

There is a Season

Experiencing Contentment
in Every Season of Life

Laurie Cole

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www.priorityministries.org

This book is lovingly dedicated to my parents,
John and Julia McKay, who instilled in me,
at a very early age, a love and reverence for God and
His Word, and modeled for me what it means to love
God and to live His Word in every season of life.

Acknowledgements

At the invitation of a dear friend, **Janet Valentine**, God provided me the opportunity to prepare this study for the Lifetouch Ladies' Bible Study at my home church, Sagemont Church, in Houston, Texas. Having never written a Bible study like this, I had no idea of the mountainous multitude of details that would be involved. But with Janet's encouraging words, "Laurie, you just write the study, and I'll take care of the details," I began writing. And Janet...well she, indeed, took care of the details or this workbook would most assuredly not be in your hands! Thank you, Janet, for getting this project going and for lovingly and tirelessly seeing it through to its completion.

When I began this workbook, I also had no idea of the need there would be for so many others to assist me—but God did, and He moved the hearts of others to help. It was an honor and a joy to co-labor with them, and I owe each of the following key people an enormous debt of gratitude:

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Finally, I would like to thank my sweet husband, **Bill**, and my wonderful sons, **David**, **Kevin**, and **J.J.**, for their encouragement and for the sacrifices they willingly made which ultimately made it possible for me to complete this project. Never once did they complain about my shoddy housework and the deficit of home-cooked meals they missed during the months I was writing. Guys, I was able to write this book guilt-free because of your unconditional love. Now I know you probably didn't even notice the messy house, but I promise to dust off the stove-top and fire-up the oven very soon.

About the Study

This workbook is an in-depth, topical Bible study. It is designed to enable you to “dig-in” to God’s Word and experience the joy of discovering truth as the Holy Spirit tutors and teaches you through the scriptures. To facilitate your sensitivity and dependence upon the Spirit, each day you will be encouraged (through a verse from Psalm 119) to begin your study in prayer and, at the conclusion of each day’s study, you will be instructed to record any insights the Holy Spirit has given you.

A good translation of the Bible will be essential as you do this study. The *New American Standard*, the *New International Version*, the *King James Version*, or *New King James Version* are all very accurate translations and are highly recommended.

Please note that this workbook contains fill-in-the-blank listening guides with each lesson. These listening guides are designed to be compatible with the *There is a Season* audio CD and video DVD lectures taught by Laurie Cole and may be purchased online at www.priorityministries.org.

L Also, when you see this initial “L” in script form in your daily assignments, it signifies personal comments from the author, Laurie Cole, to you.

About the Author



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. Raised in a strong Christian home, Laurie became a Christian at an early age. But in her early twenties, God tested and taught her the importance of truly giving Him priority in her life.

In 1985, Laurie enrolled in an in-depth women's Bible study. Encouraged by the older women who led the study, Laurie received training and began teaching and leading a group where God affirmed His call upon her life to teach. For over 20 years, Laurie has taught dozens of Bible studies, spoken at numerous women's events and conferences, and is the author of two other in-depth Bible studies: *Beauty by THE BOOK* and *The Temple*. Her passion for God and hunger for His Word continues to grow.

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 for over 30 years and have three sons (David, Kevin, and J.J.), one beloved daughter-in-law (Stephanie), and two glorious grandchildren (Ezra and Juliette).

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Introduction

Many years ago, God placed this book on my heart, but it was not the proper season for me to write. Year after year, season after season, God's call was ever present, but His timing was unclear.

Fifteen years ago when I first began studying the seasons of life, the truths I learned gave me a new perspective on life. Since that time and with every passing season, God has continued to teach me the beauty and the significance of Ecclesiastes 3:1:

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

God's call, all those years ago, to write this study was very real. Back then, I thought I was ready to fulfill that call. But God knew better. He knew I was not ready. In fact, God had some long-range demolition and reconstruction work scheduled for my life before He would ever enable me to fulfill His call to write this study.

A few months ago, at the invitation of a friend to write a Bible study for her women's group, a kind of domino effect began to occur. God was making His timing *crystal clear*. It was time to write.

