



EAT, PRAY, LOVE (Cert 15)

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Overview: *Eat, Pray, Love* it or hate it. This story of a personal search for meaning and fulfilment in life is based on the number one bestselling book of the same title, by Elizabeth Gilbert.

Director: Ryan Murphy (2010)

Producer: Columbia Pictures

Length: 140 minutes **Cautions:** Includes mild sex references and strong language.

SUMMARY OF PLOT

Dissatisfied with her marriage, her work and the expectations of her culture, writer, Liz Gilbert (Julia Roberts), tries to break free. Initially making a new relationship in which she is introduced to Eastern religion, she still feels an inner emptiness and decides to take a 'gap year' to make a journey of self-discovery. She experiences different approaches to life, work and spirituality found in other cultures.

Her first stop is Italy, where she finds there is a different pace of life from that in New York. Here she learns to speak Italian and, more importantly, allows herself to appreciate good food, friendships and a more leisurely pace of life.

Next, she goes to India, but finds that although she is close to 'the Source', ie., the residence of her guru, she continues to feel disconnected. She comes through to a better understanding of this different culture and its spirituality as she makes new friends and as she listens to their advice and guidance. Liz also discovers more about her own personality and how this needs to be incorporated into her spiritual life.

Finally, Liz spends time in Bali. Here she adds another dimension to her spiritual life through the advice of Ketut (Hadi Subiyanto) and she meets the Brazilian,

Felipe (Javier Bardem). She has come some way in recognising her tendency to lose herself in relationships with others. Will taking the plunge with Felipe bring her back to her starting point, or has she really moved on?

SOME KEY ISSUES

The Protestant work ethic (PWE) – This might be summed up as 'idle hands are the devil's workshop' and has led to a philosophy of 'work harder and work longer to become a better person'. It's an attitude that can lead to individualism and materialism and to believing that our efforts in work and career improve our status and define us as people. Nevertheless, the value of the PWE is interesting historically. Given the economic and spiritual recession our nation and world is facing, could a revisiting of these ideas offer positive insights for us today?

Prayer and spirituality – Our culture seems to be more interested in Eastern spirituality than in traditional Christianity. This film is no exception. It attempts to explore the effort needed to discover and maintain a healthy spiritual life.

The relationship between love of self and love of others – An early mention of the main character's 'permeable membrane' describes her tendency to give all to others, to become depleted and identified largely in relationship to other people. The film tries to convey the journey of personal discovery that fits us for relating healthily towards other people.

FIRST REACTIONS

- Before looking at individual clips, share personal reactions to the film as a whole. What did the group find engaging about the film? How convincing did they find it in portraying a personal search for meaning and fulfilment? Some have

criticised the film for being indulgent and light-weight or portraying a very Western individualistic stance to spirituality and personal 'happiness'. Do you agree?

- If anyone in the group has read the book, briefly share how the film compares.
- Apparently, while filming *Eat, Pray, Love*, Julia Roberts became a Hindu. Does the film inspire you spiritually?

CLIPS AND IDEAS FOR RESPONDING

Clip 1 – DVD scene 9. Starts at 0.00 minutes to scene 10 ends 2.27 minutes (approx. 6 minutes).

This scene, first set in the barber's shop, sums up the continental approach to life. Rather than needing permission to relax and then not doing it very well (the Italian characters' criticism of Americans) the Italians claim to accept their need for rest and relaxation, and even to have perfected the art. The philosophy is summed up in the phrase 'the sweetness of doing nothing'. Eating is just one form of taking pleasure in life's 'ordinary' gifts.

Group response

What are your first reactions to:

- the Continental attitude to life and work as depicted in the film?
- the American (Western?) style of life and work that is portrayed in the film?
- In your opinion, are the generalisations justified? Discuss the drawbacks and benefits of both cultures in regard to lifestyle.
- Does it affect your view of the film to know that Liz Gilbert, who was already a successful writer, set out

to record this physical and emotional journey and that she did so in a disciplined way – by getting up early each day to write?

Find your place!

