

CONTENTMENT

healing the hunger
of our hearts
by Anne Woodcock



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the goodbook
COMPANY

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Introduction: Good Book Guides

Every Bible-study group is different—yours may take place in a church building, in a home, in a cafe, on a train, over a leisurely mid-morning coffee or squashed into a 30-minute lunch break. Your group may include new Christians, mature Christians, non-Christians, students, business colleagues or teens. That’s why we’ve designed these *Good Book Guides* to be flexible for use in many different situations.

Our aim in each session is to uncover the meaning of a passage, and see how it fits into the “big picture” of the Bible. But that can never be the end. We also need to apply appropriately what we have discovered to our lives. Let’s take a look at what is included:

-  **Talkabout:** most groups need to “break the ice” at the beginning of a session, and here’s the question that will do that. It’s designed to get people talking around a subject that will be covered in the course of the Bible study.
-  **Investigate:** the Bible text for each session is broken up into manageable chunks, with questions that aim to help you understand what the passage is about. **The Leader’s Guide** contains **guidance on questions**, and sometimes  additional “follow-up” questions.
-  **Explore more (optional):** these questions will help you connect what you have learned to other parts of the Bible, so you can begin to understand how the Bible relates together as a whole.
-  **Apply:** As you go through a Bible study, you’ll keep coming across **apply** sections. Some of these have questions to get the group discussing what the Bible teaching means in practice for you and your church. Sometimes, a  **getting personal** section is an opportunity for you to think, plan and pray about the changes that you personally may need to make as a result of what you have discovered.
-  **Pray:** We want to encourage prayer that is rooted in God’s word—in line with His concerns, purposes and promises. So each session ends with an opportunity to review the truths and challenges highlighted by the Bible study, and turn them into prayers of request and thanksgiving.

The **Leader’s Guide** and introduction provide historical background information, explanations of the Bible texts for each session, ideas for **optional extra** activities, and guidance on how best to help people uncover the truths of God’s word.

Why study *Contentment*?

We live in a society that thrives on discontent. Through a multitude of different ways—advertising, celebrity gossip, makeover shows—people make money out of other people’s discontent. It’s no surprise then that we all know what it is to lack contentment in our lives—with what we have, how much we can get, what we do, who we live with, what we are like and what the future promises.

The constant hunger for something more may seem like the aches and pains of growing old—something that we must just put up with in this far-from-perfect world. But the Bible also shows that discontent is the symptom of a lethal disease that will kill us if we do not find a cure. It was discontent that first led humans into rebellion against God, with the catastrophic consequences that have followed from that decision.

Even when we come to know God as our loving Father through Jesus Christ, one of the Christian’s greatest struggles is fighting the temptation to be discontent. The stakes are high—a discontent Christian will become a negative influence on other Christians, a poor witness for the Lord Jesus Christ, depressed and resentful towards God and distracted from the gospel. Ultimately, discontent in the church leads to false teaching and loss of faith.

Yet Jesus Christ promises that anyone who believes in Him will never again hunger or thirst. The apostle Paul was able to say that he had learned the secret of being content in any and every situation—in need or in plenty. Discontent is a problem of our hearts, not our circumstances. This Good Book Guide can help us to understand why we become discontented, how Jesus Christ alone can help us, and on a practical level, how Christian living can bring the treasure of contentment to our daily lives.



Ecclesiastes

OUR HUNGRY HEARTS



talkabout

1. Can you remember a time when you felt blissfully contented, even for just a few moments? What put an end to it?



investigate

Ecclesiastes was written by a king of Israel, who called himself “the Teacher”. He seems to have been powerful and prosperous, and to have ruled during a period of peace and stability. He wrote this book “to study and to explore by wisdom all that is done under heaven” (1 v 13).



Read Ecclesiastes 1 v 1-14

2. How does the Teacher feel about life? (See for example v 2, 8, and 14.)

- Do you find this surprising? Why?



3. Look at the following verses from Ecclesiastes. In the Teacher's search for meaning and contentment, what did he try, and what did he discover?

What did he try out?	What did he discover?
1 v 16-18; 2 v 12-16	1 v 18
	2 v 16
2 v 1-3	v 11
2 v 4-6	
2 v 7-8	
2 v 9	
2 v 17-23	v 18-19
	v 23

➔ **apply**

4. Look at the list of things that the Teacher turned to in order to find meaning and fulfilment. Where do you see this same search in the lives of people around us? And the same disappointment?





getting personal

Which of these things are you depending on for a happy and fulfilled life? Or is there something else that you look to? Most of these things—relationships, family, work, leisure, achievements, experiences—can be good and enjoyable. But what is the Teacher's warning to us?



investigate

▶ Read Ecclesiastes 2 v 24-25

5. The Teacher realises that not everyone feels the same way as he does. Some people are quite content, perhaps because they keep busy and don't think about the meaning of life. But what does the Teacher want these people to understand?

▶ Read Ecclesiastes 9 v 1-12

6. In these verses he mentions the one great problem for us that makes everything 'under the sun' meaningless. What is that problem?

7. In view of this, what is the best that we can hope for in this life? (See 9 v 7-10 and also 11 v 7-9.)



➤ **Read the following verses from Ecclesiastes:**

'I devoted myself to study and to explore by wisdom all that is done under heaven. What a heavy burden God has laid on men!' **1 v 13**

'I have seen the burden God has laid on men. He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end.' **3 v 10-11**

8. What is God's part in the discontent and despair that the Teacher discovers as he investigates life?



apply

9. Why do you think God has done this?



explore more

optional

In Romans 1 the apostle Paul gives us a summary of the causes and results of human rebellion against God, that first occurred at the beginning of history in the Garden of Eden. **Read Romans 1 v 18-25.**

According to these verses...

- What do people know about God? (v 20)
- How do they know this? (v 20)
- How should people respond to God? (v 21)
- How do people respond to God? (v 18, 21, 23)
- Why do they respond to God in this way? (v 18, 24)
- What is the result of this human rebellion against God? (v 18, v 21-22, v 24-25)

How can this passage help us understand why God has laid on humans the burden of dissatisfaction with life "under the sun"?





investigate

▶ Read Ecclesiastes 12 v 1, 6-7, 13-14

10. What is the Teacher's conclusion?

- When should we put this into practice? (See v 1, 6-7.)



apply

11. What has the Teacher's investigation shown us about our search for contentment?



getting personal

What do you do when you are discontented? Do you go from one thing to another in a search for fulfilment? Can you now understand how God might use your dissatisfaction to turn you back to Himself?

Or perhaps you are really enjoying life right now. Have you realised that these good gifts come from God, and should lead you to a life of thanking and glorifying Him? Do you understand that without God life is ultimately meaningless?





pray

- Think of someone (a person you know or someone in the news) who is struggling with despair at the meaninglessness of life. Let your prayers for that person be shaped by what you have learned this session.
- Think about how the book of Ecclesiastes can be used to reach the people of today. Pray that you, your church and your leaders can use these truths to help people turn to God.

