

Leader Guide

To every thing
there is a **season**,
and a time to every purpose
under the heaven”

There is a **Season**



Experiencing Contentment
In Every Season of Life

Laurie Cole

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Second Edition—2007

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Priority Ministries
P. O. Box 590663
Houston, Texas 77259-0663
www.priorityministries.org

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Contents

A Letter to Small Group Leaders	2
Study and Leader Goals and Suggested Weekly Schedule	3
Preparing to Lead Your Small Group	4
Leading Your Small Group	5

LEADER GUIDES

INTRODUCTORY WEEK—Getting Honest: Are You Content?	7
WEEK ONE—She Said He Said: Proverbs 31 vs. Ecclesiastes 1	9
WEEK TWO—The Seasons of Life	11
WEEK THREE—The Seasons of David’s Life	13
WEEK FOUR—In Every Season: Godsend and Giants	15
WEEK FIVE—The Seasons of Your Life	17
WEEK SIX—Rejoicing in Every Season	19
WEEK SEVEN—Doing Good in Every Season	21
WEEK EIGHT—Seeing Good in Every Season	23
WEEK NINE—The Key to Contentment	25
WEEK TEN—The Harmony of Proverbs 31 and Ecclesiastes 1	27
Completed LISTENING GUIDES	29

A Letter to Small Group Leaders

MY DEAR SISTER,

What a blessing and honor it is to co-labor with you through this study, *There is a Season*. Thank you for your willingness to serve as a small group leader and for your desire to disciple other women. I fully believe the small group time will be the most important element of this Bible study. Through the encouragement, accountability, and support of small groups led by well prepared, Spirit-filled leaders (that's *you!*), you are about to experience the blessing of seeing God at work in the hearts and lives of others—and there's just nothing better than that.

Accepting the call to lead a small group is a big step of faith. Some new leaders are probably feeling some degree of apprehension, but others may be experiencing enormous anxiety. Perhaps you've even entertained some of the following thoughts:

- What was I *thinking* when I volunteered to lead a small group?
- Who am I to lead a small group?
- What if *no one* wants to share during small group time?
- What if I have a difficult group member?
- What if someone asks me a question I can't answer?

If you've had thoughts and questions like that, I want you to know something: I can *so* relate! As I have written this Bible study, I've entertained my own share of apprehensive thoughts and doubts like these:

- What was I *thinking* when I stuck my neck out and said, "Yes, I'll write a Bible study"?
- Who am I to even consider writing a Bible study?
- What if *no one* even wants to use this study?
- What if they think the homework is a total bore?
- What if no one gets anything out of the study?

At the risk of sounding like someone who may need years and years of Christian counseling, I've listed my own questions and insecurities because I want you to know that you and I are probably in the same boat. And, if we don't quell these questions and these fears, our boat will remain forever in the harbor, and you and I will never experience the blessing and rewards of launching out into the depths of faithful obedience and service to God.

As I've written this study, and as I've faced my own fears, questions, and doubts, the Holy Spirit has consistently brought one scripture to mind. For me, this verse has become God's answer to every anxious question that threatens to overwhelm me as I seek to follow His call on my life. Here it is:

Faithful is He that calleth you, who will also do it.

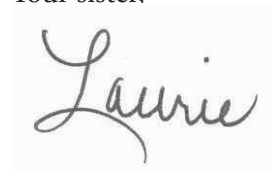
—1 Thessalonians 5:24, KJV

This short, succinct verse (easy for even me to memorize) reminds me that if God has called me to a task, He is faithful to perform that task through me. **He will do it!** It's not about you or me and what we have to do for God. It's all about *Him* and what *He* is able to do despite us and through us!

As I wrote this study, 1 Thessalonians 5:24 hung on the wall in front of my desk as a constant encouragement. If you are experiencing any apprehension or fear about leading your small group, I want to encourage you to do something. Write out 1 Thessalonians 5:24, and put it in a place where you will see it consistently. And when the doubts arise and the questions come, claim this truth and rest in the faithful God who called you, who also will perform His call *through* you.

Bless you, dear sister, for your willingness to accept God's call upon your life to lead. Be assured of my prayers for you as you step out by faith to disciple others. May the spiritual growth and fruit of our labor bring glory to the One we serve because we know He alone is the One "...*who causes the growth*" (1 Corinthians 3:6).

Your sister,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Laurie". The signature is written in black ink on a light-colored background.

Study and Leader Goals

THE GOALS OF THIS STUDY ARE:

- 1) To enable others to study the Bible and to encounter God through the pages of His Word in a life-changing way.
- 2) To encourage others to become spiritually sensitive and responsive to the work of the Holy Spirit as they apply God's Word to their lives.
- 3) To equip others so that they will grow in grace, knowledge, and intimacy with God.

The homework each week will include opportunities for students to experience Bible study in a hands-on, in-depth way. However, the homework also will include opportunities for students to journal the spiritual insights and applications they have received from the Holy Spirit. As a result, students will grow not only in their knowledge and understanding of God and His Word, but also in grace, sensitivity, and intimacy with the Lord.

THE GOALS OF THE SMALL GROUP LEADER ARE:

- 1) To facilitate a scripture-based discussion from the weekly Bible study homework.
- 2) To facilitate a Hebrews 10:24 environment so that group members may share and encourage one another to grow in their relationship with the Lord and to apply His Word to their lives.

"Let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds."

—Hebrews 10:24

SUGGESTED WEEKLY SCHEDULE

1 hour: Small group discussion

15-minute break: Refreshments and fellowship time

1 hour: Video lecture by Laurie Cole (see Note below)

NOTE: Video lectures for this study are available as a DVD set and may be purchased online at www.priorityministries.org. Each video is approximately 45-50 minutes in length.

Preparing to Lead Your Small Group

1. Pray for your group members faithfully and diligently throughout the study. Each time you meet with your group, you will ask them to share their prayer requests. Please be diligent to pray over these requests throughout the week. Also, please be sensitive to intercede for your group members as the Holy Spirit brings them to your heart. Ask Him how to pray for them, and you will find your prayers going beyond the requests they have shared with you in class.

Let your group members know of your prayers and concern for them by writing them a note or by sending them an encouraging email as the Lord leads you.

2. Thoroughly complete your Bible study homework each week. Be cautious, however, not to get caught up in just the “doing” of your homework. Each day you study, ask the Lord to do a fresh work in your life. Respond each day to His Word as He leads you.
3. After you have completed your own week’s study, read through the leader guide for that lesson noting the following:
 - a. **The weekly goal(s) stated for that lesson.** These goals are to help you keep the small group time focused and on target. You should not state the goal(s) at the beginning of your share time, but you may want to use them as you wrap up and bring your small group time to a conclusion each week.
 - b. **The questions given for that lesson.** Customize your discussion by asking the Lord to show you which questions to use in your discussion. Check the boxes beside each question you feel led to include in your small group time.

NOTE: The box beside the closing question on each Leader Guide has already been checked because you will always want to use this question to close your small group time.

4. You also may find it helpful to determine how much time you plan to spend on each question you have chosen. If so, make a note beside the questions you have chosen of the specific time you plan to spend on each one. You may choose to spend more time on some questions than you do on others.
5. Finally, claim the following scriptures and rest in God’s promises to you as you lead your small group:

*I am the vine, you are the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in him,
he will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing.*

—John 15:5

*Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were
wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth.
But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise;*

God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.

*He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things
that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before Him.*

*It is because of Him that you are in Christ Jesus, Who has become for us
wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.*

Therefore, as it is written: ‘Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.’

—1 Corinthians 1:26-31

But He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

—2 Corinthians 12:9-10

I can do everything through (Christ) Who gives me strength.

—Philippians 4:13

And don't forget 1 Thessalonians 5:24 (KJV):

Faithful is He that calleth you, Who also will do it.

Leading Your Small Group

1. Your discussion each week should be focused on the two primary goals of the small group leader given to you on page 3.
2. As you meet with your group each week, strive to establish a comfortable atmosphere in which your members will feel free to share what they have studied and learned. Your group discussion should be enjoyable and conversational and not formal or restrained. **NOTE: The following is a personal note from Laurie:**

I think the best way to describe the type of discussion I pray you will have is to give you a personal illustration from my own life. Years ago, when I was in my mid-twenties, my husband, Bill, and I were in music evangelism with my brother, Jay, and his wife, Karen. We traveled from church to church (taking our toddlers and pulling our travel trailers behind us) many months each year.

Karen and I, of course, saw each other daily. As we were together, watching our children playing or cooking together, we would often share with one another what the Lord was doing in our lives. We shared what we were learning from God's Word, from Christian books we read, and from our prayer and quiet time. These conversations were sweet, mutually enriching, and deeply beneficial for both of us. As we opened up and shared the intimate ways in which God was moving in our hearts and lives, we experienced true fellowship.

*As I have grown older, I have come to recognize that the kind of fellowship Karen and I enjoyed is rare—and precious. That is the kind of fellowship I long for you to experience in your small groups each week, and... that is the kind of fellowship I believe **all** Christian women desire.*

Think of your discussion time as a **group conversation** where everyone has the opportunity to share freely the ways they are experiencing and encountering God through His Word. Let it be a time of honesty, enthusiasm and encouragement.

