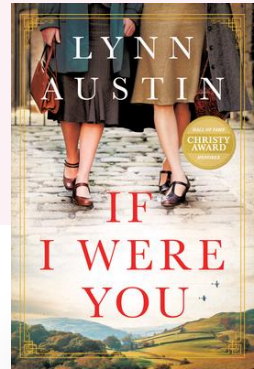




# LEADER'S GUIDE

IF I WERE YOU  
BY LYNN AUSTIN



"Where is the Good Shepherd in all of this suffering and loss?"

EVE DAWSON

## THEMES

Envy

Friendship

Belonging & Home

Suffering

Strength & Endurance

## HEADS UP! (TRIGGERS AND DELICATE TOPICS)

War

Death

Infidelity

## CHARACTERS

*Eve Dawson* is a bold, free-spirited, and tenacious young woman. Raised in a poor yet loving Christian household, her foundations of faith follow her through the traumas of life in a ravaged, war-torn England. Her strong, capable, and compassionate heart seeks ways to do good and be useful during the war, yet her heart becomes hardened and self-seeking through one tragedy after another. This hardening of her heart allows known sin into her life, as well as an air of entitlement to seek after what she desires with little thought of how her actions may impact others. After much heartache - and endurance of the consequences of her poor choices - she comes back to her faith and Heavenly Father, having been deeply changed and made new.

*Audrey Clarkson*, a poor little rich girl - is rich in wealth and things but poor and deprived of anything worthwhile. She deeply desires a home, a place to belong and, most of all, to be loved, cherished, and fully known. Audrey is a people pleaser, an essential way of life in high society for a child, where recognition of existence is only acknowledged based on meeting the expectations of others. Not allowed to show emotion, her tender heart is stifled, and although on the outside she is able to present a perfect picture of a high society young woman, she is lost within. Growing up in a large manor with servants and any 'thing' she could want, the deep hole in her heart is not filled until she has an encounter with her Heavenly Father, who meets all her heart's desires. Audrey, once shy, timid, and scared of her emotions, thrives in her newfound faith.

# STORYLINE

## 1930-40's

- Eve and Audrey meet as young girls at Wellingford Hall, where Eve's mother works as a lady's maid for Audrey's mother. Worlds apart in social class and lifestyle, Eve and Audrey are somehow drawn to one another and develop a friendship.
- Eve and Audrey reconnect in London, where Eve is studying to be a typist, and Audrey is living the life of an aristocrat.
- Eve attracts the attention of Alfie, Audrey's older brother and quickly realises that she has fallen in love with him but knows the relationship would be near impossible with the current expectations and rules for social classes intermarrying.
- As the Nazi invasion threatens England, Alfie enlists to fight in the war.
- Wellingford Hall reluctantly becomes a refuge for children seeking safety from London's impending attack from the Nazi's. Audrey's life begins to break down as the wide void between the wealthy English aristocrats and the poor begins to shrink.
- Eve and Audrey are united through a daring rescue mission to Dunkirk. Seeing the devastation, despondent faces of those being rescued, and experiencing the effects of the war firsthand, the women are compelled to do their part in the war efforts.
- As the first bombs are dropped on London in the blitz, Eve decides to volunteer in the Auxiliary Fire Service.
- Both Eve and Audrey mourn the loss of their mothers, who are tragically killed in the London bombings and together sign up to be ambulance drivers at the ATS training camp. Soon qualified and driving their own Lorry – they face the very heart aching and distressing realities of war.
- Eve and Audrey cross paths with American soldiers Louis and Robert at a social event; sparks fly quickly for Audrey and Robert, who part as friends after a delightful evening.
- At a turn of events, Louis and Robert are stationed at Wellingford Hall. Audrey and Robert fall in love and are quickly married in hospital as Audrey recovers from a V-1 attack.
- Eve and Louis fall in love. Despite Louis being married, Eve's feelings of abandonment from God harden her heart so much that she does not regret her choices.
- Once the war is over, Eve and Audrey give birth to their son's Harry and Bobbie.
- Audrey's husband Robert dies in a car crash, and Audrey's plans of moving to America to be with Robert and his family are cancelled.
- Eve needs somewhere for her own son to call home and, in her desperation, decides America is the best place to get what she needs. She leaves Audrey and her son without a goodbye and sets off for America.

## 1950

- Eve is desperate to provide a home for her son Harry and decides to impersonate widowed Audrey (and her son Bobbie), claiming Audrey's American family as her own.
- Audrey's world unravels at the news of her true identity (she is not her father's biological daughter). She is left with nothing and decides that her last hope of belonging and finding a family is to travel to America and seek her only remaining relatives.
- Bewildered, she finds Eve and Harry in her place, impersonating her life.
- Eve's deception begins to unravel, opening wounds and forcing secrets to be revealed, overall testing their friendship one final time.
- Eve's stubborn determination tries to force Audrey to back down, yet Audrey shows courage and forgiveness, helping Eve see her wrongdoing.

- Eve repents and comes back to God after such a long time away from Him and many mistakes and regrets.
- With their friendship restored, Eve and Audrey seek forgiveness and restoration from Robert's family, who offers forgiveness to Eve and warmly welcome Audrey, despite all that has happened.



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS & TALKING POINTS

1

Q. Audrey and Eve are two women who seemingly have nothing in common - yet their lives are beautifully woven together. Which character did you relate to the most and why?

### TALKING POINTS

These are some reasons we may feel connected to a particular character;

- Empathy/Sympathy
- Pity
- Similar character traits.
- Similar circumstances.
- Similar desires, hopes, or dreams.
- Similar mistakes made in our own lives.
- We may like or dislike a particular character.

