

# In Reading Groups

Book Discussion Guide from the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship

by Elizabeth Andrasi Deere



## ***Everything Happens for a Reason: And Other Lies I've Loved***

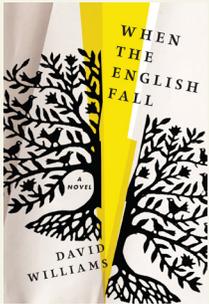
by Kate Bowler

Bowler shares her battle with cancer in an account populated with friends, mega-church preachers, relatives, and doctors. Bowler offers up irreverent, hard-won observations on dying and the ways it has taught her to live.

1. Before you read past the preface take a moment and think about the title of this book: *Everything Happens for a Reason...and Other Lies I've Loved*. What are your expectations for this book? Do you agree with the author that the statement “everything happens for a reason” is a lie?
  - with the ways prosperity thinking slips into her own faith. As you read, take note if you discover places where your theology reflects the prosperity gospel, too. How has the prosperity gospel—or parts of it—impacted the way you experience God and the world?
2. Has anyone ever said “everything happens for a reason” to you? When? How did that feel?
3. Kate Bowler stumbles upon three questions and offers them to us in her preface: Why? God, are you here? What does this suffering mean? Have you ever found yourself asking these questions? If so, what was that experience like?
4. Kate is a scholar who specializes in studying the prosperity gospel and the churches and leaders who teach it. As she journeys through her cancer diagnoses and treatments she grapples
  5. As you read, take a few moments to reflect as you set the book down for breaks. What parts of Kate’s story stay with you when you close her book?
  6. “What would it mean for Christians to give up that little piece of the American Dream that says, ‘You are limitless’? Everything is not possible. The mighty Kingdom of God is not yet here. What if rich did not have to mean wealthy, and whole did not have to mean healed? What if being people of ‘the gospel’ meant that we are simply people with good news? God is here. We are loved. It is enough.” (p. 21) What might the world look like if Christians lived this way? What might your life look like?
7. In chapter four Kate talks about her experience as she waits to get pregnant. Think about a time you waited for something. Did it seem like everyone around you was getting everything they want (and maybe you want, too)?
8. In chapter four, Kate says, “I believed in magic once” (p. 45). She then goes on to tell her story of praying to win bingo...and winning. Praying a pregnancy test would be positive...and it was. She says, “If magic was about formulas and saying the right words, I knew this wasn’t magic. This was something else” (p. 48). What do you think it was? Can you think of other ways magical thinking slips into faith?
9. As Kate emerges from surgery and is on pain medicine she begins to hand out truth to the people she loves. She says, “All these words I am tripping over are benedictions” (p. 60). Benediction means, “good word;” are there good words that you can offer now to the people you love? What would it look like for you to make that a practice?
10. In chapter five Kate reflects on the importance of touch. She speaks of wanting a young doctor in training to hold her hand when she receives bad news. She tells of gathering tangible reminders of her life before cancer

- within reach around her bed. When has touch been important to you? When has your touch been important to someone else?
11. “Control is a drug, and we are all hooked, whether or not we believe in the prosperity gospel’s assurance that we can master the future with our words and attitudes” (p. 84). Do you agree with Kate’s statement? If so, how does control act like a drug in your life?
  12. On page 86, Kate asks, “when will I realize that surrender is not weakness?” Why do you think surrendering is so hard? What might we learn from Jesus about surrender?
  13. In chapter 8 Kate explores Lent and Good Friday. What do you think about Kate taking up swearing for Lent? What has been your experience with this season in our Christian calendar?
  14. Throughout the book—while being excruciatingly honest with us, the readers—Kate shares how she puts on a smile and a happy persona for her doctors and nurses and others as she moves through this journey. How does she feel about that? How do you feel about that?
  15. In chapter nine, Ordinary Time, Kate wrestles with this new lifestyle of living in the present. How are you navigating “ordinary time?” Are there ways you try to “skip to the end” (p. 160)?
  16. Did you underline or mark any passages as you read? Kate packs a lot of wisdom and wit in a small space. Take some time and revisit the words that stood out to you most. Why did they resonate with you?
  17. Don’t miss Appendix I and Appendix II – Is there anyone in your life who is suffering? How can these words guide you to love them well? Were any of her suggestions a challenge to hear or consider?

## NEXT MONTH



### *When the English Fall* by David Williams

When a catastrophic solar storm brings about the collapse of modern civilization, an Amish community is caught up in the devastating aftermath in this thought-provoking examination of how we live today and what remains if the center cannot hold.

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