My sister, I don't know what season of life you're currently experiencing, but I invite you to come with me on a journey into the Word of God that could potentially transform your heart and every remaining season of your life. And trust me, if He can transform me, He can transform you, too.

Your sister,



*Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing;
Thou has loosed my sackcloth and girded me with gladness;
That my soul may sing praise to Thee, and not be silent, O Lord
my God, I will give thanks to Thee forever. Psalm 30:11-12*

Getting Honest: Are You Content?

I. Our destination: _____

A. Our Itinerary:

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

B. Defining Our Destination:

_____ : to be _____ with your _____, _____ or _____.

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

II. Job's Journey:

A. Job 1:1–3—Job's Description:

spiritually = _____, _____, Godfearing
physically = _____ and _____.

Result: _____.

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

he _____ and worshipped, _____ God,
did not _____, did not _____ God.

C. Job 3–31—Job's Eventual Response:

spiritually = _____.
physically = in pain and _____.

Result: _____.

Listening Guide—Introductory Week

D. Two Truths:

1. _____ can cause even the _____, most godly believer to experience discontent.
2. _____ believers will ever experience the _____ suffering Job did, yet many of us are discontent when we experience even _____ 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 _____:** This group of women continually repeat a _____ seeking satisfaction in many things.

Result: _____.

- B. **Group 2—Contentment _____:** This group of women have chased contentment but have found it to be only _____.

Result: _____.

- C. **Group 3—_____:** This rare group of women have discovered real _____, _____, and _____ despite their season of life or their circumstances.

Result: _____

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

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

There is a Season **Part I**

Identifying and Understanding
the Seasons of Life

She Said He Said: Proverbs 31 vs. Ecclesiastes 1

Have you ever seen a reflection of yourself from...well, let's just say, a less-than-flattering angle? Like when you're out shopping and you see yourself in one of those three-way mirrors? You left home thinking, "I don't look too bad. I'm presentable enough to go out in public. In fact, I look just fine." But later as you're casually browsing in the women's department, you stroll by a three-way mirror. Outwardly your mouth drops open. Inwardly you gasp in horror! You're now seeing yourself from every possible angle—front, side, and rear! Immediately you ask yourself, "What was I thinking leaving the house looking like this!? Where was my mind when I bought this sleeveless blouse—my arms are gigantic!? And these pants—no wonder they were so difficult to zip! Why it's amazing they didn't split wide open when I got into the car!" Instantly the shopping trip is over, and the diet has begun!

Three-way mirrors—unless you're Julia Roberts—are probably *not* your best friend. Mirrors often reveal far more than we're prepared to see. I can vividly remember a time in my life fifteen years ago when God held a mirror up before me. As I looked into that mirror, I was shocked to see the reflection of the person I had become. I saw bitterness, cynicism, a self-centered attitude, and many, many extra pounds of discontent. Of course, God's mirror wasn't a literal mirror. The mirror He used was the mirror of His Word. The Bible says:

*For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer,
he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror;
for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has
immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. But the one
who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides
by it, not having become a forgetful hearer, but an effectual doer,
this man shall be blessed in what he does. James 1:23–25*

God's Word is like a high-quality mirror. When we look intently at it, we will see God's standard and whether or not we are a reflection of that standard. Just like that moment before the three-way mirror in the women's department, we may be stunned by the reality of what we see as we look intently into the mirror of God's Word.

A literal mirror may or may not reveal our true physical flaws. In fact, some mirrors are "magic" mirrors. These are the ones we all love because they've been hung at a very slight angle that makes a very big difference. When we look into these kinds of mirrors we think, "Wow, I'm taller *and* slimmer than I thought I was!" But God's mirror—the Bible—is perfect. It will never lie to us. When we look at it, we will always see the truth about ourselves—and we will be forced to make a decision. We'll either choose to walk away and ignore the spiritually out-of-shape person we've become, or we'll choose to embrace the truth and allow God to shape us into His image.

