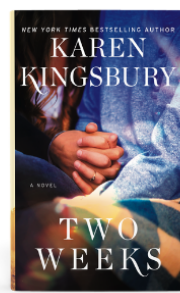


TWO WEEKS



Note: This guide is intended for use while reading Karen Kingsbury's Novel – Two Weeks. This material belongs to Karen Kingsbury and is protected as such. Thank you.

“Two Weeks – A Novel” By Karen Kingsbury

Book Club Guide

Week 1

Dealing with the Past – Elise's Story

Chapters 1-7

Elise comes to Bloomington with a past, something she doesn't want to talk about with anyone – not her mother, not her aunt, not Cole ... not even God.

When I write Life-Changing Fiction™, I pray for you. I ask the Lord that the story might land on your heart and draw you to a deeper faith and a stronger connection with the people you love.

This study guide will help you take a deeper look at the story of *Two Weeks*. I always say, when Jesus wanted to tell you straight, He told you straight. When He wanted to make a point, He turned over a table. But when He wanted to touch your heart, He told a story. So let's dig in deeper to this one.

For this part of the study, I am assuming you have read chapters 1-7. This will have gotten you familiar with the trials facing the main characters in the story.

By now you may relate to one of the characters in *Two Weeks* more than another. But as we go deeper into the narrative, I believe in some ways we can

relate to all of the characters in this story. That is certainly true of the teenage Elise Walker.

Elise comes to Bloomington as a way of outrunning her past. But in doing so, she fails to deal with what she left behind. In life there are times when we have a troubled part of our past that continues to wreak havoc on our present. It can even threaten our future.

Not until Elise tells Cole what happened to her back in Louisiana does she start to work through her pain and pregnancy, along with the ramifications of how the past has changed her.

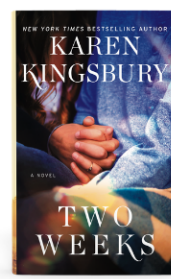
God sent Jesus to die on a cross for us, to cover our past with His sacrifice. Still, if we don't work through the things from yesterday, we can struggle with life today and tomorrow.

Take a look at this Bible verse, and then go through the questions:

“Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.” - Isaiah 43:18-19

1. What does that Bible verse mean to you? How does it apply to a specific time in your life?
2. If you were Elise, what would you have done as you moved to Bloomington, IN? What could she have done differently?
3. Think about a time when you were ashamed of your past. If you're willing ... talk about that time and how you got past it.
4. What are practical ways to reckon with the past and put it behind you?
5. What positive things can come from a broken past?
6. How can a difficulty in your past make you stronger today?
7. If you had to write Elise's next ten years, what would they look like?
8. What were your favorite parts of chapters 1-7?
9. Which part of these chapters did you relate to the most?
10. How do you see God at work in this part of the book?

TWO WEEKS



Week 2

Drowning in Heartbreak – Aaron and Lucy

Chapters 8-9

I once heard it said that we are all coming out of a trial, headed toward a trial, or right in the middle of one. In other words, heartache happens to us all.

Let me share about one of mine.

I was at a book signing in 2005 when my husband walked in. Nothing about that was normal. He was supposed to be getting the boys ready for soccer, fixing lunches and overseeing our daughter's homework. Instead he was standing a few feet away.

“Is everything okay?” I turned from the reader I was talking to and looked at him.

He shook his head. “No, honey. It's not.” He paused, tears welled in his eyes. “Your brother is dead.”

At age 39 my brother David had died in his sleep. Weeks after coming to faith in Jesus, he went to bed and never woke up. A year later my dad died from complications of diabetes. And just like that we were in a season of heartbreak.

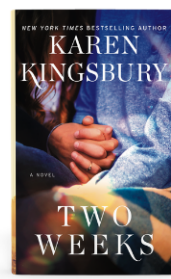
Doesn't matter if your season of heartbreak comes on suddenly or drags on for a decade the way it did for Aaron and Lucy. Either way the results are the same. The light in your eyes and the love in your heart grows dim. All that was normal and good feels twisted and drained until you walk more slowly than before, your head bowed, your spirit crushed.