3. As you lead your small group and ask questions from the leader guide, please do not give them the exact question and page number. You want to encourage them to *restate* not *repeat* what they have written in their homework. The discussion should take them to the next level of learning—to be able to restate what they have learned and not to solely depend upon a rote answer they have already written in their workbook. Unless they are unresponsive or directly ask you for the question and page number, try to keep their “heads out of their workbooks.” Of course, they need to follow along *with* their workbooks, and they will be looking for what they’ve written. But, please encourage them not to read their answers verbatim from their workbooks and not to limit themselves to sharing only what they’ve written.
4. Be an example of a sincere and eager student of God’s Word. Openly and honestly, share what God is doing in your own heart. You are “the leader,” but please seek to be transparent, genuine, and real in your leadership.
5. Assure your group that the discussion will be totally voluntary. Let them know you will not call on anyone to share or to pray aloud. Encourage them, though, to freely share as they feel led but also to be sensitive and not dominate the discussion either.
6. Ask your group to respect the boundaries of your group discussion. Tell them they are not to repeat personal information other group members have shared in the weekly discussion time with anyone outside of the group.
7. Encourage your group to complete their weekly Bible study homework. But assure them that no one will see or “check” their homework. Also, encourage them to attend the discussion even if they are unable to complete their homework.
8. Your group will appreciate it if you will **monitor and use your time wisely. Each week, begin and end your group on time.**
9. Most importantly, *be sensitive to the leadership of the Holy Spirit*. If your group gets off track from the questions you have chosen from the leader guide, but you sense the Lord is leading the discussion in another way, let Him lead!
10. Finally, if someone in your group is hurting or, perhaps, has spiritual questions or needs, please go to them privately and let them know of your concern for them. Offer to listen, share scripture, and pray with them. If needed, you also may offer to assist them in seeking Christian counsel from a minister or Christian counselor.

INTRODUCTORY WEEK – Getting Honest: Are You Content?

- GOALS:
- * To allow your group members to get to know you.
 - * To enable the group members to get to know one another.
 - * To introduce them to the topic of our study (the seasons of life and how to experience contentment in every season).
 - * To prepare them for their first week of homework.

LEADER PREPARATION:

1. Pray, pray, pray for those who will be in your group.
2. Complete your Week One homework.
3. Make a list of the information you'll need to share with your group during your first week together (weekly schedule/format, small group guidelines, homework requirements, your phone number/email address, etc.).
4. Take time to look through your workbook to get an overview of the study and to become familiar with the topics and layout of the study. You may want to make some notes so that you can give your group members a brief overview and description of the study. As you share a description of the course with them during the first week, you will be laying the foundation for your share time.
5. Review the Small Group Time instructions listed below. Make a few brief notes of your own personal answers to questions 2 and 4. If your group is reluctant to share during the discussion time, you will be prepared to share your own personal thoughts which will encourage them to be open and share as well.

SMALL GROUP TIME:

1. INTRODUCTION AND INFORMATION (10–15 minutes):
 - a. Share a little information about yourself with your group, then ask your group members to briefly introduce themselves. **NOTE: Keep this brief. They'll share more about themselves during the discussion time.**
 - b. Share information about the weekly schedule, homework, and any other necessary information with your group.
 - c. Ask your group members to open their workbooks. Guide them through the weekly format for each lesson (each week's lesson is broken into five days of homework; a listening guide is provided for the weekly lecture, etc.).
 - d. Ask your group members to turn to the table of contents page in their workbooks. Give them the specific dates that each week's lesson will be discussed in your small group, and instruct them to write the correct date beside each lesson. This will help them to keep up with the study and will prevent any possible confusion especially if they're unable to attend small group for a week or more.
NOTE: This is also a good time to encourage them to attend small group even if they fall behind in doing their homework or even if they're unable to complete it.

2. DISCUSSION (30–35 minutes):

- a. Describe your current circumstances in this season of your life by answering the following questions:
 - How is your life different now than it was 3–5 years ago?
 - What brings you joy in this season of your life?
 - What brings you sorrow in this season of your life?
 - What are the rewards and challenges of this season of your life?
 - What is your attitude toward your current circumstances in this season of your life? In other words, how are you handling this season of your life?
- b. Describe your current spiritual season of life by answering the following questions:
 - How would you describe your current relationship with God? (close, intimate, distant, strained, secure, insecure, etc.)
 - What does God seem to be teaching you in this season of your life?
 - How is your spiritual life affecting the other areas of your life? (your relationships, your circumstances, your attitude, etc.)

3. SHARE PRAYER REQUESTS (5–10 minutes):

- a. Ask your group to share personal prayer requests using the following questions:
 - How would you like the group to pray specifically for *you* (not for your husband, child, relative, etc.) during this specific season in your life?
NOTE: Please write down their requests and encourage your group members to make note of each request, too, so they can pray for one another in the days ahead.
 - What are you praying God will do in your life as a result of this study?
- b. Encourage them to pray for one another consistently during the next ten weeks of this study.

4. CONCLUSION (1 minute):

- a. Thank your group members for sharing, and encourage them to complete their Week One homework. Remind them to be on time for the lecture which will follow.
- b. Lead your group in a closing prayer.

WEEK ONE – She Said He Said: Proverbs 31 vs. Ecclesiastes 1

- GOALS:**
- * To understand the differences between the Model Woman and Solomon regarding their attitudes and experiences.
 - * To discuss and discover the ways in which we are all able to relate to the Model Woman and Solomon.

PRAYER REQUESTS & PRAYER (5–10 minutes)

DISCUSSION (50 minutes)

Please check the boxes beside each discussion question you have prayerfully chosen to use in your small group time. **NOTE: Application-based questions are shaded; scripture-based questions are not.**

DAY ONE:

- 1. Describe your first impression of the Model Woman from Proverbs 31:10–31. (question 3, page 6)
- 2. What did you learn about the Model Woman regarding her attitude toward her life and her relationship with God? (question 4 chart, page 7)
- 3. In what ways did you relate to the Model Woman? How are you like her? How are you unlike her? (questions 5a–c, pages 7–8)
- 4. Do you think this passage represents “a day in the life of the Model Woman,” or do you think it paints a panoramic portrait of a woman throughout the many seasons of her life and why? (question 5d, page 8)

DAY TWO:

- 1. What did you learn about Solomon’s background from 1 Kings? How did he begin his reign as king? How did he end his reign as king? (questions 2–3, pages 8–9)
- 2. What did you learn about Solomon from Ecclesiastes 1? What is his attitude about life and how do you think it affected his relationship with God? (questions 4a–b, pages 9–10)

DAY THREE:

- 1. What did you learn about the word “vanity?” What illustration did Solomon use to describe vanity? (questions 2–3, pages 10–11)
- 2. Please share your own paraphrases of Ecclesiastes 1:2–3. How did you express these verses? (question 5, page 11)
- 3. What differences did you see between Solomon and the Model Woman? How do they appear to contradict one another scripturally? (questions 6a-b, page 12)
- 4. Have you ever felt like Solomon that life is in some ways vain and meaningless? If so, please explain why (question 7a, page 12)

DAY FOUR:

- 1. What were some of the things Solomon pursued in his search for meaning and satisfaction in life, and how do we continue to pursue these same things? (“*Searching for Satisfaction*” chart, pages 13–14)

DAY FIVE:

- 1. As you studied the definitions of contentment, what one word best defines contentment? (question 2, page 15) How does contentment differ from vanity? (question 6, page 17)
- 2. What did you learn from scripture about contentment? (question 3, pages 15–16)
- 3. In what areas of your life are you most satisfied/content? (question 6, page 17)
- 4. In what areas of your life are you most dissatisfied/discontent? (question 6, page 17)

CLOSING QUESTION:

- 1. How has the Lord spoken to you this week? What insights did the Holy Spirit give you? How are you responding to what God has revealed to you through His Word this week? (insights and journal entries)

WEEK TWO – The Seasons of Life

- GOALS:**
- * To understand the various seasons of life (literal/figurative, experiential/circumstantial, and physiological) especially from a female perspective.
 - * To understand that God is sovereign over every season of life.
 - * To discover and understand our current season of life.

PRAYER REQUESTS & PRAYER (5–10 minutes)

DISCUSSION (50 minutes)

Please check the boxes beside each discussion question you have prayerfully chosen to use in your small group time. **NOTE: Application-based questions are shaded; scripture-based questions are not.**

DAY ONE:

- 1. Please share your own paraphrases of Ecclesiastes 3:1. (question 3, page 23)
- 2. What did you learn about the literal seasons (spring, summer, etc.) as you studied Genesis 8 and Leviticus 26. What did you learn about the way God uses and reveals Himself through these literal seasons? (questions 5–6, pages 23–24)
- 3. According to Psalm 27 and 31, how did David respond to the seasons of his life? (questions 7–8, pages 24)
- 4. What did you learn about the seasons of life from Acts 17? How does God use the seasons? What is His purpose for the seasons? (question 9, page 25)

DAY TWO:

- 1. Using “The Seasons of Life” chart, discuss the seasons listed in Ecclesiastes 3:2–8. Cover each season/verse individually but briefly. Describe these seasons and any personal experiences you have had involving these seasons. (pages 26–29)

DAYS THREE & FOUR:

- 1. What did you learn about Naomi and Ruth? What seasons of life did they experience and how did they respond? How did God use the strengths of their individual physiological seasons to help one another? (questions 1–15, pages 30–32)
- 2. What principles did you learn about the seasons of life from the book of Ruth? (question 17, page 33)
- 3. What did you learn about God from the book of Ruth? (question 18, page 33)
- 4. Using the chart on Page 34, discuss the physiological seasons of a woman’s life. Share your own experiences from each of these seasons: your greatest joys, challenges, strengths, weaknesses, outlook and attitude, and opportunities.