She Said He Said

In this first week's lesson, you'll be standing before the same mirror God used in my life fifteen years ago: Proverbs 31 and Ecclesiastes 1–2. I want to encourage you to look *intently* into His mirror. Some of the scriptures you'll be studying may be very familiar to you, and you might be tempted to breeze through them more quickly than you should. Take your time. Read and re-read these passages. Commit to become “an effectual doer” of God's Word and not a “forgetful hearer.” And let me remind you of the wonderful promise to the one who is “an effectual doer” of the Word: “This man shall be blessed in what he does.”

Study intently this week, my sister. Choose to be blessed!

Day One



1. Begin your study in prayer. Ask the Lord to guide and teach you by His Spirit. Commit to walk in the truth He reveals, and claim the blessing of Psalm 119:1.

*How blessed are those whose way is blameless
who walk in the law of the LORD. Psalm 119:1*

2. Proverbs 31:10–31 describes the woman many Christians and theologians call “the model woman.” Using your Bible, read through this passage slowly and deliberately—in other words, intently.
3. In the space provided below, describe your first impressions of Proverbs 31:10–31. Be honest. Were you inspired as you read? Or were you just tired as you read? She is one hardworking woman, isn't she? As you looked into this “mirror,” what did you see, and how did it make you feel?

4. Read through Proverbs 31:10–31 again, and make notes in the following categories listed below. Use your own words as well as words from the text, and be sure to note the verse to which your notes refer.

THE MODEL WOMAN

<i>Describe her relationships.</i>
<i>Describe the various components of her life such as how she spends her time and the things she does.</i>
<i>Describe her attitude and outlook toward her life, her work, and her future.</i>
<i>Describe her relationship with God and how it impacts her life.</i>

5. Read through Proverbs 31:10–31 one last time and note the following:
- a. In what ways are you like this woman? What attributes does she possess that you also possess? How is her life like yours? How are her relationships like yours?

 - b. In what ways are you unlike her? What attributes does she possess that you do not possess? How is her life unlike yours? How are her relationships unlike yours?

She Said He Said

- c. How easy or how difficult is it for you to relate to her? Explain your answer.

- d. Do you think this passage represents “A Day in the Life of the Proverbs 31 Woman,” or do you think the passage paints a panoramic portrait of a woman throughout the many seasons of her life? Explain your answer.

*Thy word is a lamp
to my feet, and a
light to my path.
Psalm 119:105*

*The unfolding of Thy
words gives light.
Psalm 119:130*



- 6. Finally, record what the Holy Spirit has revealed to you today as you’ve looked into the mirror of His Word. What insight has He given you for your own personal application?

Day Two



- 1. Begin your study in prayer. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you as you observe His Word. Commit to seeking Him with your whole heart.

*How blessed are those who observe His testimonies,
who seek Him with all their heart. Psalm 119:2*

- 2. For the next several days, you will be studying Ecclesiastes. Before you get started, it will be helpful to collect some background material and to do a brief character study on Solomon, the author of Ecclesiastes. Please read through the following passages noting any insights you learn about Solomon.
 - a. 1 Kings 2:10–12—What did you learn about Solomon’s heritage?

She Said He Said

- b. What conclusions does Solomon make about life in Ecclesiastes 1?

- c. Do you agree with Solomon's conclusions about life? Explain your answer.

*Thy word is a lamp
to my feet, and a
light to my path.*
Psalm 119:105

*The unfolding of Thy
words gives light.*
Psalm 119:130



- 5. Finally, record any “light” the Holy Spirit has given you today as you have looked into the mirror of His Word. What insight has He given you for your own personal application as you have studied the life of Solomon?

Day Three



- 1. Before you begin your study, take time to pray. Incorporate the scriptures from Psalm 119:5–6 into your prayer. Let it be your heart's cry:

*Oh, that my ways may be established to keep
Thy statutes! Then I shall not be ashamed when
I look upon all Thy commandments.* Psalm 119:5–6

- 2. As you scan Ecclesiastes 1, you'll see the word “vanity” is frequently used. It occurs over 30 times in the book of Ecclesiastes making it the key word of the entire book. The Bible is a divinely inspired book (2 Peter 1:20–21). Each word within its pages was individually and specifically chosen by God. In order for us to understand God's message in the book of Ecclesiastes, we need to understand the definition of the word “vanity.”

