and others?

Discuss the concept of self-care and self-discovery as portrayed in the clip from "Eat, Pray, Love." How do the practices depicted align with your own experiences of self-care? What additional strategies or techniques can you share with the group?

In what ways can our faith communities support and encourage each other in cultivating a healthy sense of self-worth and self-love? How can we create spaces where individuals feel affirmed in their identity as beloved children of God?

Chapter 3: Unconditional Love

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 (NIV)

Clip from 2010 movie "Eat, Pray, Love"

<https://youtu.be/OughNA78bgA>

This week, we're exploring the profound depths of love that transcend conditions, expectations, and limitations. You might be most familiar with this passage from Corinthians from a wedding you've attended. Interestingly this passage from Paul's letter was never meant to be used for a wedding. This entire letter Paul pens to the early church in Corinth is directed to a community of misfits. Corinth was a trade city, split down the middle by a major trade route and far off the beaten path of the metropolis of Rome. With vastly different people throughout this region, there were many differing cultures, beliefs, and traditions. As we understand more of this context, we can understand more about the words Paul is writing. How hard is it to love unconditionally when you don't necessarily agree with the people around you? How hard is it to love people who are hard to love?

As a youth pastor for many years and even more as a parent I have tried to emphasize this practice of "seeing the face of God in every individual you encounter." Yes, I know, easier said than done in most cases. But in the

practice of recognizing something of the divine creation in every being, we can exercise the practice of unconditional love. The kind of love we receive from God. If only we could open ourselves up enough and stop stumbling over our own limited beliefs. What could we unleash in this world with that kind of unconditional love?

In this week's clip from Eat, Pray, Love, we see the main character surrounded by a misfit group of friends, each with differing backgrounds and experiences. Where have you found this kind of unconditional love within a community? How have you found yourself surrounded by unique people with very different backgrounds from your own? How can we find these types of communities and cultivate a space to love unconditionally?

As we explore the theme of unconditional love this week through personal introspection and group discussion, may we deepen our understanding of love's boundless nature and strive to embody its transformative power in our relationships and communities.

Personal Reflection:

How have you experienced or witnessed instances of unconditional love in your life? How did it impact you or those involved?

Reflect on your understanding of the characteristics of genuine, unconditional love outlined in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. In what ways do you embody these qualities in your relationships? Where do you see room for growth?

How do you exemplify or struggle with demonstrating unconditional love?

Group Discussion:

Based on your interpretation of 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, how do we at times exemplify or fall short of demonstrating unconditional love?

Reflect on moments in your own life or in the world when you demonstrate unconditional love. How do these instances resonate with the characteristics of genuine love outlined in the scripture?

In what ways can we cultivate and practice unconditional love in our own lives and communities? How can we overcome barriers such as pride, selfishness, or fear to embody the transformative power of unconditional love?

Chapter 4: Compassionate Love

"For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me. Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'"

Matthew 25:35-40 (NIV)

Clip from 2010 movie "Eat, Pray, Love"

https://youtu.be/8Ojsvc_KsDY

Welcome to Week 4 of our Lenten journey, a time of deep introspection and exploration of the theme of compassionate love. This week, we embark on a profound exploration inspired by the intertwining narratives of "Eat, Pray, Love" and the timeless teachings of Matthew 25:35-40. Within these narratives lie the essence of our biblical call to embody love through acts of kindness and empathy.

In Elizabeth Gilbert's "Eat, Pray, Love," we encounter transformative moments steeped in compassion and empathy. Particularly poignant is Liz's journey towards liberation, guided by the sage advice of her friend. Through this counsel, she learns the art of releasing burdens and opening her heart to love more profoundly. In her quest for self-discovery and inner peace, Liz discovers the intrinsic joy of service to others. Indeed, the seeds of compassion she nurtures within herself blossom into a profound desire to alleviate the suffering of those around her.

Reflecting on my own journey, I am reminded of the integral role that mission and

service have played in shaping my life. As I witness the blossoming compassion within my own children, I am filled with a sense of fulfillment. It is a remarkable privilege to impart the values of service and empathy to the younger generation, thereby contributing to the betterment of our community. Through initiatives aimed at improving living conditions in marginalized areas such as Frostburg and Appalachia, we have the opportunity to extend our compassion beyond words, tangibly impacting the lives of those in need.

As we delve deeper into the exploration of compassionate love this week, let us draw inspiration from the examples of kindness and empathy found within our shared narratives. Through personal reflection and meaningful dialogue, may we reaffirm our commitment to nurturing compassionate hearts and extending love to all those who cross our paths. Together, let us embody the transformative power of compassionate love, creating a ripple effect of healing and kindness in our world.

Personal Reflection:

Reflect on a time when you received an act of kindness or compassion from someone. How did it impact you?

Consider the advice given to Liz in "Eat, Pray, Love" about letting go and opening up to love the world. What are some things you need to release in order to cultivate a more compassionate heart?

Think about practical ways you can demonstrate compassionate love in your daily life, following the example of Matthew 25:35-40. What small acts of kindness can you incorporate into your routine?

Group Discussion:

Share examples you have experienced others exhibit compassion towards one another. How do these instances resonate with the principles outlined in Matthew 25:35-40?

Discuss the significance of creating space in our hearts to love the world more deeply, as advised to Liz in the story. What obstacles do we face in letting go of burdens and opening ourselves to compassion?

Brainstorm practical ways your group can collectively engage in acts of kindness and compassion within your community. How can you work together to make a meaningful impact on the lives of others, following the example set forth in Matthew 25:35-40?