On a large sheet of flip chart paper, or similar, write:

- 'I can relax easily and am good at doing nothing.'
- On another sheet, write: 'I find it hard to relax and am always on the go.'
- Fix the statements to opposite ends of the room.
- Using a 'physical spectrum' approach, place yourself in the room somewhere between the two walls/statements, according to the level of your ability to enjoy 'the sweetness of doing nothing'.
- Encourage those who want to, to share their 'place' and the reasons behind their choices.

Individual/pairs activity

- Leading on from a conversation about defining a city in one word, there is a discussion about how Liz would define herself in one word. She considers the words, 'daughter', 'wife', 'girl-friend' and then decides on 'writer'. Another character challenges her: 'But that's what you do, not what you are'.

Individually:

- What three words would you use to describe yourself?
- Are they 'doing' words or a 'being' words? ie, do you describe yourself in terms of what you do rather than who you are?
- Do you have a sense of wanting to aim for other words to describe yourself?

In pairs:

- If you know each other fairly well, give each other three words that convey the character of the other. And discuss these together.

Clip 2 – DVD scene 15. approx. 4.23 minutes.

Liz has moved on to an ashram in India, to pursue the spiritual life that first interested her in New York. Now she has come to the place where her guru resides, but Liz can't access the mental and spiritual peace she seeks.

'Richard from Texas' tells Liz she needs to 'swim the moat if she wants to get to the castle', but he also says 'the meditation room is on the inside'. He is drawing two themes together: effort is required to achieve results; and spiritual growth comes through work on our inner selves, a work that involves 'surrender'.

In the group

- Use a graffiti wall to write up or draw images, examples and connected words of 'surrendering'.
- Is the task of surrendering active or passive?
- Suggest 'five steps to surrender', eg: recognise when you are overwhelmed...

In pairs

Discuss and share your views on:

- How is work on our inner life measured?
- In terms of how much time we spend on it? How much physical effort we give to it? How much peace we experience? How many good works we achieve?
- Other factors...?

Additional clip: DVD scene 21 starts 4.53 minutes to end

Ketut's spiritual advice to Liz, which includes his admonition to smile with the face, the mind and the liver.

- How does this advice 'sit with you'? Is spiritual growth about feeling good or being good? How can Ketut's 'spiritual prescription' aid both aims?

Clip 3 – DVD scene 27. Starts at 0.00 minutes to 7.06 minutes (approx. 7 minutes).

Wayan, Liz's friend who is a natural healer, warns Liz against indulging in 'too much pleasure', pointing out that feasting to extremes can make one sick. Liz refocuses by asking for her own birthday gifts to be diverted to Wayan so that she can buy a house. There is a play on words as both Wayan's daughter and the Italian word for 'everybody' is Tutti. Liz emails her friends: 'when you set out in the world to help yourself, sometimes you end up helping Tutti'.

As a group:

- How convincing was it that Liz seemed to learn the philanthropy question immediately?
- Should we aim to help ourselves or to help others?
- Is it ever possible to aim for either, without it having an effect on the other?
- Both Liz and Felipe have gone through painful divorces and are wary about committing to each other. Here, Felipe declares that he is willing to love again, but Liz holds back. They argue; Liz is afraid that she will lose the balance in her life that she has discovered. Felipe challenges her understanding of balance, saying: 'Balance is not

letting anybody love you less than you love yourself.' Is this a recipe for indulgence and selfishness or for good health and wholeness?

Individually

- Consider the main relationships in your life. Is there an equity in your love for yourself and the love others have for you? Or is there love that is 'out of kilter'? If so, how could you achieve a better balance?

GOD'S STORY

The Protestant work ethic

Traditional Jewish-Christian beliefs considered work, especially manual work, to be a curse inflicted on the human race as a punishment for the disobedience of Adam and Eve (see **Genesis 3.19**). This resulted in the religious and intellectual work of monks in their monasteries being regarded more highly than any manual labour. The combined teaching of Luther and Calvin in the Reformation led to work being regarded more highly. They suggested that each person had a calling by God to become all that they could be, resulting in good stewardship of their gifts and talents, and good works to the needy in society. See **Matthew 25.14–30; 2 Thessalonians 3.6–16; James 1.27**

- **Read Psalm 127.1–2** – This psalm points out the fruitlessness of working all hours if God is not in the planning and the construction of the family and the house; or in the defence of the city. It makes a comment on how we might 'burn the candle at both ends', but that this is in vain if our efforts are not motivated by God's agenda.
- In pairs, consider the following verses: **Luke 13.24; 2 Pet 1.3–8**. These are 'make every effort' verses. What kinds of efforts could be involved in achieving the aims that are specified? To what

extent are our efforts necessary for spiritual growth?