Using any secular or Bible dictionaries you have, look up the word “vanity,” and record its definition in the following space. You also may find it helpful to read several other Bible translations and note how the word “vanity” is translated in them. If you have an Amplified Bible, it is especially helpful.

3. Solomon uses a descriptive phrase to illustrate what vanity is like. Read the following scriptures and write out that repeated phrase on the line provided below.
 - a. Ecclesiastes 1:14
 - b. Ecclesiastes 1:17
 - c. Ecclesiastes 2:11
 - d. Ecclesiastes 2:17
 - e. Ecclesiastes 2:26

Repeated Phrase: _____

4. Take a moment to visualize mentally what it would look like for someone to physically act out this descriptive phrase. Explain how this phrase describes and illustrates vanity.

5. The book of Ecclesiastes reveals that Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, an immensely powerful king, the successful leader of Israel, a man of vast wealth and immeasurable possessions, sought the exact same things endless others have pursued: *true meaning and lasting satisfaction in life*. Despite the fact he had everything anyone could ever possibly want, Solomon was dissatisfied and disillusioned with life.

Read Ecclesiastes 1:2–3, and write your own personal paraphrase of these verses. Using your own words, how would you express Solomon’s statement (verse 2) and question (verse 3)?

She Said He Said

6. Proverbs 31 is the final chapter of that book. The very next book in the Bible is Ecclesiastes. In some Bibles, Proverbs 31 is on the left-hand page and Ecclesiastes 1 is on the right-hand page. Your Bible may not have the same layout, but please keep in mind that when Proverbs 31 ends, Ecclesiastes immediately follows.

Scan Proverbs 31:10–31 and Ecclesiastes 1, and answer the following questions:

- a. Did you note any difference in the attitude and life experiences of the Proverbs 31 woman and Solomon? If so, please explain.
- b. Does Proverbs 31 seem to contradict the Ecclesiastes 1 passage? If so, how?
7. We'll close our study today with a couple of questions for personal reflection:
- a. Have you ever felt like Solomon? Have you ever thought, "Life is just a vicious cycle?" If so, write out what you were experiencing during that season of your life and the specific ways in which life seemed vain.
- b. Whose outlook and attitude do you relate to at this point in your life: the Proverbs 31 woman or Solomon? Explain your answer.

*Thy word is a lamp
to my feet, and a
light to my path.*
Psalm 119:105

*The unfolding of Thy
words gives light.*
Psalm 119:130



8. Finally, record any "light" the Holy Spirit has given you today.

Day Four

1. Begin your day of study in prayer. Spend some time praising Him for the truths He has shown you and for the work He is doing in your life.



*Blessed art Thou, O LORD; teach me Thy statutes...
I have rejoiced in the way of Thy testimonies...
I shall delight in Thy statutes... Psalm 119:12–16*

Over the past two days, you’ve studied Solomon’s cynical conclusion about life. He stated it in Ecclesiastes 1:2: “Vanity of vanities! All is vanity.” The remainder of the book is dedicated to proving this conclusion. But the very first proof Solomon provides is his own personal experience.

Today we’re going to study the various ways Solomon pursued meaning and satisfaction in life. You’ll probably relate to some of these pursuits, and you’ll certainly see that people haven’t changed much since Solomon’s day. Although our resources (both mental and material) may be limited compared to Solomon’s, we’ve all pursued meaning and purpose in life in our own individual way.

2. Please read Ecclesiastes 1:16–2:17, and notice the long list of things Solomon diligently pursued in his quest for meaning in life.
3. Complete the following chart by reading the scripture reference. List Solomon’s pursuit, and note the various ways you have sought this same pursuit. Also list the numerous ways people in our culture continue to pursue these same things. As an example, the first category has been started for you.