DAY FIVE:

- 1. What did you learn about the spiritual seasons of life? (question 2 verses, page 35)
- 2. How would you describe your own current spiritual season? (question 3, page 36)

CLOSING QUESTIONS:

- 1. What season of life are you currently experiencing? How are you responding to this season of your life? (question 11, page 25)
- 2. What insights did the Holy Spirit give you this week through your study of the Word? (insights and journal entries)

WEEK THREE – The Seasons of David’s Life

- GOALS:**
- * To identify the seasons of David’s life and the way he responded to them.
 - * To understand how God worked through and used each season in David’s life.
 - * To personally identify similar seasons in our own lives and to recognize how God worked through and used them.

PRAYER REQUESTS & PRAYER (5–10 minutes)

DISCUSSION (50 minutes)

Please check the boxes beside each discussion question you have prayerfully chosen to use in your small group time. **NOTE: Application-based questions are shaded; scripture-based questions are not.**

DAY ONE:

- 1. What did God see in David that his own family did not? (questions 3e–g, page 41)
- 2. What was David’s lifestyle like as a shepherd? What do Psalm 8 and 19 reveal about his spiritual life and relationship with God? (questions 3h and 4, pages 41–42)
- 3. At this particular time in his life, what season does David’s life most parallel and why? How may God have used this season in David’s life? (questions 5–6, page 42)
- 4. Using the “Seasons Chart” on pages 52–53, describe a season of “spring” in your life. What were your circumstances? How did God use that season in your life? What did you learn about yourself and about God during that “spring”?

DAY TWO:

- 1. How did David’s life change in 1 Samuel 16:14–23? Describe what David’s new lifestyle would have been like and how it would have differed from his lifestyle as a shepherd. (questions 2a, c–d, page 43)
- 2. How did David’s days as a shepherd prepare him for his battle against Goliath? How did David’s life change after he defeated Goliath? (questions 3a and 5, page 44)
- 3. At this particular time in his life, what season does David’s life most parallel and why? How may God have used this season in David’s life? (questions 6–7, page 45)
- 4. Using the “Seasons Chart” on page 52–53, describe a season of “summer” in your life. What were your circumstances? How did God use that season in your life? What did you learn about yourself and about God during that “summer”?

DAY THREE:

- 1. According to 1 Samuel 18, how did David’s life change after Saul became jealous of him? (questions 2a–b, page 46)
- 2. What does Psalm 59 reveal about David’s spiritual life during this season? (question 3, page 46)

WEEK THREE

- 3. At this particular time in his life, what season does David's life most parallel and why? How may God have used this season in David's life? (questions 4–5, pages 46–47)
- 4. Using the “Seasons Chart” on pages 52–53, describe a season of “fall” (change and transition) in your life. What were your circumstances? How did God use that season in your life? What did you learn about yourself and about God during that season of change, instability and transition?

DAY FOUR:

- 1. The seasons of David's life change again as he leaves Jerusalem to become a fugitive. Using your notes from Day Four, describe what his life would have been like during this season of his life. (questions 2–5, pages 47–49)
- 2. At this particular time in his life, what season does David's life most parallel and why? How may God have used this season in David's life? (questions 6–7, pages 49–50)
- 3. Using the “Seasons Chart” on pages 52–53, describe a season of “winter” in your life. What were your circumstances? How did God use that season in your life? What did you learn about yourself and about God during that “winter”?

DAY FIVE:

- 1. According to Psalm 17, what did you learn about David's faith and spiritual life during a difficult season of oppression? What does Psalm 17:15 reveal about contentment and satisfaction in life? (questions 2–3, pages 50–51)

CLOSING QUESTION:

- 1. How did the Lord speak to you this past week through His Word? What insights did you receive from the Holy Spirit? In what way do you sense He is working in your current season of life?

WEEK FOUR – In Every Season: Godsend and Giants

- GOALS:**
- * To understand the significance of Godsend and how God uses them throughout the season of our lives.
 - * To understand the significance of “giants” and how God uses them throughout the seasons of our lives.
 - * To understand that despite our past sin and failures, we can stand before God with clean hands and experience His present help and deliverance because of His grace and forgiveness.

PRAYER REQUESTS & PRAYER (5–10 minutes)

DISCUSSION (50 minutes)

Please check the boxes beside each discussion question you have prayerfully chosen to use in your small group time. **NOTE: Application-based questions are shaded; scripture-based questions are not.**

DAY ONE-THREE — GODSENDS:

- 1. Describe the ways in which God uses other people in our lives and desires to use us in the lives of others. (questions 2a–g, page 59)
- 2. Discuss the Godsend in David’s life, the Godsend in your own life, and the ways God has used you as a Godsend by using the charts on pages 61–65. Use the questions on each chart to discuss the significance of each of David’s Godsend, the Godsend in your life, and the way God has used you or is leading you to become a Godsend in someone’s life.

DAY FOUR — GIANTS:

- 1. Before David ever picks up his slingshot to kill Goliath, he faced three figurative giants of discouragement. Who were those giants of discouragement, and how did David respond to them? (questions 2e–g, pages 66–67)
- 2. Have you ever faced any giants of discouragement? Briefly describe your experience and how you responded. (question 3, page 67)
- 3. Describe and discuss the giant David faced in 2 Samuel 21:15–17. How did David defeat him? What principles about giants did you learn? (questions 4a–e, pages 67–68)

DAY FIVE:

- 1. What are some of the figurative giants David faced during the seasons of his life? (questions 2a–g, page 69)
- 2. Ask them to turn to 2 Samuel 22 in their Bibles and read verse 1 to them. How did David respond to the giants and enemies he faced, and what did God do for him? What principles can we learn from David as we face giants and enemies? (questions 3b–c, page 70)

WEEK FOUR

- 3. Read 2 Samuel 22:21–25 to them. Knowing David’s sin and imperfections, how could he say he was righteous, blameless, and had clean hands? What does this reveal about God, and what does this reveal about David? (question 3e, page 70)
- 4. How do your own past sins and failures affect you today in this season of your life? How do they affect your relationship with God? How did 2 Samuel 22 encourage you? (question 4, page 70)

CLOSING QUESTION:

- 1. How did the Lord speak to you this past week? How do you believe He wants you to apply what He is teaching you?

WEEK FIVE – The Seasons of Your Life

- GOALS:**
- * To understand God always has a purpose for every season of life.
 - * To evaluate the seasons of Joseph’s life and God’s purposes for them.
 - * To evaluate the seasons of our own lives and God’s purposes for them.

PRAYER REQUESTS & PRAYER (5–10 minutes)

DISCUSSION (50 minutes)

Please check the boxes beside each discussion question you have prayerfully chosen to use in your small group time. Application-based questions are shaded; scripture-based questions are not.

NOTE: Please spend at least half of your discussion time allowing your group members to share their timeline, “*The Seasons of My Life*.” Watch your time carefully, and abbreviate your discussion as much as necessary so that your group will have at least 25 minutes to share their timeline.

DAY ONE:

- 1. As you studied Ecclesiastes 3:1 and 11, what four truths did you learn, and what message do each of them teach? (questions 2a–h, pages 77–78)
NOTE TO LEADERS: If you are unclear about these four truths, they are listed in Question 10 on page 108 of your workbook.
- 2. How does Romans 8:28 correlate with the first two truths you saw in Ecclesiastes 3:1 and 11? (question 3b, page 79)
- 3. According to Romans 8:31–39, what can you be assured of throughout every season of life? (questions 3c–d, page 79)

DAY TWO:

- 1. What did you learn about Joseph’s relationship with his brothers from Genesis 37? (question 2b, page 80)
- 2. Discuss what happened to Joseph in Genesis 39. What repeated phrase or theme did you see in this chapter and how does it relate to the seasons of our lives? (questions 3a–d, page 81)
- 3. What did you learn about the way Joseph responded to injustice that you want to apply to your life? (question 4, page 81)

DAY THREE:

- 1. According to Genesis 40–41, what did you learn about Joseph’s character and faith while he was in prison and as he became Pharaoh’s servant? (questions 2a–b and 3a–e, pages 93–94)
- 2. In Genesis 41:50–52, you learned Joseph had two sons while he was in Egypt. What did the names he gave his sons reveal about himself, about God, and about the seasons of life? (question 3g, page 94)

WEEK FIVE

DAY FOUR:

- 1. As you read the accounts in Genesis 42–43 concerning Joseph’s meeting with his brothers who do not recognize him, what do you believe God was doing in Joseph’s brothers’ lives? What do you believe God was doing in Joseph’s life as he dealt with his brothers? (questions 2–3, pages 95–96)

DAY FIVE:

- 1. According to Genesis 44, what finally happens in the lives of Joseph’s brothers? (question 2a, page 97)
- 2. According to Genesis 45, how did Joseph respond to Judah’s confession, and what do his words reveal about his feelings toward his brothers and his faith in God? (questions 2b–c, page 98)
- 3. What did you learn from Joseph’s life about responding to the seasons of life? What did you learn from Joseph’s life about forgiveness?
- 4. Spend as much time as possible allowing them to share their timelines of the seasons of their lives. Ask them to share some of the most significant events, experiences, seasons, Godsend, and giants from their lives. As they share, continually ask them what they believe God’s purposes were for that season. (pages 84–85)

CLOSING QUESTION:

- 1. What is the most important thing God taught you this week? How did He use this week’s lesson to speak to your heart?

