

Blue Like Jazz
Session #1: Introduction & Ch. 1-3
Living Within The Harmonic Structure

Introduction: Name, Blue Like Jazz, other people's names.

Vulnerability & Openness

- Today, we are looking at what it means to live within “life’s created order,” this harmonic structure, this idea of God’s story and how we fit into that. Blue Like Jazz is a story, a collection of thoughts compiled and beautifully juxtaposed in such a way to give us a platform to discuss life, faith, and God.

Mad Libs Activity

- Don talks a lot about stories and the basic components required in story. If they don’t contain certain structures, certain elements, the story won’t make sense. As we see in the Mad Libs, even if they have the required pieces (nouns, pronouns, adjectives), they sometimes don’t make sense, they don’t work, they’re out of place. These stories, like jazz music, don’t always make sense. But more on that later...

Watch Esperanza Spalding Youtube Video

- What are your reactions?
- Jazz music, if you’re like me, doesn’t always sound great to me. But what is AMAZING about jazz is that these musicians are playing within this bass line of a harmonic structure. If she sings a note out of this structure, it would sound terrible!
- What’s similar about the Mad Libs and Esperanza Spalding?
- Think about the Creation Story. God gave his people a garden to play within and they went out of bounds. They went out of the harmonic structure. They fell out of rhythm.
- Where are you? Are you in rhythm? Are you playing within the harmonic structure?

Watch Video of Don Miller to 15:00 at Willow Creek Leadership Summit

- “Creeds provide boundaries, but stories are more powerful than creeds.” Stories, narrative, also provide boundaries.
- What are the essential elements of a story? (Setting, conflict, climax, resolution)
- What do you think Don means when he says “If he can sink a into habit, prevent him from truly engaging God.” Semper reformanda...
- Who played make believe games growing up? I played hours of whiffle ball and gun wars. Wanted to be someone fancy and no one wants to be themselves. To Don, God was magic, selling something He wanted.
- Who has ever viewed God like that? If I pray, I’ll receive. Put my coins in and out comes the answer. Make us new? How?

Don says Christianity offers us a climax to this conflict and setting of life. We can Follow Him, but like Jazz music, it’s not always something we can write about or put on paper. Where is the end destination? Perhaps like Mark said, the destination is the journey. Follow me within this harmonic structure. Here’s your garden. Here are your boundaries. Here is the story. Play, be free, live, but play within these elements and you’ll find life and rhythm.

Like Don says, Christianity is a lot like jazz music – It’s something you feel and something very difficult to get on paper. It hangs there like notes on page. You can feel your rhythm...

Watch Rhythm, Rob Bell video

Blue Like Jazz
Session #2: Ch. 4-7
Sin, Grace, Evangelism, and Sacred v. Secular

Introduction: Name, Blue Like Jazz

Vulnerability & Openness:

- Last week, what did we talk about? Living within life's created order. How God, like Jazz and story, has a certain structure that makes some great and others not; some in rhythm, some out; some in tune, some out. The Creation Story...
- We discussed the difference between religion and spirituality and how that term has taken on a negative meaning with many people. ("**Familiarity breeds unfamiliarity – unsuspected unfamiliarity, and then contempt. People THINK they have heard the invitation...Genius, it is said, is the ability to scrutinize the obvious**" – Dallas Willard). People think they've heard RELIGION.
- Navy Seal Story: Come, Follow Me. Back to Jesus...

Mad Libs Activity: Stories don't always make sense. These words were out of place. It wasn't a good story. Funny, but not good.

Ella Fitzgerald: Reactions. What's similar about Mad Libs and Ella Fitzgerald?

Evangelism: What is it? Define it.

- For those of you who've read ahead, Don addresses this more in depth later, but I really want to highlight this section of the book because as we fail at this a lot, especially in our understanding. This week, I was reflecting on whether I was making a difference. So often, we measure our success as Christians by how many ppl we "evangelize." Needless to say, God really spoke to me about this. And I want to share it with you.
 - Pg 46. Read quote.
 - "I discover more and more that the greatest gift I have to offer is my own joy of living, my own inner peace, my own silence and solitude, my own sense of well-being." (Henri Nouwen)
 - We often view evangelism as an act. True, there are times when we have to ask and overcome our nerves, like Don admits to. But, for the most part, we simply need to live a better story
 - **Show Don talking:** Live a better story!

