

Lauren Akins

WITH MARK
DAGOSTINO

LIVE *in*
LOVE

BOOK CLUB KIT

Discussion Questions

1. In her letter to the reader at the beginning of the book, Lauren writes that fans often call her and Thomas Rhett, “the ‘perfect’ couple.” In what ways does the true story of their relationship—the one Lauren shares in *Live in Love*—reveal their struggle and growth, both as a couple and as individuals? In what ways does Lauren’s story still seem like a fairy-tale come true?
2. Reflecting on her childhood and where her idea of what her adult life would eventually look like, Lauren writes: “So much of what we want as adults gets formed in our hearts when we’re little kids, and yet, do any of us really remember how we first came up with the particular set of expectations we have for our own lives?” What dreams did you have for your own life that were formed in childhood? How have those dreams come true or not now that you’re older? Are you able to remember when those early desires were shaped?
3. Throughout the book, Lauren describes her very close relationship with her mom, Lisa. Lisa was the “fun mom” when Lauren was a kid; she was with Lauren and provided significant emotional support when Lauren learned of Hunter’s death; she moved to Uganda when Lauren was too pregnant to wait there while Willa Gray’s adoption was finalized; and she offered a lot of honest wisdom and solace when Lauren was struggling as a mom to two young kids while Thomas Rhett’s career took off. In what ways do you think this close mother-daughter relationship shaped her adult life? Think about your own relationship with your family—how have your family members influenced you, positively and/or negatively?
4. Lauren recalls that Thomas Rhett joined her elementary school in second grade, but that she never really noticed him (aside from the time he played Scrooge in the school Christmas play). She writes: “You never really know who you’re not paying attention to, right now. You can just never know who might end up being really important to you later in life.” Can you think of someone who was in your life for a long while before you understood their importance to you? Who was it? When and how did you begin to see what they would mean to you?
5. Lauren describes her father’s parenting style as “open book parenting.” What did Lauren’s parents do that you think lead her to characterize their parenting philosophy this way? If you are a parent, how would you describe your parenting style? If you are not a parent, how would you describe the parenting style in the home where you grew up?

Discussion Questions

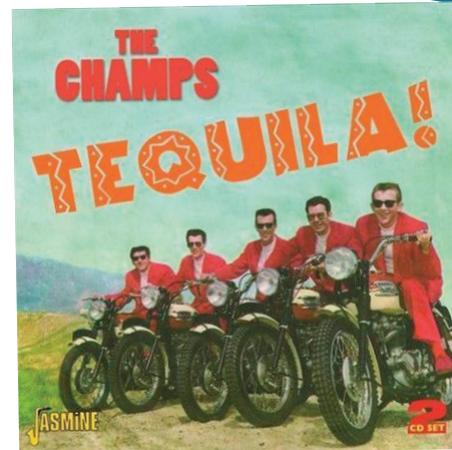
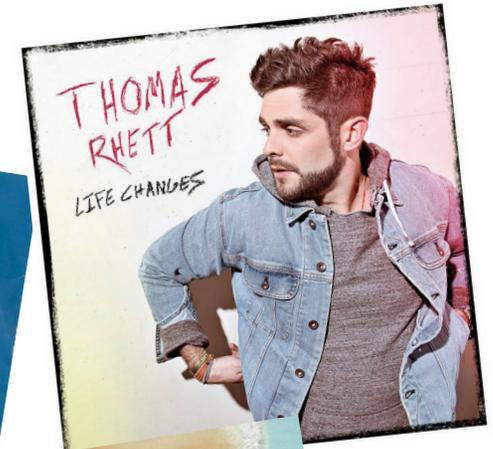
6. Lauren and Thomas Rhett dated in high school, breaking up near the end of their sophomore year. Lauren writes, “There was no part of me that wanted to hurt Thomas Rhett. None. I was sure we’d be able to be friends again. It would just take some time. . . . We weren’t going to throw that away.” Over the next several years, Lauren and Thomas Rhett dated other people but they remained friends and their families stayed close. Did this surprise you? How do you think they were able to make that friendship work? Have you ever been able to stay friends with an ex?
7. When discussing her belief in God with a friend who was struggling in his life and his faith, Lauren retells a story her father once told her. She describes a perfectly planted garden existing in the middle of the woods, which had to have been planted by someone. Lauren says that her faith in God is similar: when she thinks about “the complexity and perfection” of our world, she feels “there’s something that did this. There’s someone or some thing to attribute it to . . . and if you’re willing to search to figure out what that looks like, you’ll find what you’re looking for.” What do you think about that explanation? Would you describe your faith in a similar way? Why or why not? Has anyone ever shared a story like this with you to describe their belief in God? What was it?
8. Lauren recalls the one kiss with Thomas Rhett that changed everything. “I felt it all the way down to my toes . . . with that one kiss, I realized that I’d been overlooking the greatest relationship in my life and it had been right in front of me the whole time.” Have you ever had one moment that changed the way you saw your entire life or someone in it? What was it?
9. After her friend Hunter’s death, Lauren returns to college and struggles with her coursework. At the suggestion of a professor, she seeks help at the campus counseling center. “My counselor served as a psychological outlet and gave me a place to process and address all of my heartbreaking thoughts and serious anxiety.” Later, when preparing for their marriage, and then when having difficulty adjusting to the demands of parenthood, Lauren and Thomas Rhett seek counseling and even attend a multiple-day intensive couples counseling retreat, which they both find helpful and rewarding. If you feel comfortable, discuss a time in your life when you or someone you know sought out therapy or counseling. What was that experience like? Was it beneficial to you? Why or why not?
10. Lauren describes the transformative experience she had in Haiti on her first trip with Suzanne and 147 Million Orphans. Although at first Lauren felt overwhelmed by the depth of people’s need in that impoverished country, she came to see the impact of doing only what she *could* do. “My reason for being here was to do my part. Not everyone’s part. My part. What I could give. As crushed and sad and upset and shocked as I as by all the devastation . . . I started helping . . . just one child at a time.” What does “Love one at a time” mean to you? Discuss examples from your own life where one small act has larger ripple effects.