Let's examine more closely this difficult season, the one that comes to us all. We'll start with this Bible verse:

“So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” – Isaiah 41:10

1. This Scripture is made up of two commands and five promises. Break those down and discuss them.
2. Which of these promises speaks most closely to you and a heartbreak you've gone through, or one you're going through right now? Share about this.
3. What were some of Aaron and Lucy's struggles in this sad season of infertility and childlessness? How did they handle their sorrow differently?
4. Based on personal experience with loss and painful times, if you were Aaron and Lucy's best friend what advice would you have given them to get through this season?
5. Read John 16:33. Here are two more promises from Jesus. Why do you think He gave us the first promise in this verse?
6. How does the second promise in that Bible verse make you feel?
7. Talk about how you were able to leave a season of grief and heartache in the past? Give practical ways that helped you move on from that time?
8. What were your favorite parts of chapters 8-9?
9. Which part of these chapters did you relate to the most?
10. How do you see God at work in this part of the book?

TWO WEEKS



Week 3

No Greater Love – Cole’s Story

Chapters 10-16

One of the greatest goals of the Christian life is to think of others better than ourselves. Living a life of faith begins with a decision to believe. But it doesn't end there. Faith is a journey ... and it must be so for all the days we walk on this earth.

That journey will include moments where we mess up, times when we hit the pillow at night asking God to forgive us for missing an opportunity or not representing Him well. But it will also include days or seasons when we can feel God pulling us to the next level. Often that next level is thinking of others better than ourselves.

The Bible says a lot about living for others. In many ways that is the over-arching theme of the New Testament. The truth Jesus came to show us. Live for others. That describes Jesus and His time on earth perfectly. And from the cross Jesus showed us the ultimate act of love – one only He could do. After first living for us, in the end He died for us.

Cole Baxter Blake is young but he has a deep faith. At just 18 he has seen an incredible example of what it looks like to lay down one's life for someone else. He has seen love in action, because he's seen it in the person of his father – Landon Blake.

All of Cole's life he has known that his dad came back into his mother's life at a time when she was difficult and unlovable. She fought the very love Landon offered – a protective, self-sacrificing love.

Through it all Landon stayed. Eventually even taking Cole on as his own son – despite the fact that Landon was not Cole's biological father.

Sometimes I'll be at the store or the airport and I'll see a man in a wheelchair, his wife pushing him down the concourse, stopping to tend to his needs, completely consumed with his wellbeing instead of her own. Or maybe it's a woman without sight, getting an understanding of her surroundings from her loving husband.

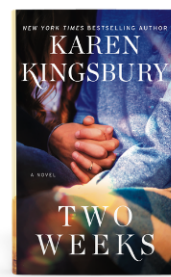
You've seen these moments in your life or in a video or real-life scene somewhere. Someone giving everything they have for the love of someone else.

Here's one place we can find this type of selfless faith in Scripture:

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, rather, in humility value others above yourselves.” – Philippians 2:3

1. What does that Bible verse mean to you? Explain how you've seen this verse lived out.
2. Describe how Cole reacted to Elise's news about being pregnant. What was he willing to give up to help her?
3. Talk about a time when you felt God asking you to sacrifice your time, talents, or money for someone else. How did you feel about that? How did it work out?
4. When did someone else sacrifice for you? Explain that time and how it made you feel.
5. How did the people around Cole react to his offer to skip college and stand by Elise? What practical advice would you have given Cole if you were his family member or friend?
6. In what ways can you grow in the area of thinking of others better than yourself? Give a few tangible examples.
7. Who is the most giving, selfless person you know? Share about that person and what makes them so giving.
8. What were your favorite parts of chapters 10-16?
9. Which part of these chapters did you relate to the most?
10. How do you see God at work in this part of the book?

TWO WEEKS



Week 4

When Tragedy Strikes – Theo and Alma’s Story

Chapters 17-19

A hot summer day and Steve was walking inside with two plates of half-eaten chicken. Thirty-four years old and helping his three little boys with lunch. “Get me a brownie, please, Daddy.”

“You got it, buddy.” Steve smiled and walked through the back door of his house. Then he stopped cold. The pain hit like a Mack truck out of nowhere. He grabbed his head and screamed, “What’s happening?!”

Family was visiting, three other couples, sisters and brothers-in-law and parents. Lots of little kids. The adults rushed to Steve’s side, but by then he was on the floor, unresponsive. An ambulance was called. “Could be heat stroke,” one of the paramedics said.

And so his young wife rode with her sister behind the speeding vehicle. Heat stroke. Yes, that had to be it. Nothing too serious. Heat stroke. Everything is going to be fine. It’s just the heat.