WEEK SIX – Rejoicing in Every Season

- GOALS:**
- * To briefly review the theme of Ecclesiastes 1–3:11 and the principles from Part I of this study.
 - * To transition into Part II of this study by beginning to focus on the instructions found in Ecclesiastes 3:12–14.
 - * To understand the principles, power, and purpose of rejoicing in every season.

PRAYER REQUESTS & PRAYER (5–10 minutes)

DISCUSSION (50 minutes)

Please check the boxes beside each discussion question you have prayerfully chosen to use in your small group time. **NOTE: Application-based questions are shaded; scripture-based questions are not.**

DAY ONE:

- 1. This week we began Part II of our study with a review of some of the principles you learned in previous weeks. What was the theme of Ecclesiastes 1:1–11? (question 3, page 107)
- 2. What repeated phrases did you see in Ecclesiastes 1–3 (you were asked to underline them in your Bible)? How do all of these phrases relate to one another, and how do they reveal Solomon’s message and purpose for writing? (question 7, page 107)
- 3. What other repeated word did you see in Ecclesiastes, and how did it relate to the theme and message of the book? (question 8, page 107)
- 4. As you observed the definitions of the words “vanity,” “satisfied,” and “content,” what did you learn about the relationship between these words? What was Solomon ultimately seeking in life? (question 9, page 108)

NOTE TO LEADERS: Please emphasize that contentment and satisfaction are synonymous. In the weeks ahead, as we study more fully the principles of contentment, the word “satisfied” will often be used in their homework. They need to understand that contentment and satisfaction mean the same thing.

DAY TWO:

- 1. What did you learn from the New Testament scriptures you studied concerning when and why we are to rejoice? (question 3 chart, page 111 and questions 4–5, pages 111–112)
- 2. In honesty, many of us probably left some of the boxes unchecked on our “Reasons to Rejoice” chart. Rejoicing is a choice that is not always easy, especially when we are struggling in some areas in our lives. Would any of you be willing to share which scriptures on the chart were challenging for you and why? How are you struggling in this season to rejoice? (question 3 chart, page 111 and insights, page 113)

DAY THREE:

- 1. What did you learn about the first song recorded in scripture (Exodus 15)? What circumstances preceded this song? What had God done for them? How does this apply to us today? (questions 2a–d, pages 113–114)
- 2. What else do joy and rejoicing produce in our lives? How does it affect our life and our relationships with others? (questions 3a–b, page 114)
- 3. What did you learn about joy/rejoicing from the example of Paul and Silas in Acts 16? What were their circumstances and how were they responding? What were the results of their response? (questions 4a–d, page 114)

DAYS FOUR & FIVE:

- 1. As you studied the book of Philippians:
 - what did you learn about joy and rejoicing?
 - what did you learn about Paul and his circumstances?
 - what did you learn about Paul’s attitude and example?
 - how did God speak to you through this wonderful book?

(Day Four and Day Five notes, pages 116–120)

NOTE TO LEADERS: It may help them to open their Bibles to Philippians as you move through one chapter at a time asking the questions above.

CLOSING QUESTION:

- 1. In Luke 10:17–22 you saw Jesus rejoiced and praised God. (question 4, pages 111–112) In John 15:11, Jesus describes Himself as joyous on His final night with His disciples, and in Matthew 26:30 you saw Jesus sang with His disciples only a few hours before He would be betrayed, arrested and crucified. (question 4d, page 112 and question 5b, page 115) Knowing all of this, what was Jesus teaching us firsthand about joy, praise, and rejoicing? How does this motivate you?

WEEK SEVEN – Doing Good in Every Season

- GOALS:**
- * To understand the purpose for doing good: to point others to the One true God and to glorify Him.
 - * To understand the relationship between faith and good works.
 - * To understand God's specific commands and instructions to women.

PRAYER REQUESTS & PRAYER (5–10 minutes)

DISCUSSION (50 minutes)

Please check the boxes beside each discussion question you have prayerfully chosen to use in your small group time. **NOTE: Application-based questions are shaded; scripture-based questions are not.**

DAY ONE:

- 1. Have them open their Bibles to Psalm 78. According to Psalm 78, what were the Israelites instructed to share with future generations and why? (question 4, page 126)
- 2. What was the purpose of the works Jesus performed? (question 6, page 127) What is our responsibility and purpose as Christians? (question 7, page 127) What do God's works, Jesus' works, and our works all share in common? (question 8, page 127)
- 3. You have just seen the primary purpose for doing good. But what other motives and reasons do we often have for doing good? (question 9, page 127)

DAY TWO:

- 1. What did Jesus teach about doing good? (question 2 chart, page 129)
- 2. As you studied the scriptures about the relationship between good deeds and works, what did you learn? (question 3, pages 129–130)
- 3. Where do we begin as we seek to do good? What should our priority be as we seek to do good? (question 5, page 130) As you seek to give your relationship with Christ priority, what obstacles most often draw you away from seeking Him first in this season of your life? (question 6d, page 131)

DAY THREE:

- 1. As you studied the scriptures about the right and wrong way to do good, what did you learn? (chart on page 132–133)
- 2. How does God equip us to do good? (question 5, pages 133–134) How have you seen Him use each of these in your own life as He has equipped you to do good?

DAY FOUR:

- 1. What are some of the specific ways God instructs you and me, as women, to do good? (charts on pages 136–137)

NOTE TO LEADERS: Please be prepared to deal with any controversy that may arise regarding 1 Timothy 2:11–15 (they were not asked to read this, but they may have, since they read 1 Timothy 2:9–10) and 1 Corinthians 14:34–35. The primary principle in these verses is that women are not to exercise spiritual authority over their husbands. Also, in their service within the church, women (and men) are to be subject to pastoral authority. It is also helpful to remember the context of 1 Corinthians 14 which is order within the church as opposed to chaos and disorder.

- 2. Which of the scriptures on these charts did God use to speak specifically to you? Explain how God used that/those scripture(s) in your life. (question 4, page 138)

DAY FIVE:

- 1. What are some of the specific ways we can do good to others? (question 2 chart, page 139)
- 2. Describe what you learned about Dorcus. How did God use her? What were your impressions about her? Have you known women like her? If so, please share how they have impacted your life. (question 3, page 140)

CLOSING QUESTION:

- 1. You do not need to answer this question aloud, but, as we close our time together, I want to ask you some very important final questions. Having studied the relationship between salvation and good works, in what way do your words and works bear witness of your faith? Have you been affirmed in your relationship with Christ this week as you have pondered your own spiritual growth and the evidence of your salvation? Or, have you had some doubts about the genuineness of your relationship with God? Do you ever sense you are just striving to do good in order to earn God's approval, and yet, you still have no peace and assurance of your salvation? If so, I would love to visit with you privately after class. Don't go home today with doubts about your own salvation. If God is drawing you to Himself, convicting you of your need for a real relationship with Him, today could just be the day of your salvation. I'm available, and I'd love to talk and pray with you.

NOTE TO LEADERS: Please be prepared to minister to anyone in your group who may have questions or doubts about their salvation.

WEEK EIGHT – Seeing Good in Every Season

- GOALS:**
- * To understand Ecclesiastes 3:13 and what it means to “*see good in all of your labor.*”
 - * To understand what God’s Word teaches about our attitude and our experience toward our life and our labor in every season of life.

PRAYER REQUESTS & PRAYER (5–10 minutes)

DISCUSSION (50 minutes)

Please check the boxes beside each discussion question you have prayerfully chosen to use in your small group time. **NOTE: Application-based questions are shaded; scripture-based questions are not.**

DAY ONE:

- 1. Begin your discussion by reading Ecclesiastes 3:13 to your group from both the NAS and KJV. (question 4, page 147) After studying the Hebrew definitions of the words in these verses, what do you believe this instruction from Solomon means? (question 7, page 148)
- 2. As you studied the other verses from Ecclesiastes, what other areas of life are we exhorted to enjoy besides our labor? (question 8, page 148) Why are we to enjoy these things? (question 9, page 148)
- 3. What is your primary work or labor in this season of your life, and what do you enjoy the most and the least about it? Also, how can you “see good” in the things you enjoy the least? (questions 10–13 chart, page 149)

DAY TWO:

- 1. As you studied the scriptures, what did you learn about the relationship between the heart/mind and our words/deeds and the importance of seeing good? (question 6, pages 151–152)
- 2. As you studied Psalm 73, what did you learn from Asaph about how to handle negative, oppressive thoughts? (question 7, page 152–153)
- 3. As you studied Lamentations 3, what did you learn from Jeremiah about how to handle especially difficult circumstances, depression, and hopelessness? How can we experience hope when life seems hopeless? (question 8, page 153)
- 4. Have you allowed yourself recently to become mentally consumed by negative thoughts about your life? If so, how did your thoughts affect the other areas of your life? (question 9, page 154)

DAY THREE:

- 1. As you studied, what did you discover are the keys to winning the battle within our minds and keeping our attitude Christlike? (chart on pages 156–157)

WEEK EIGHT

- 2. What are some of the frequent “stations” you play within your mind? What did the Lord reveal to you this week about your thoughts and attitudes? (question 3, page 157)

DAY FOUR:

- 1. What are some of the reasons we so often fail to enjoy our life and our labor? (question 2, page 159)
- 2. As you look back over the seasons of your own life, describe the season you enjoyed the most and why you enjoyed it. Describe the “enjoyment factor” of your current season of life and why it may be more or less enjoyable than other seasons of your life. (questions 3–4, page 159)
- 3. Now, a question for those of you who are wise, older women: how would you encourage younger women to enjoy their life and labor? (question 5, page 160)
- 4. What principles did you learn from Jesus’ life about how to better enjoy your life and labor? (questions 6–8, pages 160–162)

DAY FIVE:

- 1. On your final day of homework, you completed three charts in order to evaluate your priority relationships, responsibilities, and recreation. What are some of the ways you can improve your attitude and enjoyment of your priority relationships? (chart on page 164) What did you learn about your responsibilities and how you can improve your attitude and enjoyment toward them? (chart on page 165) What are some of the ways you plan to improve and enjoy your personal recreation as well as recreation with those you love the most? (chart on page 166)

CLOSING QUESTION:

- 1. How did God speak to you this week as you studied His Word? How will you apply what He’s revealed to you?

