



STUDY GUIDE
www.bluelikejazz.com

While the chapters of *Blue Like Jazz* are driven by topics such as God, Sin, Belief, Faith, Redemption, Jesus and so on, the book is entirely narrative. In personal story,

Blue Like Jazz speaks of what it feels like to have a relationship with God, what the Christian idea of sin nature feels like, what the desire to be forgiven feels like, in short, a discussion of the gospel without using often misunderstood Christian terms. I hope readers will find explanations for their human feelings within the rich, beautiful theology of Christian Spirituality, and, that much of their hostility toward the faith will be allayed.

While walking through *Blue Like Jazz* with a small group is great for any group of Christians, it is also a wonderful text for of readers who simply have questions about spirituality.

In short, *Blue Like Jazz* will make a great discussion book from two angles:

People searching for spirituality: A great book for those in your church or campus ministry who do not consider themselves Christians but have questions.

Christians who want a deeper walk with Christ: The book contains plenty of material to flesh out the precepts of Christian spirituality in the context of community.

I hope you have a great time discovering God and each other during your journey through *Blue Like Jazz*.

Regards,

Don Miller

SMALL-GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Before you get started: A few discussion questions are given for each chapter. Exercises and writing assignments are optional, of course, but are highly recommended, especially for college and seminary classes. If you were to ask each question and do each assignment, this small group might last six months. Depending on how much time you have, and the personality of the group, simply narrow the questions and assignments to fit your needs.

Chapter One: Beginnings, God on a Dirt Road Walking Toward Me

- What were your early perceptions of God?
- If you were in your car, driving to a coffee shop to meet with God (literally in person) what would be going through your mind? Are you worried about how He will receive you? Are you excited about meeting Him in person? What do you think He looks like?

Chapter One exercise: Secure a copy of Rembrandt's painting entitled "The Return of the Prodigal Son." Tell your small group that the figure in the center, the man knelt over His son, represents God. Then ask your group four questions:

1. What are the characters inside this painting thinking?
2. What are the characters inside this painting feeling toward the son?
3. What are people feeling toward the father figure?
4. If the man in the middle is God, where are you in this painting?

Chapter Two: Problems

- When did you realize you were broken, in need of being fixed?
- How hard is it for you to think about other people more than yourself?
- What do you feel like you are losing by thinking about other people more than yourself?
- When you think about sin, do you think about what people *do* or the status of the human heart?
- How are you self addicted?

••Chapter two exercise entitled "Other People Exist" Go to a local grocery store and walk around in groups of two. Bring a digital or Polaroid camera and ask complete strangers if you can take a picture with them. Write their names on a sheet of paper. Ask them if they would be willing to answer a few questions....(Are they currently in love? What is their greatest fear? What do they daydream about most?) Attempt to take a picture in each of these sections of the store: produce, dairy, canned foods, meat and poultry and the parking lot. Paste each picture on a piece of cardboard and under each picture write "Jack daydreams about being a rock star, or Jane fears rejection."

••Writing assignment: Write an essay in which you present proof that other people exist.

••Discussion group leader: Take a piece of paper and ask people in your group to give you descriptive words about public transportation, specifically city busses. Write these words down. You are looking for words like dirty, slow, big, late, that sort of thing. At the top of the list, write "city bus." When the list is complete, erase the words "city bus" and write "other people." Ask the group if they view other people the same way they view busses. Point out that our sin nature wants us to reduce other people to tools and machines.

Brainstorm some ideas on how, as individuals, we can realize that other people exist and matter as much to God as we do.

Chapter Three: Magic, The Problem with Romeo

- What makes it difficult for you to believe God could do something magical in your life?
- What would it feel like to be made new by God?
- Does radical conversion still happen in people's lives?
- What magical propositions did Jesus present to people in the gospels?

Chapter Four: Shifts, Find a Penny in the Reeds

- Do you believe God is pursuing a love relationship with everybody in the world?
- How many non-Christians do you love?
- How do you communicate that love to them?
- Are you more comfortable around Christians than non-Christians?
- If so, is this indicative of a prejudice? How are non-Christians different than Christians?

Chapter Five: Faith, Penguin Sex

- What is love? Does love exist? Can love be proven scientifically? Does God exist? Can God be proven scientifically?
- List three things that happen in life that cannot be explained through science? (beauty, love, light...)

Writing assignment: (You want to get a book on light or physics from the library on this one) Compare and contrast the quality of light to the qualities of God.

Chapter Six: Redemption, The Sexy Carrots

- Tell the group what it felt like when you first met Jesus. What did you feel for Him? (If you are not a Christian, this is question, is, of course, exempt, but don't worry, there is still a lot of stuff in this chapter that will stimulate some thoughts.)
- Read through the story once again of Don Rabbit. In your life, can you identify with the moral of this story?

Chapter Seven: Grace, The Beggars Kingdom

- Why do people become fundamentalists?
- Why did Rick try to kill himself?
- How do you feel when you blow it in your spiritual life?