- The following website gives a helpful historical and interpretive information on what is known as the 'Protestant Work Ethic':
<http://www.urbana.org/complete-book-of-everyday-christianity/work-ethic-protestant>

Individually

- Using creative materials, draw a tree with roots under the surface of the ground. Label the roots as the spoken or unspoken messages regarding an attitude to work that you have heard from your parents, teachers or other influential people in your life, eg. 'God helps those who help themselves ...'
- Go on to label the branches and shoots of the tree as the effects of these messages.
- To what extent have you made those messages your own? Are there any you would like to change? Have you forged new messages for yourself? What kinds of fruit does your tree produce?

In small groups, share and discuss your trees.

Prayer and spirituality

Read Psalm 131 – A picture can say a thousand words and this psalm is a striking example – making a powerful statement about Christian and Jewish perspectives on prayer and relationship to God. The psalmist describes a picture of a child with its mother in peace, stillness and contentment. The term, 'weaned' shows that this is a baby or child that is no longer at the breast. The child is becoming independent and distinct from its parent yet still within a close and reliant relationship.

In the whole group

- Discuss how this picture might offer insights into how people might relate to God.

In pairs

Consider the following verses: **Ephesians 2.8; 2 Timothy 1.6**

- When it comes to the place of prayer and spiritual growth— how much depends on us and how much depends on God?
- The effort required in prayer: See Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, **Matthew 26.36–46**. Discuss the kinds of effort involved as Jesus prays. What kind of effort is involved in our praying in community and individually?
- Check out the website, lyfe.org.uk for group resources to support people in developing a deeper, more integrated Christian spiritual life..

Love of self and love of others

Read Luke 10.25–37 – A lawyer, well-versed in the Jewish Scriptures, comes to Jesus wanting answers on his life's journey. He wants clarity on who is his neighbour and Jesus tells this story in reply. The characters are drawn from the 'goodies' and 'baddies' of the time; and typically of Jesus, he turns the accepted labels and assumptions on their head. He strips the answer down to the qualities of character that are shown in our actions, rather than staying within accepted norms or paying lip service alone to the spiritual law.

- Do you think Jesus answers the question, 'Who is my neighbour?' Why or why not?
- The original question asked to whom the lawyer should show love, but Jesus tells a story both about giving and receiving love. Does this lead us to

consider that our receiving of another's love is a kind of action?

- Is my love of neighbour shown by how close I allow people to me?
- How easy or difficult do you find it to receive from others, especially those who might be considered to be 'beneath' you? Are you more comfortable in giving help or in receiving it?
- Read or sing the words of 'Make Me a Channel of Your Peace' (for these see for example, hymnlyrics.org). The words are attributed to St Francis. Do you agree with the sentiment that we should seek more to give consolation, understanding and love than to receive these for ourselves? Is it desirable, healthy and possible to live a completely selfless life?

Individual exercise

- Draw two large circles of an equal size on a large piece of flip chart paper. Label one circle 'Others' and the second circle 'Self'.
- Inside the first circle, write or draw the ways that you show love to the people in your life and in the world. Inside the second circle, write or draw the ways in which you show love to yourself.
- Are you happy with the result? Is there anything you would like to change?
- Flip the paper over and drawing on the insights gained from the previous activity, draw the circles so that they overlap and in the overlapping area draw or write the ways in which you care for yourself at the same time as you care for others.

In pairs or small groups:

- Discuss your circles and share your observations in as much depth as you are comfortable with. You

may want to keep some of your observations private.

- If appropriate, close by offering your flip chart pages to God and pray that Jesus would be the centre of each and every circle you have drawn.

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