But it wasn’t. An aneurism had burst in Steve’s brain. He was dead before the ambulance got to the hospital. And like that Steve was gone.

Sudden, unforeseen tragedy. The kind we go all our lives praying will never happen. The sort of horrific event that seems all too common in our world today. If not on a personal level than certainly on a national and global scale.

Car accidents and heart attacks and drownings. Terrorist attacks and shootings. The sorts of terrible situations where life changes in a minute. A single minute.

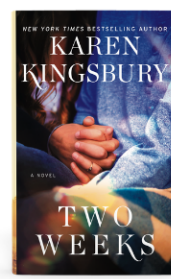
That's what happened to Theo and Alma with their beautiful daughter Vienna. Where is God in these disastrous days? And how do we remember to breathe when the pain is so great, so sudden we can no longer stand?

Let's start by seeing what the Bible says about these moments.

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” – John 14:27

1. This Scripture offers us the very words of Jesus in the form of three declarations and two commands. How are these sacred sentences a living formula for peace?
2. What part of this verse offers you the most hope in face of past tragedies – personal or global?
3. How is it possible to follow the two commands in this Bible verse? What do they mean to you personally?
4. Jesus specifically mentions fear in this Scripture. How are fear and tragedy often linked together – before or after a terrible event? Talk about this?
5. Theo and Alma received sudden tragic news in *Two Weeks*. Have you ever gotten tragic news? Did you handle it the way Theo and Alma did ... or differently? Share details about this.
6. What are practical ways to handle a tragic event?
7. How can you be a friend to someone going through a sudden devastating situation? What should you not do?
8. What were your favorite parts of chapters 17-19?
9. Which part of these chapters did you relate to the most?
10. How do you see God at work in this part of the book?

TWO WEEKS



Week 5

Believe the Best – Ashley’s Story

Chapters 20-22

After thirty years of marriage and raising six children – three of whom were adopted from Haiti – my husband and I have learned to live with a few guidelines. Near the top of the list is a statement we say often. Very simply it is this:

Believe the best of each other.

I remember one morning when the kids were young, and Donald and I had a business meeting across town. We gave the kids clear instructions. Chores were to be done first, and then they could play outside.

An hour later we were returning from the meeting when we came upon one of our sons jogging in the neighborhood. Donald stopped the car, rolled down the window, and questioned him. “Son, we told you to get your chores done first. Why are you out jogging?”

He was fourteen at the time, and his face fell at the implied accusation. “I did my work faster than everyone else.” His heart was clearly wounded. “You said we could go out after we finished.”

Sure enough, we arrived home to find his room and chores beautifully finished. Not only that, but he had left us a note on his bed. “Mom and Dad, thanks for all you do. I hurried and did my chores because that’s how you two always work around here.”

And just like that we were reminded of that critical family rule. Believe the best of each other.

Ashley Baxter Blake needed to remind herself about this rule when she began feeling frustrated by Cole's decision to spend time, emotions, and even possibly his future with Elise Walker. But Ashley came around.

Sometimes it's easy to forget that we're all flawed. We all make mistakes. Almost always when we do something that hurts someone else, that action was done on accident. And other times there is only the perception of error. As in the case with our son that day.

Life works out best when we operate under the restraint of this rule. Believe the best of those you love, and you will always be ready with a gentle answer. Assume positive things of those close to you, and you will always protect relationships. Even if the worst *has* occurred, assuming the best will create a better environment for healing, for finding common loving ground again.

Side note. That son returned home from his jog and found the two of us. He gave us a sweaty hug and grinned. "Good to know you and Dad are just human, after all." He stuck his chest out. "Plus, only Superman could finish his chores so fast!" We apologized and he told us he loved us. Then he headed up to shower.

Donald and I gave each other a knowing look. It had worked. Training our kids to believe the best about the other person had taught our son to do that with us. Even when we had failed to do that with him. It was a lesson learned, and one that Ashley eventually figured out, as well.

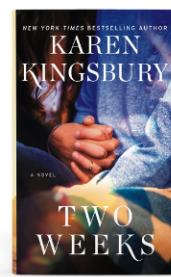
It is also easily found in Scripture.

"Therefore as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience."
– Colossians 3:12

1. How are the character traits listed above like clothing? Talk about what this means.
2. Which piece of "clothing" listed in this Bible verse do you wear most easily? Which do you struggle with? Explain.
3. Ashley struggled with seeing her son consider walking away from college for Elise. What do you think bothered Ashley most about Elise?