WEEK NINE – The Key to Contentment

GOALS: | * To understand what it means to fear the Lord

PRAYER REQUESTS & PRAYER (5–10 minutes)

DISCUSSION (50 minutes)

Please check the boxes beside each discussion question you have prayerfully chosen to use in your small group time. **NOTE: Application-based questions are shaded; scripture-based questions are not.**

DAY ONE:

- 1. Begin by reading Ecclesiastes 3:14 to your group (question 3, page 173 in your workbook.) As you studied this verse, what do you believe Solomon meant when he said, “...for God has so worked that men should fear Him”? (question 4, page 173)
- 2. What are some of the ways you have seen God work in your life in the past and at the present time? How do God’s works cause you to respond to Him? (question 5 chart, page 174)
- 3. As you studied the account about Abraham and his son, Isaac, in Genesis 22, what did the Lord reveal to you about Abraham? Why did God require Abraham to go through that difficult experience? How did you define the fear of God according to this passage? (question 7, page 175)

DAY TWO:

- 1. As you studied the account of the Hebrew midwives from Exodus 1, what did you learn about the fear of the Lord from that account? What did you learn about the character of Moses’ family? How did God bless the midwives? How did God bless Moses’ family? (questions 2–3, pages 176–177)
- 2. As you studied Exodus 14, the account of God parting the Red Sea, what did you learn about the various types of fear, the effect of fear, and the “cure” for fear? (question 5, page 178)
- 3. What principles about fear did you learn from Abraham, the Hebrew midwives, Moses’ family, and the Red Sea experience? (question 7, page 178)

DAY THREE:

- 1. According to the verses you studied, how did you complete the two sentences given in questions 2 and 3 on pages 179–180?
- 2. As you studied the verses from the Psalms and Proverbs, what did you learn about the fear of the Lord, and how can you apply these truths to your own life? (chart on pages 180–181)

DAY FOUR:

- 1. As you reflected back over the seasons of your life, have you experienced any seasons of fear? If so, please describe how fear affected you. How did you experience deliverance from the bondage of fear? (question 2, page 182)
- 2. You studied several scriptures about fear this past week and you wrote them in your homework. How did those scriptures impact you, and which one of them spoke to you in a significant and personal way? (questions 5–7, pages 183–184)

DAY FIVE:

- 1. Is it possible to both fear and love the Lord? What did you learn from your study this week? (question 2, page 186)
- 2. Considering everything you studied this week about the fear of the Lord, how would fearing the Lord affect the first three instructions Solomon gave us in Ecclesiastes 3:12–13 (to rejoice, see good, and do good)? How would the fear of the Lord be the “key” to “unlocking” these exhortations? (question 4, page 186)
- 3. Considering everything you studied this week, how would you define the fear of the Lord? (question 5, page 187)

CLOSING QUESTION:

- 1. Is God testing you in any area of your life? Is the fear of anything other than God preventing you from fully obeying Him in any area of your life? If so, please explain. Also, please share how the Lord spoke to you about your fear through His Word this week and how you desire to respond to Him.

WEEK TEN—The Harmony of Proverbs 31 and Ecclesiastes 1

- GOALS:**
- * To understand that true and lasting contentment can only be experienced by those who fear the Lord and obediently choose to rejoice, do good, and see good in every season of life.
 - * To understand that true and lasting contentment in every season of life can be experienced by any Christian who will wholly seek satisfaction in Christ.

PRAYER REQUESTS & PRAYER (5–10 minutes)

DISCUSSION (50 minutes)

Please check the boxes beside each discussion question you have prayerfully chosen to use in your small group time. **NOTE: Application-based questions are shaded; scripture-based questions are not.**

DAY ONE:

- 1. As you reviewed Proverbs 31:10–31, and Ecclesiastes 1, what is the Model Woman’s outlook about life and what is Solomon’s outlook about life? (question 2c, page 192)
- 2. You saw in your homework this past week that the words “content,” “satisfy,” and “fill/full” are synonymous. As you read through the scriptures from Ecclesiastes, what did they teach about contentment? How did you summarize what they taught? As you read through the other scriptures, what did they teach about contentment? How did you summarize what they taught? What did the scriptures from Ecclesiastes reveal about Solomon’s spiritual life? (questions 4 and 5, pages 193–194)
- 3. As you studied Exodus 16:1–18, what were the Israelites experiencing and how were they responding to God? What did Moses promise them? What was God trying to teach them by “rationing” their food to them daily? (question 6, page 194) How does this continue to apply to us today?

DAY TWO:

- 1. Although Solomon and the Model Woman had very different perspectives about life, what did they have in common with one another? What did you learn about Solomon’s faith and beliefs as you studied:
 - a) Deuteronomy 17:14–20
 - b) 1 Kings 3, 6, and 8
 - c) 1 Kings 9:1–9
 - d) 1 Kings 4:25–26, 10:14–29
 (notes from pages 196–198)

DAY THREE:

- 1. As you looked at the “obituaries” of Abraham and David, how was Solomon’s “obituary” different and why? (questions 3–4, page 200)
- 2. Do you believe Solomon had a true saving relationship with God? Why or why not? What do you think happened between Solomon and God? As you wrote out the “Four Truths About Life,” and the “Four Exhortations” Solomon gave in Ecclesiastes, do you think he practiced these beliefs? Why or why not? (questions 5, 7 and 8, pages 200–201)
- 3. What about the Model Woman? Did she practice the truths Solomon taught? What did you learn as you re-read Proverbs 31? (“How the Model Woman Practices Her Faith” chart, page 202)

DAY FOUR:

- 1. What kind of legacy did Solomon leave? How will he always be remembered? How would his legacy have been different if he had lived-out the truths and principles he taught and believed? Please explain your answer. (question 3, page 204)
- 2. What kind of legacy did the Model Woman leave? How will she always be remembered? Is her life experience and legacy hers alone, or can women today experience the same kind of life and legacy she did? Please explain your answer. (question 4, page 204)
- 3. According to Solomon and Ecclesiastes 3:1, 11–14, how can you and I experience a life of meaning and contentment in every season of life?

DAY FIVE:

- 1. What did you learn about satisfaction and true contentment as you read through the final scriptures in our study? (question 2, pages 206–207)
- 2. In this current season of your life:
 - a) in what specific ways do you believe God would have you rejoice and praise Him
 - b) in what specific ways do you believe God would have you do good;
 - c) in what specific ways do you believe God would have you “see good” and “enjoy” this season of your life?(question 4, page 207)

CLOSING QUESTION:

- 1. Over the past ten weeks, what has the Lord done in your life as you have studied His Word? In what ways are you beginning to experience contentment in your life? What is the most important thing God has taught you through this study we have done together?

Completed Listening Guides

INTRODUCTORY WEEK – Getting Honest: Are You Content?

I. Our destination: contentment

A. Our Itinerary:

1. The first part of our journey will involve understanding and identifying the seasons of life in order to:
 - discover your own current season of life, and to
 - gain insight about God's purposes throughout the seasons of your life.
2. The second part of our journey will involve learning the principles of contentment in order to:
 - apply them to your life in every season;
 - and to ultimately experience contentment in every remaining season of your life.

B. Defining Our Destination:

Contentment: to be satisfied with your possessions, status or circumstances.

C. Our Starting Point: We know the destination, but, in order to get there, we must first honestly evaluate where we are right now.

II. Job's Journey:

A. *Job 1:1–3*—Job's Description:

spiritually = blameless, upright, Godfearing
physically = healthy and wealthy.

Result: content.

B. *Job 1:20–22, 2:10*—Job's Initial Response to Satan's Attacks:

he mourned and worshipped, blessed God,
did not sin, did not blame God.

- C. **Job 3–31**—Job’s Eventual Response:
spiritually = disillusioned.
physically = in pain and depressed.
Result: discontent.

D. **Two Truths:**

1. Immense suffering can cause even the strongest, most godly believer to experience discontent.
2. Few believers will ever experience the major suffering Job did, yet many of us are discontent when we experience even minor suffering.

III. **The Question: Why do so few Christian women experience ongoing contentment?**

Cole’s Unscientific Conclusions: 3 Groups of Women

- A. **Group 1—Contentment Chasers:** This group of women continually repeat a vicious cycle seeking satisfaction in many things.
Result: Disappointment.
- B. **Group 2—Contentment Cynics:** This group of women have chased contentment but have found it to be only fleeting.
Result: Disillusioned.
- C. **Group 3—Contented:** This rare group of women have discovered real joy, meaning, and purpose despite their season of life or their circumstances.
Result: Satisfied.

