

What Good is a Book Club?

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by Isa Fillinger

What goes through your head when you hear the words, "book club"? For me it has conjured up a list of images including but not limited to:

- A bunch of scholarly men in tweed jackets, sitting in an Ivy League study, smoking cigars, nursing glasses of Scotch and pontificating on books that I've only lied about reading. I imagine the discussion being more of a competition to see who could sound the most intelligent, and less about building bridges between the text and their own lives.
- My class discussion sections in undergrad, which bore remarkably similar characteristics to image #1, minus the cigars and Scotch, but definitely including me lying about having done the reading.
- A gathering of harried moms who meet at Chick-Fil-A, discussing books they'd *like* to read while they monitor their children on the playground and pull stray pieces of waffle fry from their hair.

Despite my love of reading, with these images and former experiences floating around in my head, I found myself hesitant to want to join the women's book club at OBC. I'd ask, "*What actually is a book club? What is it good for?*" After pouring out the spirits and the academia-laden intelligence competitions, what are you left with?

What follows is my answer, and why I think, for at least five reasons, you *should* come to OBC's book club.

1. **You will read books you would probably never otherwise read.**

I'm a binge-reader within certain genres. It doesn't mean I'm unwilling to read outside of those genres, but most of the time it doesn't occur to me to branch out. Whether you are a "fantasy/mystery/historical fiction-only" or "nonfiction or bust" kind of lady, I guarantee you will only be helped, not hindered in the reading of other genres. Remember why your mother told you to eat your vegetables? The same holds true here: It's good for you!

2. **You will meet and talk to women with whom you may never have otherwise spoken or met.**

Despite my outgoing personality, it is hard as a single, 25-year-old woman to meet other women at OBC. There is nothing wrong with ministries that cater to meeting women where they are in a particular stage of life. However, the book club is unique in that you can meet women of any age or relationship status. This is a good and healthy thing as it gives us perspective outside of our own stages of life.

3. **You will find community.**

As I already mentioned, I'm not a very shy person, but I have been surprised and encouraged by how much more comfortable I am reaching out to women at OBC on a Sunday morning because of the time I spent with them at book club. And here's a bonus: you will always have something to talk about with them. This makes those initial interactions with someone at least slightly less awkward.

Full disclosure: I dislike first meetings much the same as I dislike the opening few chapters of a book. I just want to get to the good stuff. But I have found that community building is similar to reading books; it's slow going at the beginning. It may even be, shall we say, "boring" until we make up our minds within the first few "chapters" whether we're going to stick with it or pick up a different "book." But if we press on through those first few awkward, weird, or even uninteresting interactions, we can find ourselves in the midst of something wonderful, beautiful, and exciting, just as in a really great book.

4. You will gain something whether you speak or listen.

I get it. Some may not really like talking in front of people. Or maybe you don't mind, but you need more time than is normally allotted to process what you've read or what someone else has said. That's okay! Our book club is only the beginning of the conversation. So even if you are like one of my sweet sisters who is silent the whole time during the monthly book club meeting, I can promise you will find women like me who are ready to listen to your thoughts later on, whenever that may be.

And if you like to talk, it's such a relief to have a safe space to do so, without fear of being teased for how many thoughts and observations come tumbling out. Book club is not school. You will not be forced to speak, nor will you be strategically ignored in order to "give someone else a turn who hasn't answered yet" (My worst nightmare as a student in discussion-based classes). Come as you are. Verbal and quiet-processors are all welcome.

5. You will be thankful for the opportunity to use books as a safe way to discuss real issues that affect you.

Yes, I am outgoing, and yes, I talk a lot. However, this has not necessarily translated to me talking deeper issues I may struggle with. Coming to book club has allowed me to use themes discussed within the books as a way to be more honest with others and myself. I honestly can't think of anything less appealing than sitting in a room with women I don't yet know well, and declaring that I wrestle with depression. However, I have been able to come to book club, discuss a book character that is fighting depression or other mental illness and say, "I so relate to this character." It may be too vulnerable to speak up and voice your own doubts about your faith, but then you come to book club and discuss a book about powerful Christian women, many of whom wrestled with the same doubts about God and their faith.

This to me is the ultimate beauty of book club: a group of women who may not know each other well, coming together to meet one another just where they are, reading books that will also meet them just where they are. My hope is that even if you are not a reader, even if you hate to read, you will give book club a chance. Give the stories a chance, but even more, give women like me a chance to fumble through the first few "pages" of meeting you, in order to grow together in community, and experience the ultimate story that God is writing in each of our lives'.