

# Everything Happens For A Reason

## Discussion Guide

1. The title of the book, *Everything Happens for a Reason (and other lies I've loved)*, plays on a common phrase of comfort offered to those in need. Name some popular phrases you have heard or used to respond to a friend going through a hard time.
2. The prosperity gospel, a system of Christian faith characterized by the belief that corresponds strength of faith with material or personal gain, is often contrasted with the plainclothes Mennonite faith. Describe how strands of faith practices have informed your experience of loss, suffering, or pain. What about the faith practices you've experienced have been most harmful? Most helpful?
3. Think about a time when you experienced a difficult situation (an illness, divorce, death in the family, job loss). What do you wish your friends and family had said to you? What do you wish they would have done for you?
4. What accounts for the differences between the way congregants of a prosperity gospel and Mennonite church react to Kate's diagnosis and illness?
5. Discuss the nature of grief, both in the book and in your own experience. What are your go-to ways to process (or avoid) grief in your experience?
6. What unique truths emerged in *Everything Happens for a Reason* to you? In what ways does this book enhance the themes of suffering, love, grace, and redemption featured in Kate's research on the prosperity gospel?



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7. If Toban (Kate's husband) or Kate's best friend or parent had written this memoir, what might they have said about Kate's victories and her suffering?

8. How does Kate's spiritual life change during the course of the book? Describe any shifts you've noticed in your spiritual life during a difficult season of your life.

9. Kate writes an op-ed for the *New York Times* and receives hundreds of letters from readers expressing their own fears and grief. Why do you think these readers were compelled to write to Kate, a stranger? What knowledge or connection do these readers seek?

10. In chapter 7, Kate writes, "The pain of the world is being calculated, and according to some, compassion can be doled out only by the teaspoon." How can you dole out more compassion to yourself today? To your loved ones?

11. "How can anything good live in the space that death would make?" *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?

12. In recounting her daily ten minutes of honesty to Ray, the pediatric oncologist, Kate describes those ten minutes as, "feel[ing] like I'm hungry and I'll never be full again." Who is someone in your life who you go to for your 10 minutes of honesty? What about them makes them your person?





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13. A Buddhist writes to Kate that the “world is a balance sheet,” suggesting we are all able to subtract and add to the abstract columns of mutual wellbeing. How do the characters surrounding Kate (her husband, child, family, friends, doctors, coworkers, acquaintances) add to or subtract from her wellbeing? How are the characters in your own life adding to or subtracting from your wellbeing?

14. “The future can seem awfully like the present,” Kate writes. In what ways does Kate’s present inform her ideas of the future, and vice versa? Do you find yourself living in the past, present, or future? What beauty and harm do you find when you reflect too much on the past? Too much on the present? Too much on the future?

15. “Don’t skip to the end.” Kate’s friend Frank gives her this advice on her diagnosis day. What do we lose when we assume the inevitability of our fate?



Don't miss  
Kate's podcast,  
*Everything  
Happens.*