IV. **The Answer: If we want to experience ongoing contentment in every season of our life, we must—**

- A. Get honest with ourselves.
- B. If necessary, confess our sin and repent. *Job 42:1-6*
- C. Learn and live the scriptural principles of contentment. *Phil. 4:11-12*

WEEK ONE – She Said He Said: Proverbs 31 vs. Ecclesiastes 1

I. The Model Woman—*Prov. 31:10–31*

- A. Is a panoramic portrait of a woman through the seasons of her life.
- B. She lives a life of joy, meaning, and contentment.
Prov. 31:13, 18, 25, 29

II. Solomon—*Ecc. 1:1–14*

- A. Is the autobiographical account Solomon wrote during the latter seasons of his life.
- B. He lives a life of cynicism, emptiness, and discontent. *Ecc. 1:2–3, 8, 13b, 14*

III.

Searching for Satisfaction:

A. Wisdom—*Ecc. 1:16–17*

- human knowledge
- intellectualism
- philosophy
- science

B. Pleasure—*Ecc. 2:1–2*

- entertainment
- fun / leisure
- creature comforts
- eating / food

C. Alcohol/Drugs—*Ecc. 2:3*

- drinking
- partying
- drugs
- prescription drugs

A Scriptural Perspective:

A. Wisdom—*1 Cor. 1:18–24, 30*

- worldly wisdom won't bring true knowledge of God
- knowing Christ brings true wisdom

B. Pleasure—*2 Tim. 3:1, 4, Titus 3:3, 1 Tim. 6:17*

- in the "last days" men will love pleasure rather than love God
- God has given us all things to enjoy

C. Alcohol/Drugs—*1 Tim. 5:23, Rom. 14:21, Eph. 5:18*

- useful for physical ailments
- not to cause others to stumble"
- not to be drunk but filled with the Spirit

Searching for Satisfaction:

D. Works/Projects—*Ecc. 2:4–6*

- buildings / homes
- gardening / pools
- workaholism
- achievement / recognition

E. Possessions/Money—*Ecc. 2:7–9*

- servants
- more and more “stuff”
- greed

F. Sex—*Ecc. 2:8b*

- sensuality
- immorality
- internet “chat rooms” and websites

A Scriptural Perspective:

D. Works/Projects—*Col. 3:23, Luke 10:40–42*

- we are to work hard as for the Lord
- but work isn’t to take priority over our relationship with God

E. Possessions/Money—*Mt. 6:19–21, 2 Tim. 6:6–8*

- we’re to store up treasures in heaven not on earth
- godliness brings great pain if it is accompanied by contentment

F. Sex—*Heb. 13:4, 1 Cor. 6:18–20*

- within marriage is pure
- God will judge immorality
- our bodies are God’s temple

IV. Final Conclusions:

- A.** Life is empty and a “chasing after the wind” when it is centered around worldly, temporal pursuits. *Ecc. 2:11*
- B.** But, a life of joy, meaning, and contentment can be experienced because Christ has redeemed us from futility.
1 Pet. 1:17b–19, 1 Cor. 15:58

WEEK TWO – The Seasons of Life

I. As Christian women, we will experience many different types of seasons which will simultaneously combine to affect us in many positive and negative ways throughout our lifetime.

A. Physiological Seasons: caused by hormones and our reproductive system including...

puberty, periods, and PMS

pregnancy and childbearing

mid-life malaise / perimenopause

menopause

post-menopause

B. Seasons of Circumstances and Life Experiences including...

childhood, teen, adult experiences

relationships / friendships

singleness/marriage/divorce/remarriage

joy and sorrow

health and sickness

Ecc. 3:1-8 seasons of

circumstances

C. Spiritual Seasons: including...

conviction and salvation

spiritual growth / babe in Christ / mature

testing and discipline

II. As Christian women, our faith in God and His Word must always be the primary factor in determining how we live and respond to **every** season of our lives.

WEEK TWO – LISTENING GUIDE

III. Walking by Faith in Every Season—*Ruth 1–4*

A. Two Women Who Walked by Faith:

	<u>Naomi</u>	<u>Ruth</u>
Physical	<u>older / Season 5</u>	<u>young / Season 1</u>
Circumstances	<u>grief / loss / uncertainty / fear</u>	<u>grief / loss / uncertainty / fear</u>
Spiritual	<u>faith is being tested</u>	<u>new to faith in God</u>

B. In Seasons of...

1. Extreme and difficult circumstances, God is pleased by our wobbly, “baby steps” of faith. *Ruth 1*

We may struggle with

unbelief anger
despair God
bitterness

2. Routine, day-to-day activities, God is pleased by simple, obedient steps of faith. *Ruth 2*

These simple steps will:

ultimately lead us to God's purpose and will for our lives
teach us to seek Him first in every detail of our lives

3. Testing, God may require us to take a leap of faith in order to follow Him. *Ruth 3*

we may risk looking foolish
we must do ALL God requires

4. Blessing, we will experience God's reward of faith. *Ruth 4*

joy and peace
fuller understanding of God's purpose
deeper trust and faith in God

WEEK THREE – The Seasons of David’s Life

I. What is a season?

Definition: Season⁴ = Hebrew “*eth*” which means:

- time
- the right time
- the proper time
- may be either short-lived or a longer time
- the (favorable or unfavorable) events in life
- in the plural it means circumstances, courses of time, occurrences, and events

II. What have we learned about seasons thus far?

- A. God is sovereign over the seasons of our lives. *Ecc. 3:1–8*
- B. As Christian women, we will experience many different types of seasons which will simultaneously combine to affect us in many positive and negative ways throughout our lifetime.
- C. As Christian women, our faith in God and His Word must always be the primary factor in determining how we live and respond to every season of our lives.

III. What other principles should we understand about the seasons of life?

The seasons of our lives will

- A. Be determined primarily by the *events* and *circumstances* of our lives.
- B. *Change* throughout our lives and will *vary* in their length.
- C. Often *mirror* the characteristics of the seasons of nature.
- D. Not always correlate with our physical *age* or *stage* in life.
- E. Not always *precede* and *follow* one another in a consistent order as the seasons of nature do.

IV. Evaluating the Seasons—1 Samuel 16–20

A. *Spring*—1 Sam. 16:11–13

1. Evidence of Spring:
 - season of *peace / tranquility*.
 - season of *routine responsibilities / rut*.
 - season of spiritual *growth* and “*planting*.”
 - season of growing *intimacy* with God.
2. Essentials for Spring:
 - seek Him *first*. *Matt. 6:33*
 - seek Him in extended *stillness* and *solitude*.
Psalms 23:2-3, 46:10
 - seek *spiritual growth* through His Word. *1 Pet. 2:2*

WEEK THREE – LISTENING GUIDE

B. Summer—1 Sam. 16:14–21, 17:17–18:4

1. Evidence of Summer:
 - season of new opportunities.
 - season of increased responsibilities.
 - season of spiritual fruitfulness.
 - season of busyness.
2. Essentials for Summer:
 - guard your priorities. 2 Cor. 11:3
 - guard your motives. John 7:18, 1 Cor. 10:31
 - guard your pride. John 15:15

C. Autumn—1 Sam. 18:5–11

1. Evidence of Autumn:
 - season of change.
 - season of uneasiness / insecurity / uncertainty.
 - season of new/unexpected challenges.
 - season of temptation.
2. Essentials for Autumn:
 - seek and walk in wisdom. Eph. 5:15–18, Jas. 1:5, 3:17
 - seek godly counsel. 1 Sam. 19:18
 - seek God through:
 - a. submissiveness to His Will, and
 - b. for security in your circumstances. Ps. 9:9–10, Prov. 18:10

D. Winter—1 Sam. 20:41–42

1. Evidence of Winter:
 - season of sorrow / grief.
 - season of loneliness / isolation.
 - season of letting go.
 - season of brokenness.
2. Essentials for Winter:
 - grieve the loss. Ecc. 3:4 and 6
 - cry out to God: PRAY. Ps. 142
 - constantly
 - honestly
 - humbly
 - specifically
 - have faith. v. 7
 - offer God the sacrifice of praise. Is. 61:3, Heb. 13:15

WEEK FOUR – In Every Season: Godsend and Giants

I. **Godsends:** the *significant* and *influential* people God sends into our lives to impact our lives for His divine purposes.

II. **Principles we learn from the Godsends in David's life:**

Godsend # 1—Samuel

1. They may *recognize* and *affirm* God's anointing/call upon our lives before we even become aware of it ourselves. *1 Sam. 16:10–13*
2. They are people we can *trust*, they're "*safe*." *1 Sam. 19:18*

Godsend # 2—Jonathan

3. They may be our *peer*, and may eventually become our dearest friend. *1 Sam. 18:1–3*
4. Our relationship with them may be *limited in time*, but the effects of the relationship will *mark* us for the rest of our lives. *2 Sam. 21:7*

Godsend # 3—Nathan

5. They will be a source of sound, timely, and *godly counsel* enabling us to *discern* God's will for our lives. *2 Sam. 7:1–17, 1 Ki. 1:5–39*
6. They will *confront* us when we sin, and will tell us the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth in order to bring us to *repentance* and *restoration*. *2 Sam. 12:1–15*

Godsend # 4—Hushai

7. God often sends them when we are experiencing a season of *winter / sorrow*. *2 Sam. 15:23, 30*
8. They often show up as *answers* to our *prayers*. *2 Sam. 15:31–37*

Godsend # 5—Joab

9. They enable us to see our *blind spots*. *2 Sam. 19:1–8*
10. They will not always be completely without *fault*, but God can still use them in our lives for His good purposes. *1 Kings 2:5–6*

WEEK FOUR – LISTENING GUIDE

III. Giants: the difficult circumstances, people, trials, and testings God sovereignly allows us to face in order to mature our faith and increase our dependence upon Him.

