

Blue Like Jazz by Donald Miller - Nonreligious thoughts on Christian spirituality

Lesson Objectives

- Build trust and relationship with the members of the study.
- Lead the group in a discussion about Jesus and the Gospel that uses language that is approachable by a non-believer or nominal believer.
- Lead the group in a discussion about Jesus and the Gospel that brings new ideas to the table that even the mature Christians haven't encountered before and feel challenged by.
- Finish the discussion by talking about Jesus' desire to rescue us, leaving them to contemplate their willingness to allow him to rescue them.
- Cast vision for the next study.

Lesson Notes

- Remember that there are potentially non-believers or immature believers there so be aware of Christian language that is unfamiliar to them. This is the first lesson so treat it as such.
- Before you launch into the study, have snacks available and set aside 15-20 minutes for people to slow down from their day and connect with others. Use this time to personally build relationships and trust with individuals there.

Getting Started

- After 15-20 minutes, let everyone know you are getting started and ask them to grab a seat.
- Briefly introduce yourself and other bible study leaders.
- Do a short icebreaker to allow everyone to get to know each other; at a minimum have everyone share their names.
- Express a desire for the time to be a place they get to be together, be encouraged and, have their character developed; ultimately that they are blessed.
- Express a desire personally to get to know them and be a resource for them.
- Introduce the lesson by saying something along the lines of:
What we're going to do today is simply have a conversation about Jesus. To do that, we are going to use a book called Blue Like Jazz. It is really helpful in talking about Jesus because it uses everyday language to talk about Christianity. At the same time, you will find it has some very challenging, helpful, and fun ideas you probably haven't heard before. Let's dive in.

Discussion

For our discussion today, we are going to read each of the sections of the chapter individually, talking about each as we go. To get started, read the first section that ends on page 30. A set of dots will mark the end of each section.

Read pages 26-30

- At the end of the section, the author says, "the message, however, was appealing to me. God said he would make me new. I can't pretend for a second I didn't want to be made new, that I didn't want to start again. I did." How have you experienced a sense of newness since being in college? What are ways college is allowing you to be made new? [Let them share their experiences encouraging each person as he shares and responding appropriately. Feel free to share your own experience here; in fact, you or a co-leader may need to share first in order to get them talking. After several people have shared, ask the next question.]

- Ok, lets make it a little more intimate, what's an area of your character that you would like made new? [Again let them answer and again be prepared to share yourself.]
- Ok so there is some appeal in Christian spirituality's offer of making us new but there is a problem. Let's continue reading to see what he has to say.

Read 30-31

- What is the problem the author is getting at in this section? [You are looking for the idea that though Christian spirituality has appeal it many times seems confusing. He could make sense intellectually of what Christianity was trying to say.]
- Luckily, the author doesn't leave us only with questions and problems. Lets keep reading and see what solutions he offers.

Read 31-33

- What was the author coming to understand about story and our lives? [We respond to story because we are ourselves in a story.]
- Ok, well lets consider our own story. First, what is your setting? [Let several of them answer.]
- Now, how about conflict. What are ways you experience conflict? [Example here can come from relationships, sports, etc. Again let them share. This is a great place to ask follow-up questions and probe deeper as to how they experience conflict. The goal here is to help them feel conflict in their lives.]
- In this section we see the author stating the main thesis of the chapter. It's related to conflict but more specifically the main thesis relates to climax. What is he arguing here? ["If the human heart responds to climax in the structure of story, this means that climax, or point of decision, could very well be something that exists in the universe. What I mean is that there is a decision the human heart needs to make" (32,33).]
- The author goes on to suggest that this idea, that there is a decision that needs to be made, seems to parallel his understanding of Christian Spirituality. Let's read the next section and see what he argues this decision is.

Read 33-35

- What's the author getting at in regards to story and our lives in this section? [We have a decision to make; "If life had a climax, which it must in order for the element of climax to be mirrored in story, then Christian spirituality was offering a climax. It was offering a decision" (35)]
- What is the decision the author is suggesting we have to make? ["When I understood that the decision to follow Jesus was very much like the decision the hostages had to make to follow their rescuer, I knew then that I needed to decide whether or not I would follow Him. The decision was simple once I asked myself, Is Jesus the Son of God, are we being held captive in a world run by Satan, a world filled with brokenness, and do I believe Jesus can rescue me from this condition?" (34)]

- Luke the Gospel writer records Jesus saying almost this exact idea. Jesus said, "He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed" (Luke 4:18).
- Lead them into a time of personal application by saying something along the lines of, "now we want to take some time to process where we find ourselves relative to this decision so we're going to break up into groups to give you some time to discuss this." Have them break up into groups of no more than 2 or 3.

Apply

- How do you identify with being in need of rescue from yourself and the world around you?
- How does this decision line up with your previous understanding of Christian spirituality? What lines up? What is different?
- If Jesus is here to rescue us, how willing would you be to let him? Why?

Close

- This is what we are going to continue to look at next week.
- Again, this is simply a time you get to gather as a group. Hopefully, it is a time you enjoy being together and you get to slow down from the rest of life and school. We will continue this conversation then.