Discussion Questions

11. Lauren was at first very reluctant to participate in the music video for “Die a Happy Man”—a video that went on to garner millions of views, and which helped to boost Thomas Rhett’s early career. Did you relate to her reluctance? If you had been in her place, what would you have done? Why do you think Lauren later saw her participation in that video as part of God’s plan for her life?
12. In the midst of grappling with the decision of whether or not to adopt Willa Gray, Lauren attends a friend’s birthday where a stranger approaches her and shares some prophetic wisdom. “God needs you to know: He’s already taken care of all of it,” this woman tells Lauren. What did you think about this moment? Have there been times in your life when you’ve seen signs or when it felt like the universe or God put someone in your path so that they could help you on your journey? Describe those occurrences. What did they mean to you? How did you feel in those moments?
13. Lauren describes the ways that Thomas Rhett’s faith evolved through the tumultuous process of adopting Willa Gray, later reflecting that he “found more strength to support [her] when [her] spirits got down . . . when [she] started to feel weaker, Thomas Rhett became stronger.” In what ways are Lauren and Thomas Rhett able to balance one another and offer one another exactly what they each need? Do you have a relationship in your life—it does not need to be a romantic one, it could be a friendship or a family relationship—that offers a similar balance? How? What is that like?
14. Lauren is open and honest about how hard it was to be a mom to two young girls. She was surprised when she began to feel resentful of Thomas Rhett’s blossoming music career. Can you relate to Lauren’s struggle? How? Lauren describes beginning to feel “estranged from [her] husband. Even when he was in the same room.” Do you ever feel a similar loneliness? Why or why not? What do you do about it?
15. As Thomas Rhett becomes more and more famous, Lauren begins to realize how difficult it would be to create the type of “low-key, normal home” she had grown up in and always dreamed of creating for her own family. At one point she even realizes that “the type of family life I had always thought we’d build together just wasn’t going to happen.” Still, she and Thomas Rhett have built a wonderfully warm and love-filled family. In what ways have Lauren’s early dreams come true? In what ways has she had to compromise? When you think of your own life, what compromises have you made? What dreams have come true for you?

Playlist

- “What a Wonderful World” by Louis Armstrong
- “Sixteen” by Thomas Rhett
- “The Way You Look Tonight” by Frank Sinatra
- “Africa” by Toto
- “Die a Happy Man” by Thomas Rhett
- “Let It Go” from the movie *Frozen*
- “Tequila” by the Champs
- “Oceans (Where Feet May Fail)” by Hillsong
- “Sinners Like Me” by Eric Church



Recipes

Rosemary Paloma:

- 1 oz Tequila of your choice (Anejo is Lauren's favorite!)
- 1 lime
- 1 grapefruit Topo Chico
- 4 sprigs rosemary
- 2 cups sugar
- 2 cups water
- Ice
- Coarse kosher salt

1. Start by boiling equal parts sugar and water to make a syrup. Once boiling add rosemary.
2. Rub a lime along the rim of the glass and dip in coarse kosher salt and fill with ice.
3. Add the juice of half a lime, four ounces of grapefruit Topo Chico, half an ounce of rosemary syrup, and 1 shot of tequila to glass and stir.
4. Garnish with rosemary or jalapeños (Lauren's favorite!).



Recipes

Buffalo Chicken Dip:

- 4 oz cream cheese
- ½ cup sour cream or ranch dressing
- ¼ cup Frank's Red Hot
- 2 cups shredded rotisserie chicken
- Scallions for garnish

1. Preheat oven to 375 degrees.
2. Mix all ingredients in a large bowl and spread evenly over a shallow baking dish.
3. Bake for 20 minutes or until bubbly.



Recipes

Mexican 7-Layer Dip:

- 1 14 oz can refried beans
- Guacamole (1 medium package or 2 large avocados)
- 2 cups salsa
- 2 cups sour cream
- 1 package shredded cheese
- 2 2.5 oz cans black olives
- 3 stalks scallions, chopped
- 1 package Taco seasoning

1. Start by mixing sour cream and taco seasoning until blended well. Drain salsa so your dip doesn't become runny.
2. Pick a shallow baking dish and start layering ingredients starting with the refried beans.
3. Then the guacamole, sour cream with seasoning, shredded cheese, black olives, and green onions. Repeat until all ingredients are used.