IV. Four Types of Giants:

1. Satan—who seeks to destroy us. *1 Pet. 5:8, Eph. 6:10–18*

Our response:

- Be sober and on the alert.
- Resist him, firm in your faith.
- Put on the spiritual armor of God.

2. Sin—”giants” of our own making. *Jas. 1:14–15, Gal. 5:16, Rom. 6:11–14*

Our response:

- walk by the Spirit.
- Consider yourself dead to sin and alive to God.
- Do not let sin reign in your life.
- Present your body to God as an instrument of righteousness.

3. Someone—an enemy; a living, breathing person. *2 Tim. 4:14–17, Matt. 5:44, 6:14–15*

Our response:

- Be on guard.
- Rely upon and rest in God’s presence and strength.
- Pray for your enemies.
- Forgive your enemies.

4. Circumstances—trials and testings God sovereignly allows us to experience.

Jas. 1:2–4

Our response:

- Consider them as a joy because ...
- They test our faith;
- They produce endurance;
- They mature / complete us.

V. Principles we learn from the Giants in David’s life:

1. We will face giants throughout our entire lifetime.
2. We will never face a giant alone.
 - God is always with us, and
 - He often sends Godsend to help us.
3. We may not defeat every giant in every battle, but we can repent, be cleansed and press on with clean hands as David did.

WEEK FIVE – The Seasons of Your Life

I. Journey Update

A. **Our Destination:** contentment—to be satisfied with your possessions, status, and circumstances .

B. Our Itinerary: Two-Part Journey

1. Part I: understanding and identifying the seasons of life in order to discover your own current season of life, and to gain insight about God's purposes throughout the seasons of your life.

Primary Process: ASSESSMENT

2. Part II: learning the principles of contentment in order to apply them to your life in every season of your life.

Primary Process: APPLICATION

C. **Final Result:** Assessment + Application = Contentment

II. Today's Topic: The Struggle to Transition from Part I to Part II

A. Between Part I and Part II we may still struggle with:

1. Many unanswered questions: Why God?
2. Ongoing pain and hurt from past and present circumstances.
3. Ongoing anger, bitterness, and unforgiveness.

B. The keys to overcoming the struggle:

1. cease striving / let go. *Psalm 46:10*
2. submit to God's sovereignty.

WEEK FIVE – LISTENING GUIDE

III. Facts We Must Face...as learned from the life of Joseph:

- A. God has a dream / plan for our lives, but Satan will attempt to thwart it. *1 Pet. 2:5–9*
- B. unjust suffering is part of God's plan for our lives. *Phil 1:29*
- C. Others may forsake and forget us, but God never will.
Is. 49:14–16
- D. Bitterness brings bondage, but forgiveness brings freedom. *Gen. 45:4–8, 50:19–20*
- E. What others intend for evil, God can use for good.
Is. 53:5, 7, 10–12

Joseph's response to the struggles he faced: submission to God

IV. Truths We Must Embrace...to “cease striving” and submit to God's sovereignty

- A. There is a season for everything in life. *Ecc. 3:1*
Apply: This season is God's season for my life.
- B. God has made everything beautiful/with purpose in its time. *Ecc. 3:11a*
Apply: This season in my life has purpose.
- C. God has made us long for eternal significance in our lives. *Ecc. 3:11b*
Apply: There is eternal significance in this season of my life.
- D. We cannot fully know the eternal significance of our lives this side of eternity. *Ecc. 3:11c*
Apply: I may not know the eternal value of this season now, but by faith, I believe God will reveal it in the future.

Final Truth: The road to contentment begins with a cross.

WEEK SIX – Rejoicing in Every Season

I. Solomon's Conclusions—*Ecc. 3:1–11*

- A. There is a season for everything in life. *Ecc. 3:1–8*
- B. God has made everything beautiful, appropriate, and with purpose in its time. *Ecc. 3:11a*
- C. God has made us long for eternal significance and meaning in our lives.. *Ecc. 3:11b*
- D. We cannot yet fully know the eternal significance, value, and purpose of our lives. *Ecc. 3:11c*

II. Solomon's Instructions—*Ecc. 3:12–14*

- A. In this study, we will call the first three instructions the 3 Doors to Contentment.
- B. The first instruction, rejoice, is the first, door to contentment.
 - 1. OT/Hebrew definition of rejoice¹⁶
 - to brighten up
 - to cheer up
 - to be or make glad
 - 2. Ecclesiastes teaches we are to rejoice...
 - in our everyday, routine activities, and work. *Ecc. 3:22*
 - in our labor that we consider to be drudgery and unsatisfying. *Ecc. 5:19*
 - throughout our lives; in every season. *Ecc. 11:8–9*

III. Scripture Teaches that Joy/Rejoicing...

- A. Is the result of salvation—a work of grace. *John 16:20*
- B. Cannot be taken away from us. *John 16:22*
- C. Is a command, thus, a choice. *1 Thess. 5:16*
- D. Is to be expressed continually. *1 Thess. 5:16, Phil. 4:4*
- E. Is the opposite of grumbling / complaining. *Ecc. 15:24, 16–17, Numbers 14 reveals it can cost us God's blessing.*
- F. Is often expressed in praise and in song. *Luke 10:21, Eph. 5:18–20.*

IV. Paul's Example: I can rejoice in the Lord always because...

A. Christ is my life. *Phil. 1:12–21*

1. Despite my status in life (prisoner). *Phil. 1:7, 13–14, 17*
2. By focusing on the eternal not the temporal. *Phil. 1:22–23*

B. Christ is my example. *Phil. 2:5–8, 17*

1. Despite my self. *Phil. 2:3–4*
2. By focusing on submission, servanthood, and sacrifice.
Phil. 2:3–9

C. Christ is my goal. *Phil. 3:8–15*

1. Despite my past—the good and the bad. *Phil. 3:4–7*
2. By focusing on knowing Him. *Phil. 3:8–15*

D. Christ is my strength. *Phil. 4:13*

1. Despite my possessions and circumstances. *Phil. 4:11–19*
2. By focusing on prayer and His provision. *Phil. 4:6–19*

WEEK SEVEN – Doing Good in Every Season

I. Review

- A. In Ecclesiastes, Solomon's search for meaning in life is ultimately a search for contentment / satisfaction in life.
- B. In Ecclesiastes 3:12–14, we see three instructions that will enable us to experience joy, meaning, and contentment in every season of our lives.
- C. In this study, we are calling these instructions, the 3 Doors to Contentment.
1. Door # 1 = Rejoice
Focus on God
 2. Door # 2 = Do Good
Focus on others

II. Scripture teaches we are to...

- A. Do good in our lifetime. *Ecc. 3:12*
- B. Do good with all of your energy. *Ecc. 9:10*
- C. Do good to all men and especially to other Christians. *Gal. 6:10*
- D. Do good as for the Lord rather than for men. *Col. 3:23*
- E. Do good so that others will see your good works and glorify God. *Matt. 5:14-16*

III. Questions and Answers—*Matt. 25:14–29, 1 Cor. 3:11–15*

- Q. What are the seven words every Christian longs to hear?
- A. well done, good and faithful servant.
- Q. Who will hear these words?
- A. All who have been faithful servants / stewards of Christ.
- Q. How will we be judged?
- A. According to our words / deeds & motives.
- Q. What will be the outcome of the judgment?
- A. **We will receive** reward **or we will** suffer loss, **but we cannot** lose our salvation.

WEEK SEVEN – LISTENING GUIDE

IV. Role Models Who Will Hear, “Well Done”

A. Dorcas—Acts 9:36–42

- she was abounding in good works.
- she served the Lord by serving others continually.

B. Phoebe—Rom. 16:1–2

- she was a servant of the church.
- she was a helper of many, and of Paul as well.

C. Priscilla and Aquila—Rom. 16:3–5, Acts 18:18–28

- fellow workers in Christ Jesus.
- their home was used as a church—good stewards.

D. Mary, Tryphaena, Tryphosa, and Persis— Rom. 16:6 and 12

- all of these were women.
- all of these shared this in common: they worked hard for the Lord.

E. Rufus' mother—Rom. 16:13, Mark 15:20–21

- ministered to Paul as a “mother.”
- her background: Jewish from Cyrene / N. Africa.
- her husband: Simon, who helped carried Jesus' cross.
- her love and ministry to Paul was an extension of her love for Christ.

Door # 2: Doing good...because He has done so much for me!

WEEK EIGHT – Seeing Good in Every Season

I. Principles of Contentment

- A. Submit to the Four Truths about life. *Ecc. 3:1–11*
- B. Practice the 3 Doors to contentment. *Ecc. 3:12–13*
 - 1. Door # 1 = Rejoice: Focus on God.
 - 2. Door # 2 = Do Good: Focus on others.
 - 3. Door # 3 = Seeing Good / Enjoying Good: Focus on our attitude and our experiences.