Sacred v. Secular: Where have you experienced a spiritual experience, a holy moment outside of Church? More spiritual experiences at Reed than at Church. Reactions?

Sin: Self-absorption or self-addicted. Story of Don Rabbit. Who can relate to that story?

Grace: Furthermore, who can relate to the story and trying to fix their sin by becoming more self-disciplined?

- Pg 86: "Self-discipline will never make us feel righteous or clean; accepting God's love will." Never let awards or love really sink in.
 - Personally, about a month ago when I re-read this, God will hammered this home to me. I had been trying to SELF-DISCIPLINE myself to get out of this funk. My sports, life, academics teach that if we just work harder, we'll be better. Willing to accept God's grace and love gives us the fuel to obey
 - **You are my beloved.** "Becoming the Beloved means letting the truth of our Belovedness become enfolded in everything we think, say, or do."

BLUE LIKE JAZZ ~ Donald Miller

Week 2: Points to ponder again...Ch. 4-7

1. Evangelism is not always just an act or a decision. Sometimes, it is simply living a “greater story” to show (and sometimes tell) others.
 2. “The goofy thing about the Christian faith is that you believe it and don’t believe it at the same time.” Do you ever feel like this? Like love or beauty, faith is not always something we can rationalize.
 3. “I had more significant spiritual experiences at Reed College than I ever had at church.” If we truly believe that God dwells not just in the “Temple,” then there is nothing fundamentally wrong with this statement. Our “spiritual” experiences can occur anywhere. There is no longer sacred and secular. God reigns everywhere.
 4. Sin is our self-addiction and self-absorption. Why is it so hard to stop thinking about ourselves all the time?
 5. “Self-discipline will never make us feel righteous or clean; accepting God’s love will.” It is a spiritual discipline to really hear God say: “You are my BELOVED.”
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Week 3: Things to consider in Ch. 8-11

1. Why do we feel like we always need the right answers?
2. Do you ever feel like a fraud or a fake?
3. What does being a Christian mean to you? What does it mean for your friend who doesn’t go to Church?
4. What does true belief look like?

Blue Like Jazz Study: Ch 8-11 **The Mirror, Frauds, Belief, and Confession**

Introduction: Vulnerability and openness. Names and Where We Are

- Last week, we addressed evangelism and living out your story; grace and our need to receive it first; Don Rabbit and Sexy Carrot.
- This week, we're going to talk about some of the best chapters in this entire book. Here, we really start to turn a corner. With "one of those honest looks in the mirror" as Don points out in Chapter 8, we see things a fresh perspective out of Don.

Mad Libs Activity

The most prominent message of this entire book is Don and our attempts to figure out where and how we fit into "life's created order" and how story intercedes with God's story.

Reflections?

Doubt: "Every Christian knows they will deal with doubt" (Pg 87) – Thoughts?

Reflections? At the end of this chapter, as he discusses Trendy Writer who "rapes aspects of the Islam faith," Don is saying he's finally enlightened and that he has finally looked in the mirror and remembered exactly what he looks like.

- Where does doubt fit into the Story? Is it okay to doubt? Is this in rhythm?
- Every single disciple doubted. Why would these be included if they had not been a part of the Story?

"A faith without doubts is like a human body without any antibodies in it. People who blithely go through life too busy or indifferent to ask hard questions about why they believe as they do will find themselves defenseless against either the experience of tragedy or the probing questions of a smart skeptic." – Timothy Keller

Fraud: Read pg 97: Do you ever feel like a fraud or a fake? Is this okay?

- Canyon story. Laying by the stars, Blue Like Jazz (Pg 100). Have you every restarted your own faith? Do you need a restart right now?
- God is reaching out to me! The 4 stars. Beetlejuice. 1000 times larger than the SUN!

Belief:

- The Bachelor. "I just had to follow my heart."
- Don Miller: "Love is both something that happens to you and something you decide upon." What do you guys think about this? (pg 104)
- The trouble with deep belief is that it costs something (107) Chris Tomlin: Wants to give our worship legs.
- "Satan wants us to believe meaningless things for meaningless reasons." (Pg 106)
- "Living for something is the hard thing" (Pg 111)
- "What I believe is what I do." (Pg 110)
- Is passion the same as belief? How do we differ from insurance agents?
- Jonestown: 1978. 909 ppl killed themselves for someone passionate.

