



DISCOVER THE SPIRIT
THAT CONNECTS US ALL



COLLATERAL BEAUTY

DISCUSSION GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

When a successful New York advertising executive suffers a great tragedy he retreats from life. While his concerned friends try desperately to reconnect with him, he seeks answers from the universe by writing letters to Love, Time and Death. But it's not until his notes bring unexpected personal responses that he begins to understand how these constants interlock in a life fully lived, and how even the deepest loss can reveal moments of meaning and beauty.

Few experiences are as profound and powerful as the loss of a loved one. The ways in which people respond to that and try to find their way back to life and love is at once deeply personal and universally human. Focusing on one man's difficult progress after the death of his child, the inspiring holiday film *Collateral Beauty* suggests that even the darkest circumstances contain moments of light, and that the connections we forge with one another are reminders that life is still worth living. Below is a series of discussion starters for conversations around this beautiful and emotional film.

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WHAT IS YOUR WHY?

Collateral Beauty opens with this simple, yet deep question. Why did you get out of bed this morning? Why do you come to this job? Why are you with your spouse? Boiled down, these questions are, essentially, about the meaning of your life.

We often move through life on auto-pilot: we get up, get the kids ready, send them off to school, go to work...you're familiar with the drill. For the most part, these can be rich, full lives. However, we can also get stuck in a rut and, at times like these, it might be helpful to ask ourselves, "What is my why?"

Perhaps the answers will reaffirm our life choices, but maybe they will force us to make new ones. Better yet, engaging this question might even help us find meaning in the seemingly meaningless parts of our lives.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. Your turn: what is your why?
2. Think about the people you are closest to. Can they answer this question? Do you see differences between people that can answer this question quickly and those that struggle to find, or don't have, an answer to it?



LOVE, TIME, AND DEATH

Collateral Beauty suggests that we are all driven by three abstractions: love, time, and death. We all long for love, wish for more time, and fear death. In a sense, these could be broad answers to the opening question, “What is your why?”

There’s deep truth to this claim. We all know those experiences, but the film points to a more complex reality. Some of us fear love. Some people, who find themselves in great pain, long for death. Others fear the passing of time. *Collateral Beauty* is a helpful film because it implicitly asks us to stop and feel—or consider—our emotions, not just during the film, but every day.

What are the components of my experiences (physical, emotional, spiritual, or otherwise)? What am I longing for in this moment? What am I afraid of? Why do I want more? This all seems to be a way of affirming the ancient wisdom that the unexamined life is not worth living.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. What do you think about this claim that we are motivated by love, time, and death? Is it meaningful to you? Do you agree with it?
2. Do love, time, and death shape the way you live your life? If so, how? If not, are there other abstractions that guide you through life?

COLLATERAL BEAUTY IS EVERYWHERE

Perhaps the boldest claim that *Collateral Beauty* makes is that collateral beauty exists. Many of us will be familiar with the term, collateral damage, which refers to the ancillary suffering that often spins out from great tragedies, but what is collateral beauty? As the film teaches us, it is the recognition that, from even the darkest of times, beauty, hope, recovery, and even goodness can be found.

As it is with collateral damage, finding and fully understanding the presence of collateral beauty requires time and distance from the tragedies that affect us. We need perspective on the event, we need time for wounds to heal (both emotional and physical), and we need the wisdom to know what can be repaired and what can't. No matter the event, collateral beauty is waiting to be found on the horizon.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. What do you make of this concept of collateral beauty? Have you experienced it? Do you know others that have?
2. Consider people that you know who are going through difficult times. Are there ways in which you can be part of or help them discover the collateral beauty in their experiences?



WE ARE NOT ALONE

When we undergo difficult seasons in life, we can be tempted to shut ourselves off from the outside world. This is an understandable reaction. We want to be angry or sad or quiet, and we might be afraid that this will make other people uncomfortable. On the other hand, we might not want to hear what other people have to say to us because we feel that it won't help.

Yet Collateral Beauty points to a deeper truth. We were neither made to be alone nor can we ever be alone for long without inflicting further damage on our lives. This is reality, not consolation. We are never alone in our suffering. Around the world, people share in similar experiences of tragedy. While loss is deeply personal and unique, it is also universal.

This is why support groups can be so effective. People with shared experiences gather together to just be together. They know what to say and, more importantly, what not to say to one another. They know that listening—fulfilling others' desires to be heard—is vital. Perhaps the best thing we can do is to be facilitators of this support.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. Is it helpful for you to think about shared experiences of suffering? Why or why not?
2. Where do you see support groups or communities that support one another around you? Are they effective? What makes them so?

PATIENCE WHILE HEALING

Collateral Beauty is built around one universal truth. We will all undergo dark times in our lives whether that be the loss of a family member or a friend, the loss of a job, being diagnosed with an illness, the list, unfortunately, goes on. While we hope that we can move through them, we rarely do so unscathed. Sometimes these scars are deeper than others and while we can heal, we are forever changed. This is a powerful and important lesson for us all.

We have a natural inclination to want to fix what is broken. We want to comfort our family and friends when they are hurting. So we say and do the best we can: we pray, we prepare meals, we visit, we send gifts, we tell them everything is going to be o.k. But at the same time, we sense that this may not be true.

We need to accept and embrace the possibility that some wounds take a long time to heal. It's certainly not a comfortable place to be, nor should it be, especially when we all share the desire to minimize suffering as quickly as possible. When we encounter these moments in life, may we find the patience and wisdom to be a quiet presence for those who need that the most.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. Have you seen people experiencing healing after a lengthy time of grieving or suffering? Have you seen other people be too quick to try to "fix" someone? What did you take away from these experiences?
2. Think about people around you who have lost someone close to them. How did they change? How did you interact with them through that experience?



NOTHING'S EVER DEAD

In *Collateral Beauty*, one of the characters says, “Nothing’s ever dead if you look at it right.” This might initially sound like an empty platitude, but perhaps we expect we all know it to be true, given time and perspective.

Naturally, we live in a process of death and renewal. The old dies off and gives fuel to the new. Spring, summer, winter, and fall are the most basic of these cycles. In our own lives, even after great loss, we know the departed live on in memories, through their descendants, and in the lives of those they influenced along the way. This plays out in many ways.

In many Asian and Hispanic cultures, the death date of a loved one or family member is more important than their birth date. Families honor the deceased by celebrating on the anniversary of their death, thus keeping them (or at least the memory of them) alive for another year. Many faiths retain hope in an afterlife, which provides not only a place of eternal comfort for the deceased, but is a source of comfort for the grieving here on earth. The real challenge becomes not overcoming grief, but identifying life in and after death.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. Talk about experiences of death and loss in your life. Where have you seen newness and new life emerge in those experiences?
2. How do you honor and preserve the memory of deceased family members and loved ones? Is this a major part of your life? Should it be?

LIFE IS A BALANCING ACT

The three abstractions of love, time, and death might define much of our movement through this world, but within them are a host of experiences and feelings that fight for our attention and give shape to our daily lives. They're often in tension with one another: work/family; joy/sorrow; comfort/suffering; and the list goes on and on. It's natural to want to minimize all the negative experiences, but we can't do that with the expectation that life should or will be free of them.

Collateral Beauty encourages us to create a more balanced life by being good stewards of the time we are given and giving adequate attention to family, friends, work, and play. In the end, this will, hopefully, prepare us to meet the sorrows and challenges of life with both stronger relationships and a clearer outlook.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. Talk about the balance in your life.
Where are you strongest? Where are you weaker? Why is that?
2. What are practices you can undertake to strike a stronger balance in your daily life?