II. Scripture teaches we are to...

- A. See good and enjoy the good of both our labor and our life.
Ecc. 2:24, 3:13
- B. Enjoy life with those we love. *Ecc. 9:9*
- C. Recognize our life, labor, and our loved ones are a reward and gift from God.
Ecc. 2:24, 3:13, 5:18, 9:9

III. Enjoying your life and labor:

Principles to Practice

- 1. Keep your priorities God's priorities. *Matt. 6:31–34*
- 2. Delight in the Lord. *Ps. 37:4, 90:14, 100:2, 16:11*
- 3. Stop worrying about everything and start praying about everything. *Phil. 4:6–8*
- 4. Count your blessings often. *Ps. 103:1–14*
- 5. Recognize your season and accept its limitations, and embrace its opportunities.
Ecc. 3:1–8
- 6. Simplify your schedule and your responsibilities. *2 Cor. 11:3*
- 7. Stop trying to please everybody. *Luke 4:14–30*

WEEK EIGHT – LISTENING GUIDE

8. Make the 3 R's a regular part of your life: rest, renewal, and recreation. *Gen. 2:1–3, 1 Tim. 6:17*
9. Purposefully plan and schedule fun family activities. *Ecc. 3:4*
10. Practice hospitality. *Rom. 12:10a, 13b*

WEEK NINE – The Key to Contentment

I. Principles of Contentment:

- A. Submit to the Four Truths about life. *Ecc. 3:1–11*
1. There is a season for everything in life.
 2. God has a purpose in each season.
 3. God has made us long for eternal significance.
 4. We don't always get to know—this side of eternity.
- B. Practice the Three Doors to Contentment. *Ecc. 3:12–13*
1. Rejoice in every season.
 2. Do Good.
 3. See Good.
- C. Use the key: Fear God. *Ecc. 3:14*

II. Scripture teaches we are to fear the Lord because:

- A. His works and His ways are eternal and perfect. *Ecc. 3:14*
- B. Life will be well for those who fear Him, and life will **not** be well for those who do not fear Him. *Ecc. 8:12–13*
- C. It is the final conclusion, the primary truth that applies to every person.
Ecc. 12:13
- D. It is linked to obeying God / keeping His commandments. *Ecc. 12:13*
- E. God will bring every act to judgment. *Ecc. 12:14*

WEEK NINE – LISTENING GUIDE

III. What does it mean to fear the Lord?:

- A. It involves **BOTH** attitude and action.
1. Attitude: Reverence to God because of His power and position.
 2. Action: results in the desire to please Him **AND** the choice to obey Him.
- B. Therefore, if I say I fear the Lord I will respect **AND** obey Him.

IV. Three who feared the Lord:

- A. Noah *Gen. 6:5–9, 13, 22, Heb. 11:7*
- B. Abraham *Gen. 22:1–3, 5, 12, 15–18*
- C. Hebrew midwives *Ex. 1:17, 21*

These examples reveal that faith, submission, sacrifice, courage, and blessing are all characteristics of those who fear the Lord.

V. Choosing Contentment:

- A. I *cannot* unlock the doors to contentment by...
- waiting until I feel like rejoicing,
 - waiting for my attitude or my circumstances to improve before I do good,
 - or waiting until I can see the value of all I'm doing.
- B. I *can* unlock the doors to contentment when I choose to...
- rejoice,
 - do good,
 - and see good
because I fear God.

WEEK TEN – The Harmony of Proverbs 31 and Ecclesiastes 1

I. You should not be content with...

- A. An abusive relationship. *Gen. 2:18–25, Col. 3:18–19, Eph. 5:22–29, 1 Cor. 7:10–15*
- B. Any known sin in your life. *1 John 3:9, 1 John 1:9*
- C. A lack of spiritual growth. *1 Pet. 2:2, 2 Pet. 3:18*
- D. Anything less than full-hearted devotion and love for the Lord.
Matt. 22:37

II. Evaluating the Model Woman and Solomon

In Every Season of Life...

The Model Woman

- Possessed genuine faith in God
- Believed God's commands
- Practiced God's commands
- Feared God
- Experienced joy and meaning in life
- Experienced satisfaction/contentment

Solomon

- Possessed genuine faith in God
- Believed God's commands
- Practiced God's commands
- Feared God
- Experienced joy and meaning in life
- Experienced satisfaction/contentment

Their legacies...

The Model Woman's life is an example for all of us to emulate because she chose to fear and follow the Lord fully throughout every season of her life.

Solomon's life is a warning for all of us to heed because he chose not to fear and follow the Lord fully throughout every season of his life.

III. Following God Fully

A. The Example: *Christ*

1. He fully emptied Himself of His Peace as God. *Phil 2:5-7*
2. He fully satisfied all righteousness. *Matt. 3:15*
3. He fully wrought each of His miracles. *Matt. 4:23, 8:16, 14:20, John 2:3–10*
4. He fully paid the penalty of our sin. *John 19:30*

B. The Motive: *Jesus fully gave so that we could experience life to the full. John 10:10*

C. The Call: *“Follow Me” is Jesus’ high call to us. Matt. 4:19, 8:22*

D. The Requirements:

1. Supreme love. *Matt. 10:37*
2. Take up your cross. *Matt. 10:38*
3. Self-sacrifice. *Matt. 10:39*

E. The Result: *Those who fully follow Christ throughout every season of their lives will experience “life to the full”—contentment and satisfaction in this life—and they will leave godly examples for others to follow.*

About the Author



For twenty years Laurie Cole has witnessed the life-changing, heart-transforming power of God's Word at work in the lives of women of all ages—including herself!

Laurie was reared in a strong Christian home and became a Christian at an early age. But in her early twenties, God began testing and teaching her in brand new ways. As a result, she learned the importance and priority of loving God most and seeking Him first.

Because of a deep hunger to know God and His Word—and with no idea about how her entire life was about to change—Laurie enrolled in an in-depth women's Bible study when she was twenty-seven years old. Encouraged by the older women who led the study, Laurie received training and eventually began leading a group where God affirmed His call upon her life to teach.

Now, twenty years later, Laurie has taught dozens of Bible studies, spoken at numerous women's events and conferences, and is the author of two in-depth Bible studies for women: *There Is A Season: Experiencing Contentment in Every Season of Life* and *The Temple: Glorifying God in Your Everyday Life*. Because she believes seeking Christ first is the key to experiencing a life of true purpose, Laurie founded **Priority Ministries** to encourage and equip women through Bible studies, teaching, and other resources.

A minister's wife, Laurie and her husband, Bill, serve the Lord at Sagemont Church in Houston, Texas, where he is the Associate Pastor of Worship and Praise. They have been married twenty-nine years and have been blessed with three awesome sons, David, Kevin, and J.J., two beloved daughters-in-law, Stephanie and Sommer, and one absolutely beautiful grandson, Ezra.

About Priority Ministries

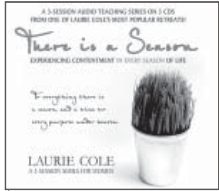
Priority Ministries exists to encourage and equip women to prioritize their relationship with God by loving Him most and seeking Him first.

Through teaching and proclaiming His Word at retreats, conferences and events, and by providing practical, in-depth Bible studies and other resources, Priority Ministries will emphasize this truth: when we love and seek God first, He will be pleased and glorified through our lives and we will experience a life of true joy and eternal significance.

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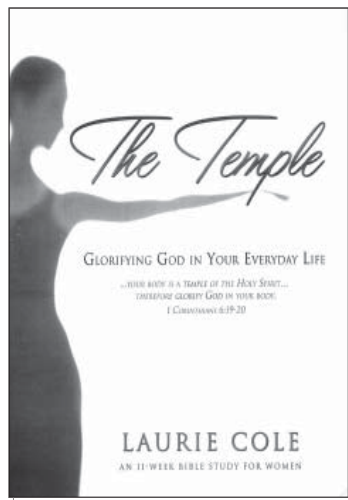
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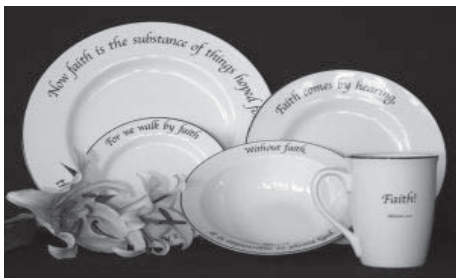
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There is a Season

Experiencing Contentment
in Every Season of Life

Leader Guide

Please allow me to share with you what an exciting tool you are now holding in your hands!

I had the distinct privilege of coordinating the Ladies' Bible Study that piloted *There is a Season* and want you to know that you are—in my opinion and experience—beginning a very life-changing Bible Study.

As the Coordinator, I was responsible for training and preparing small group leaders to facilitate this study. Laurie Cole has written a superior leader guide that will make a seasoned leader smile and a novice leader feel secure.

Let me explain why I believe this leader guide is such a wonderful tool by pointing out some of its strengths. Included in each week's lesson you will find:

- A clearly defined goal for the lesson/discussion.
- A suggested schedule to help guide your discussion and prayer time.
- A “smorgasbord” of carefully thought-through questions that will simplify your preparation and discussion time. Pick and choose from among the many scripture-based and application-based questions to customize your weekly discussion.
- A closing question for each week's discussion that will bring your group to a point of self-examination and personal growth.

Personally, I do not think it is an exaggeration to say that you will experience contentment in your season of facilitating a small group by using this guide!

May God Find Us Faithful,



Janet Valentine
Executive Director
Priority Ministries

Other resources available for this 11-week study include the workbook, and DVD and audio CD lectures by Laurie Cole. For more information, visit the Priority Ministries online store at www.priorityministries.org, or call toll-free 1-866-YOU-GLOGIRL (1-866-968-4564).



Laurie Cole is the Founder and President of Priority Ministries, a ministry dedicated to encouraging and equipping women to love God most and seek Him first. She is a frequent speaker at women's events and conferences and the author of two in-depth Bible studies for women, There is a Season and The Temple. A minister's wife, Laurie and her husband, Bill, serve the Lord at Sagemont Church in Houston, Texas, and they are the parents of three sons.



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