Confession: How disarming is it to just apologize first?

- Evangelism is not a target on a wall. It's not 1, 2, 3. Oftentimes, we're just a link in the chain. But what can we do to start?
- How do we reinvent Christianity? Pg 115.
- Portland doesn't understand. Does Las Vegas?
- Pg 126 "Jesus is relevant in this place"

BLUE LIKE JAZZ ~ Donald Miller

Week 3: Points to ponder again...Ch. 8-11

1. **“I do not need a God I created. I need the one true God” – CS Lewis. How does evangelical Christian culture in America attempt to recreate God into our own desires?**
 2. **Donald Miller writes that every Christian at some point knows they are going to doubt. Where does doubt fit into the Story?**
 3. **“I have become an infomercial for God and I don’t even use the product.” Do you ever feel like a fraud or a fake? What can you do to restart?**
 4. **“But the trouble with deep belief is that it costs something.” “Living for something is the hard thing.” Where is your belief? How would you characterize your belief?**
 5. **Confession is incredibly disarming. Who do you need to apologize to about misrepresenting Christ?**
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Week 4: Things to consider in Ch. 12-14

1. **What is Church?**
2. **What’s the right way to love and be in love?**
3. **Why are relationships important? Are they a part of the story, of “life’s created order?”**

Blue Like Jazz Study: Ch 12-14

Confession, Church, Romance, and Alone

Introduction: Vulnerability and openness. Names and Where We Are

- Last week, we talked about taking “one of those honest looks in the mirror.” We discussed ways to really create this mirror and figure out how we’re going to find truth. We also watched Rhythm by Rob Bell, talked about doubt, feeling fake, and how hard it is to believe
- This week, we’re going to address some new themes including romance, community, and being alone. We’re also going to further address how Christianity and Church in general needs a re-addressing, a re-commitment to something different.

Mad Libs

Watch “They Like Jesus, but Not the Church” Video by Dan Kimball ~ Why do you think people like Jesus and not the Church? What are your reactions? Have we contributed to this image?

Church v. Jesus. Terms. Describe. Compare.

Church: Pg 115. Don no longer wants to defend Christianity as a term. Too much baggage. Is he right or wrong to think this way?

* Pg 124: The Central Message of being a Christian. Do we forget the central message too often?

* The reasons Don hated church:

1. People selling this product of Jesus
2. Everything was “life-changing.”
3. You had to be a Republican
4. War metaphor. Against homosexuality, liberals. We SHOULD be against poverty,

injustice, hate, and pride.

* What is the church? What does Scripture say? How does it compare to Jesus?

* Don loved Imago Dei because: (pgs 136-37)

1. Very spiritual. Pray and fast.
2. A concentration on art.
3. Community. Authentic. Tight.
4. Authenticity. Be real.

* What is CLC about? What can we do to become more like the Church Jesus calls us to be?

* How are we judgmental towards other churches? Do you think God can reach others through other churches?

Romance: Do we view the church as the Bride of Christ?

* What do you do when you decide to move past dating and into a marriage? (*Commit, don’t just follow your heart. Selflessness, humility, freedom-loss to gain something more.*)

* So often, we want to consume from Church. What about relationships? If we were looking to just get, we wouldn’t “get” very much, right? Same with Church?

* How does marriage mirror Christ’s love for the church?

Alone: Our soul needs to interact with other people to be healthy. Do you agree?

* On one hand, our society puts way too much pressure on romance. The romance myth: When I finally find someone, then I’ll be happy. (Pg 152)

* What is the loneliest you’ve ever been? What kind of problems does this cause?

* Is “relationship” a necessity to life?