Chapter Eight: gods: Our Tiny Invisible Friends

- Do you ever feel like Christianity is not true, that, perhaps, there is no God or if there is He is not who we think He is?
- Why did Trendy Writer embrace facets of Islam?
- Why did the Israelites want a different God?
- Discuss this quote by C.S. Lewis, “I do not need a God I created, I need the one true God.”
- How does evangelical Christian culture in America attempt to recreate God to make Him fit our own desires? (Example: God wants us to be rich)

Chapter Nine: Change: New Starts at Ancient Faith

- Have you ever felt like Don on page 96 and 97, like your faith needed to be restarted?
- When you think about the apostle Paul (page 101) and the way he lived his life (see the book of Acts), what is it that He knew about God that allowed him to be so passionate within his belief? How can we have that passion too?
- How would your life look different if you believed everything Jesus said was true was actually true? What would your life look like?

Exercise: Study groups of people who are living this out. Look at The Simple Way in Philadelphia (www.thesimpleway.org)

Chapter Ten: Belief: The Birth of Cool

- Why is passion often mistaken for belief? (IF a singer sings passionately about something, we are inclined to think he/she is singing about something important. Even if the topic is not important.)

Exercise: Listen to the song “Hook” by Blues Traveler. You will find the song on the album “Four.” In the song, John Popper talks about how, even though he isn’t singing about anything, because he sings with passion and conviction, the audience will buy the record and assume it is about something important. What other tricks does John Popper say that he is using to fool the listenership? How do politicians, media figures and everyday people use the same tactics?

Chapter Eleven: Confession: Coming Out of the Closet

- Why is it so difficult to share our faith in Jesus?
- What do we as Christians have to apologize about to the world?
- Who in your life have you miss communicated the love of God to people who are not followers of Jesus?
- In John Chapter Two, how does Jesus share the gospel? (He offers her meaning, he hints that her life is not fulfilling. He tells her that he is living water.)
- In Acts 17, how does Paul share the gospel? (He quotes their poets. He understands their system. He goes to where they are. He respects them and their system of education.)

Chapter Twelve: Church: How to Go Without Getting Angry

- What sucks about church?
- What is good about church?
- How are you judgmental toward the evangelical church?
- How does God reach different people through different churches?
- How important is it to God that we, as the church, be united, like a family?
(See Ephesians)

Chapter Thirteen: Romance: Meeting Girls is Easy

- How does marriage mirror Christ's love for the church?
- How important is the opposite sex's (in terms of intimate, romantic relationships) role in teaching us to receive love?

Chapter Fourteen: Alone: Fifty-three Years in Space

- What is the loneliest you have ever been?
- What problems does loneliness create in a society? (Example, addiction, suicide, escapism...)
- Read through the story of Don Astronaut (page 159) and discuss what this might feel like were it to happen in real life?

Chapter Fifteen: Community: Living with Freaks

- How are you like Hugh Grant in the movie About a Boy? (read page 180, paragraph 2)
- Describe a time when you lived in community and how that time changed you?
- How can you speak love and healing into somebody's life, the way Christ did with Zacheus?

Exercise: Watch the film "About a Boy" and discuss the conversion Hugh Grant makes from isolation to community. What realizations did he have that led him to believe living in community was important?

Chapter Sixteen: Money: Thoughts on Paying Rent

- Why is it that we want to buy new things?
- How can we use our money to serve God?
- Have you ever experienced another culture not preoccupied with the accumulation of things? What was that culture like?

Exercise: Journal how you spend every dollar for one week. Give the Journal to another person in your small group to read.

Chapter Eighteen: Love: How to Really Love Other People

- How important is it to God that Christians love each other? (read John 17)
- Why are some Christians threatened by people who are not Christians?
- Why did Don like the hippies so much? (Page 208 & 209)
- How did Don feel when he stepped into the conservative Christian community? (page 210)
- According to Don, what do Christians and people who are not Christians have in common? (page 215)
- What did Greg Spencer teach that allowed Don to understand love differently? (Page 217)

Exercise: Take your small group, college or seminary class into the homosexual district of your community. (If you don't have one, take them to any community) Spend an evening in groups of two, going to coffee shops. Come back and ask the question: What is good about this community? What can we learn from this community? What is the difference between loving this community and endorsing homosexuality?

Chapter Nineteen: Love: How to Really Love Yourself

- Does God want us to love ourselves?
- What is the difference between loving yourself and self obsession?
- How does our culture help people hate themselves? What would God want to say to people who hate themselves?
- In what ways do you hate yourself?
- What would repentance from that look like?

Chapter Twenty: Jesus: The Lines on His Face

- How did you come to know Christ?
- Is there anybody in the room who would like to have a relationship with Jesus? (Be prepared to lead these people into a relationship with Jesus)
- What do you love about Jesus?