Chapter 5: God's Love and Forgiveness

*"Be kind and compassionate to one another,
forgiving each other; just as in Christ God forgave you."
Ephesians 4:32 (NIV)*

Clips from 2010 movie "Eat, Pray, Love"

<https://youtu.be/Mpr167Wdsvg>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uvXCQT1wKS0>

Welcome to Week 5 of our Lenten journey, where we explore the profound theme of God's love and forgiveness. In this chapter, we'll delve into how forgiveness is portrayed in both the movie and book of "Eat, Pray, Love," and connect it with Ephesians 4:32. Together, we'll reflect on God's forgiveness and our call to extend forgiveness to others, deepening our understanding of love and forgiveness.

In "Eat, Pray, Love," forgiveness is a central theme as Liz navigates her journey toward healing and reconciliation. Moments of forgiveness directed both towards others and towards oneself, play a pivotal role in the character's growth and transformation.

In the Greek New Testament, there are two main words translated as "forgive." One conveys the idea of pardoning or sending away, removing the guilt associated with wrongdoing. This is reflected in Luke 5:21, "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" However, the word used in Ephesians 4:32 is different. It stems from the same root as the word "grace" and denotes freely giving favor or dealing graciously with another. It entails looking at a wrongdoing suffered and responding with a selfless, considerate love, rather than holding onto the offense.

As a pastor, I've encountered individuals grappling with forgiveness in situations of hurt, betrayal, and trauma inflicted upon them. Some wounds run deep and may seem impossible to heal, especially in cases of abuse where trust is shattered and boundaries violated. How do we navigate the practice of forgiveness in such profound and complex situations?

In these circumstances, the focus often shifts inward. How do we extend forgiveness and grace to ourselves? Acknowledging the difficulty of forgiving oneself is crucial, particularly when dealing with the aftermath of profound trauma. As we confront the need for self-forgiveness, I increasingly find myself emphasizing the importance of self-compassion and understanding. It's essential to recognize the significance of our experiences and to extend grace to ourselves, forgiving ourselves for perceived shortcomings.

As we reflect on God's love and forgiveness this week, may we draw inspiration from the examples of forgiveness. Through personal introspection and group discussion, may we deepen our understanding of the transformative power of forgiveness and strive to embody it in our relationships and communities.

Personal Reflection:

Think about a time when you struggled to forgive someone. What barriers did you encounter in extending forgiveness? How did you eventually overcome them?

Reflect on a moment when you experienced God's forgiveness in your own life. How did this experience impact your understanding of forgiveness towards others?

Consider the concept of self-forgiveness. Are there areas in your life where you struggle to forgive yourself? How can you cultivate a spirit of self-compassion and forgiveness?

Group Discussion:

Share examples from "Eat, Pray, Love" where characters demonstrate forgiveness towards others and or self. How do these instances align with the principle outlined in Ephesians 4:32?

Discuss the challenges and rewards of extending forgiveness to others. How does the act of forgiveness contribute to healing and reconciliation in relationships?

Explore the idea of self-forgiveness within the group. How can we support one another in cultivating a mindset of self-compassion and forgiveness? What practical steps can we take to practice self-forgiveness in our daily lives?

Chapter 6: Love in Community

"And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching." Hebrews 10:24-25 (NIV)

Clips from 2010 movie "Eat, Pray, Love"

<https://youtu.be/XKeHblN2Qlo?si=HbvB96IFHjXWcnuT>

Welcome to the final chapter of our Lenten journey, a moment of reflection on the pivotal role of community in our spiritual growth and pursuit of love. Drawing inspiration from Liz's transformative odyssey in "Eat, Pray, Love," we'll delve into the profound significance of community across her experiences in Italy, India, and Bali, and connect these reflections with the timeless wisdom bestowed upon us in Hebrews 10:24-25. Together, we'll explore how community serves as a cornerstone in nurturing our spiritual well-being, fostering growth, and building a supportive spiritual family.

In Liz's journey, we bear witness to the transformative power of community as she navigates the depths of her spiritual and personal evolution. From the embracing warmth and camaraderie she discovers in Italy to the profound spiritual connections forged amidst the bustling streets of India and the unwavering support of friendships cultivated in the lush landscapes of Bali,

community emerges as an indispensable catalyst for her metamorphosis.

Now, as we conclude our Lenten voyage, let us pause to acknowledge the profound importance of community in our spiritual pilgrimage. Let us reflect deeply, both individually and as a collective, on how community has shaped our paths, nurtured our souls, and propelled us forward in our pursuit of love and spiritual fulfillment.

As we engage in personal reflection and enriching group dialogue, let us recommit ourselves to the cultivation of supportive relationships, to the encouragement of one another in love, and to the nurturing of a vibrant and inclusive spiritual family. For it is within the embrace of community that we find solace, strength, and the unwavering support needed to navigate the intricacies of our spiritual journey with grace and resilience.

Personal Reflection:

Think about a time when you experienced the support and encouragement of a spiritual community. How did this impact your journey and growth?

Reflect on the importance of consistent fellowship and meeting together, as emphasized in Hebrews 10:24-25. How does regular engagement with a spiritual community contribute to your spiritual well-being?

Consider the characteristics of an ideal spiritual family, drawing from Liz's experiences in "Eat, Pray, Love." What qualities do you value most in a supportive community?

Group Discussion:

Share examples from "Eat, Pray, Love" where Liz finds support and camaraderie in various communities. How do these instances resonate with the principles outlined in Hebrews 10:24-25?

Discuss the challenges and benefits of participating in a spiritual community. How can we overcome obstacles such as busyness or apathy to prioritize fellowship and community engagement?

Reflect on ways we can foster a supportive and inclusive spiritual family within our own communities. How can we create spaces where individuals feel valued, supported, and encouraged in their journey of faith and love?