BLUE LIKE JAZZ ~ Donald Miller

Week 4: Points to ponder again...Ch. 12-14

- 6. Don doesn't feel the need to defend Christianity. The word has become too synonymous with negativity. Why do you think this is the case?**
 - 7. "Rick really wanted to redeem the image of the church to people who had false conceptions about it." How can we play a role in redeeming the image of the Church? Of being a Christian? Of Christ?**
 - 8. Study after study shows people are way more interested in Jesus in the Church. Why? How can we get back to being about Jesus**
 - 9. "God risked himself on me. I will risk myself on you. And together, we will learn to love." How can our earthly relationships give us a better idea of what God desires for our communities?**
 - 10. "The soul needs to interact with other people to be healthy." Do you agree? Why or why not? Are you currently having your "soul massaged" by your community?**
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Week 5: Things to consider in Ch. 15-17

- 4. Is faith meant to be personal or shared in community?**
- 5. "The most difficult lie I have ever contended with is this: Life is a story about me."**
- 6. How tightly do you hold onto money and your world?**
- 7. Do you allow yourself to dwell on the mystery of God? Or do you try to create a formula to chart God?**

Blue Like Jazz Study: Ch 18-20 Love, Love, & Jesus

Introduction: Vulnerability and openness. Names and Where We Are

- Last week, we talked about taking worship, community, and money. **How did you guys enjoy the Louis Giglio video?**
- This week, we're going to address some new themes: **love, love, and Jesus.** Interestingly enough, Don ends with two chapters on love and one on Jesus. But how can these not be intertwined.

What does Jesus say is the greatest commandment? "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind...And the second is this: Love your neighbor as yourself." Matt. 22:37-38.

- **The Shema. The Jews would have been VERY familiar with this command and prayer.**
- Do you ever feel like you complicate things too much? Don says, pg 236, if he read the Bible more it would make him simple in his thinking. Are we simple thinkers?

Story: The major them of this study has been: How do we fit within the Grand Narrative? How do you write your story? Where are you playing in the rhythmic structure? Are you in tune or out of tune? Are you in rhythm or out of rhythm?

- We talked a few times about how do you take one of those "honest looks in the mirror." It's really simple, isn't it? Who is our mirror? Jesus.
- Read page 238 and reflection of Jesus.

Diagram Jesus's story: Ask people to respond.

- * **Setting** (*The Mediterranean ~ Much political and religious unrest, Jewish nation*)
- * **Conflict** (*Opposition to religious establishments, the Roman Empire, and Jewish nation. Turned everything upside down*)
- * **Climax** (*The cross*)
- * **Resolution** (*The resurrection*)

Now, how SHOULD our story match up?

- * **Setting:** United States ~ Much political and religious unrest, Christian nation
- * **Conflict:** Opposition to the American Empire; rest in HOPE of God alone; fight poverty, injustice, inequality; and expect conflict

"In this world, you will have trouble." John 16:33

"Dear friends, don't be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you." 1 Peter 4:12

- * **Climax:** "And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple." Luke 14:27. What does it mean to carry his cross?

- * **Resolution:** The glorious resurrection. Not heaven alone.

Watch Video of Jesus & ask them to write during it

Write: "What do you want your story to include?"

What have we learned? What can we do to go forward? How can we get back to the real Jesus and real love?

BLUE LIKE JAZZ ~ Donald Miller

Week 5: Points to ponder again...Ch. 18-20

- 11. “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind...Love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matt. 22:37). It’s that simple, so do you?**
 - 12. Do you ever use love as a commodity? That is, do you withhold to force ‘payment’ and do you give to receive ‘payment’?**
 - 13. Check yourself that next time you are speaking to someone. Are you loving and speaking with your mouth or your heart or both?**
 - 14. “I think Christian spirituality is a lot like jazz music I think loving Jesus is something you feel. I think it is something very difficult to get down on paper.” (Don Miller, 239). How would you describe your Christian faith?**
 - 15. The key to everything, Don writes, rests in our ability to receive love. Can you receive it? Do you rest in it? When is the last time you let God tell you how much He loves you? How does culture effect this?**
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Final Thoughts of Blue Like Jazz

- 16. How do you want to write your story? What do you want your story to include?**
- 17. How can you model your own story after Jesus? What do you want of your setting, conflict, climax and resolution?**

Blue Like Jazz Book Study Evaluation Form

Please fill this out & leave it with us, signed or unsigned... or drop it off or mail it to the church office for Greg or John.

1. What did you enjoy most about this Book Study?
2. What was most challenging for you with this Book Study?
3. What are some of the things you learned from your time in this study?
4. Is there anything you are more confused about, because of this study?
5. What suggestions would you like to give Bruce, Greg, John & Pastor Michael for future book studies?
6. Would you like to participate in future book studies?
7. Are there any books that you would like to suggest for future book studies?

Please write any additional comments on the back of this sheet --

Thanks for participating!