SEARCHING FOR SATISFACTION

READ	SOLOMON PURSUED	HOW I’VE PURSUED THIS	HOW OTHERS PURSUE THIS
a. Ecc. 1:16–18	wisdom	education	education
		reading	college/degrees
		Bible studies	therapists/Dr. Phil
b. Ecc. 2:1–2			

She Said He Said

SEARCHING FOR SATISFACTION

READ	SOLOMON PURSUED	HOW I'VE PURSUED THIS	HOW OTHERS PURSUE THIS
c. Ecc. 2:3	_____	_____	_____
	_____	_____	_____
	_____	_____	_____
	_____	_____	_____
d. Ecc. 2:4-6	_____	_____	_____
	_____	_____	_____
	_____	_____	_____
	_____	_____	_____
e. Ecc. 2:7-8a	_____	_____	_____
	_____	_____	_____
	_____	_____	_____
	_____	_____	_____
f. Ecc. 2:8b	_____	_____	_____
	_____	_____	_____
	_____	_____	_____
	_____	_____	_____

4. Now take a moment to describe any pursuits that have been meaningful and satisfying in your life.

- 5. Describe how or why these things have brought meaning and satisfaction in your life.



- 6. Conclude this day of study by noting any insights the Holy Spirit has given you today.

Thy word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path.
Psalm 119:105

The unfolding of Thy words gives light.
Psalm 119:130

Day Five

- 1. Begin your time of study in prayer and by making Psalm 119:11 your goal.

Thy word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against Thee. Psalm 119:11



- 2. Our final day of homework will be a study on the topic of contentment. First, please read the following definitions of contentment:

- content¹** Satisfied; happy.
- contentment²** The state of being contented.
- contentment** To be satisfied; manifesting satisfaction with one's possessions, status, or situation.

- 3. Read the following verses and write out what you learn about contentment/satisfaction:
 - a. Psalm 107:1 and 9

She Said He Said

b. Proverbs 19:23

c. Philippians 4:11–13

d. 1 Timothy 6:6–8

e. Hebrews 13:5–6

4. As you reflect upon the woman you studied in Proverbs 31 and the definition of contentment, would you define her as a woman of contentment? Briefly explain your answer.

5. As you reflect upon Solomon from your studies in Ecclesiastes, would you define him as a man of contentment? Briefly explain your answer.

6. As you will recall, the key repeated word and theme of Ecclesiastes is “vanity,” which is defined as “emptiness; fig. something transitory and unsatisfactory.”³

Contentment, then, is the opposite of vanity. Contentment results in satisfaction. Vanity results in dissatisfaction.

In what areas of your life are you most satisfied and content?

In what areas of your life are you most dissatisfied and discontent?
What areas of your life seem vain, empty, and without meaning?

L We'll conclude each week's lesson in this study by journaling. I find journaling is a tool God uses to help me: (1) honestly express myself; (2) process and understand myself and the seasons and circumstances of my life; and (3) understand what God is seeking to teach and do in my life.

7. Take time to reflect upon what God has shown you this week and the way you sense He is working in your life. Journal your thoughts by completing the sentences provided.

My Journal

THIS WEEK THE LORD...

AS A RESULT, I...



You've spent a lot of time this week gazing into the mirror of God's Word. Whatever the Lord has revealed to you, be assured of His unchanging love for you, and take heart in His abiding promise to you:

For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus. Philippians 1:6

Fifteen years ago when I saw my reflection in the mirror of the same verses you studied this week, I was shocked and ashamed. I was a professing Christian and a Bible teacher, yet I had become almost as cynical as Solomon. Reading Proverbs 31 did not inspire me, it only defeated and convicted me. But today I can testify to the faithfulness of God's promise from Philippians 1:6. Although I've still got a long way to go in my Christian walk, God forgave my sinful, negative attitude and began to teach me the principles of contentment—principles that have transformed my mind and become essential to me through the constantly changing seasons of my life.

This week you took God's mirror and saw the truth about yourself. Perhaps what you saw in the mirror wasn't very pretty. But here's some good news: God can perform spiritual "makeovers" in our lives! Over the next nine weeks, you will learn the principles of contentment. You will discover how to experience true joy, lasting satisfaction, and real meaning in every season of your life. And just think: at the conclusion of this study you may even be able to go to the mirror of Proverbs 31 and see a woman who looks at lot like...**YOU!**