4. What was Ashley's turning point with Elise? How did God get her attention? Which part of Ashley's story in these chapters did you relate to the most? Discuss.
5. If you were Ashley's friend, what practical advice would you have given her about the situation with Cole and Elise?
6. When has someone believed the best about you? When has someone not believed the best? Talk about how differently these situations played out.
7. What are practical ways we can believe the best about the people we love? Can reminding ourselves about the beautiful past with a person be a tool toward making this relationship rule stick?
8. What were your favorite parts of chapters 20-22?
9. Which part of these chapters did you relate to the most?
10. How do you see God at work in this part of the book?

TWO WEEKS



Week 6

Beauty from Ashes – An Overview

Chapters 23-25

Nothing can erase the heartache and grief of losing a child. There is no forgetting the sorrow of childlessness or the ache of placing a child into the arms of another mother. No way of going back and rewriting the past. No do-overs.

But the blessing of living the Christian life is a promise God gives us amidst our greatest sadness. The promise that God will make beauty out of the ashes of our lives. The last chapter of our stories hasn't been written until we take our final breath.

Friends of ours had several healthy children when they welcomed a baby with severe special needs. This wasn't their plan and for a time they grieved the loss of their expectations about this child. They wept over what would never be for their littlest boy. He would never run or walk or play sports. Never be top of his class, a favorite among his friends. He might not ever talk.

But then they became keenly aware of the special needs community. Their research led them to a situation in Haiti where special needs children were often left to die. The reality caused this family to uproot their lives, sell their home and quit their jobs. They moved to Haiti and started an orphanage for Haitian children without sight or hearing, children with cerebral palsy and Down Syndrome.

Today this family lives a beautiful and rewarding life helping kids no one else wants to help. They run a ministry called *My Life Speaks*. They are committed to making their existence about these precious boys and girls in a barren area an hour outside of Port au Prince. A classic example of beauty from ashes.

For Theo and Alma, it was signing on as house parents at a group foster home. This change didn't bring their daughter back. But it gave them purpose in the sorrow. Beauty from ashes.

It was that way for Cole and Elise and also, of course, for Aaron and Lucy. Years of emptiness and sadness when it came to the lonely nursery were all worth it when they held that tiny baby girl for the first time.

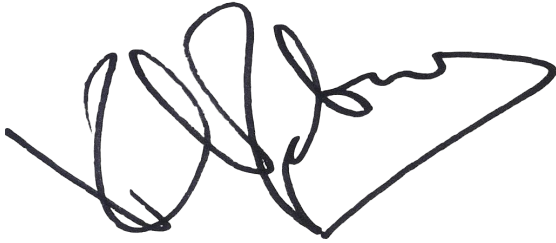
The Bible has something to say about seeing beauty from the ashes:

“The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted ... to comfort all who mourn ... to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.” – Isaiah 61:1-3

1. Take a minute and read the entire section of Scripture from the reference above. What does it say to you? Which part speaks to you the loudest today? Discuss this.
2. The Lord gives us the ability to help people through their seasons of tragedy and heartache. We get that ability through His Spirit. What do these verses say about mourning? Why is it important to mourn?
3. Psalm 30:5 says weeping may last for a night, but joy comes in the morning. Describe a time when you've seen this verse apply to your life?
4. Tell about a time when God made beauty from ashes in your story. What did you learn from this? Has it changed the way you look at heartbreak and tragedy?
5. Describe how beauty came from ashes for the characters in *Two Weeks*? What did these fictitious people learn about God through their times of sorrow?
6. Lamentations 3:22-23 says, “Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness.” What does this Scripture mean to you?
7. How have you see the Bible verses from Lamentations at work in the novel *Two Weeks*? What about your life?
8. What were your favorite parts of chapters 23-25?
9. Which part of these chapters did you relate to the most?
10. How has God used this book in your life?

Assignment: Please share your book with someone. Maybe buy an extra copy as a gift for someone who needs encouragement. A book cannot be life-changing sitting on a shelf. Also keep up with me at KarenKingsbury.com. Sign up for my free newsletter! I'm praying for you!

Much Love,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Karen Kingsbury'. The signature is stylized with large, overlapping loops and a long, sweeping tail that extends to the right and then curves back down.

Karen Kingsbury