2

Q. Discuss some of the themes in *If I Were You*. How do Eve and Audrey's beliefs, values, and life experiences, affect the decisions they make as adults?

### TALKING POINTS

*Eve*

- Home (financially poor, loving, Christian foundations).
- Belonging (where family and home is, when this is lost, she does not know who she is anymore).
- Family (deep connections, healthy and loving family bonds).
- Identity (sense of identity and belonging wrapped up in people and places).
- Envy (as an adult driven by fear, bitterness, jealousy, and anger towards God & others).

*Audrey*

- Home (wealthy, sterile environment, deprived of emotion and love).
- Belonging (she never understands true belonging until she meets her Heavenly Father).
- Family (wants to build the loving family she never had herself for her son, does not have healthy role models for family and needs to learn how to parent in love).
- Identity (not her earthly fathers biological daughter, battles with who she truly is).
- Motivation (people pleasing, others focused, desiring to be loved and known).

# 3

Q. Eve is raised in a poor but loving Christian household, whereas Audrey is raised in an extremely wealthy household where she has an overabundance of 'things' but is totally deprived of love and affection. As the girls grow, they secretly envy one another and deeply desire what the other has. How does this envy impact their friendship over the years?

## TALKING POINTS

Answers may vary and include;

- Envy gives the enemy a foothold and allows for bitterness and resentment to grow.
- The girls seem to have a love/hate relationship at times.
- Envy can cause us to assume the worst of one another instead of believing in the good.
- Envy breeds discontentment.
- Love does not envy (if envy is present in a relationship, Christian love is not present).

# 4

Q. During the war, the breakdown of social class, gender roles and morals increases as traumatised and hurting people navigate the new way of life. How were some of these changes beneficial? How might God use these changes in the lives of individuals?

## TALKING POINTS

Answers may vary and include;

- God sees every person as equally valuable and created in His image; there is no class system amongst children of God – this begins to be more apparent during the war and breakdown of social class.
- If you have accepted Christ, you are adopted into the family of God. Many women and children became widows and orphans during the war and, out of necessity, had to learn to live without a man of the house.
- Families had to learn to make do with a lot less and manage food rations for a long time after the war.

# 5

Q. "Where is the Good Shepherd in all of this suffering and loss" (p278). Eve's faith journey, while ending strong, is not without its challenges and can seem like a rollercoaster at times. Hitting rock bottom, she acknowledges feelings of total abandonment and engages in known sin - something she'd refused to do previously. How does this impact her decision making as she moves further and further away from God?

## TALKING POINTS

As we harden our hearts against the Lord, committing known sin and stifling the Holy Spirit, it becomes easier and easier to compromise our beliefs and engage in more unholy behaviour.

- "She told herself not to be sorry for what she and Louis had done... She hadn't left the Good Shepherds fold - He had abandoned her" (p310).
- Sin can often escalate quickly to become more destructive and more involved.
- The more we sin, the easier it is to sin again.
- The world can corrupt or distort our views of sin and what is and is not sin.
- We must refer to the Bible for knowledge of what is right and wrong.
- We need to allow the Holy Spirit to convict us of sin.
- Good friendships aid with calling out sin in a loving and helpful way.
- Accountability partners can be helpful to help overcome sin.

# 6

Q. Audrey grows up craving love and affection, with a deep desire to be fully known and cherished. When she finds her faith in Christ and begins a relationship with her Heavenly Father, she truly begins to flourish as those deep, and empty voids in her heart are filled with Him. She begins to feel whole. Do you struggle to allow God to fulfil deep needs or desires in your heart? Or do you feel Christ truly meets all your needs?

## TALKING POINTS

Answers may vary and could include;

- Allowing God to fill every need requires obedience, faith, contentment, trust and His supernatural peace and joy during times of trial and suffering.
- Allowing God to fill every need is a daily decision of faith and may be harder during trials and temptation than from the mountain top.
- Requires us to fix our eyes upon Jesus and not our circumstances.
- Requires us to hold onto our hope of joy of salvation even amongst the storms.
- Requires us to see with our heavenly eyes, not our earthly eyes.

Why is it hard to allow God to meet our needs?

- Trust; do we truly trust He has our best interest at heart? Do we believe He will work everything together for our good? Do we believe He is sovereign?
- Faith; are we faith-filled? Do we need to pray for the gift of great faith?
- Have we seemingly been 'let-down' before? Did we trust God, and everything seemed to fail, and we still do not see the full picture or understand?
- Hurts and Offences; have we been hurt and let down by others and assume God will do the same?
- God's Promises; do we believe God's promises are meant for us, or just everyone else?
- Do we feel unworthy? (we are - Jesus makes us ALL worthy).

# 7

Q. Historical fiction, biographies and storytelling have a way of profoundly impacting the soul, sometimes in a way which textbooks and facts cannot. Was there a moment for you in the book where the horrors of the war came alive? How did this change your perspective of war or challenge your attitudes towards circumstances you may be facing today?

## TALKING POINTS

Answers may vary and could include;

- London Blitz
- Death of loved ones and war casualties.
- Food Rations and general poverty from the war.
- V-1 Bombing on Audrey and Eve's ambulance.
- Eve and Audrey sailing to Dunkirk.

Perspectives

- Learning about war, the loss of life, trauma, poverty, and fear may help us put our current circumstances into a healthy perspective, not to belittle our pain, trials, or suffering, yet to remind us we are not alone in our human experience. Pain, hardship, trauma, suffering are a part of life in our broken world - many others have suffered and endured much in the past.

- While experiencing suffering, we can thank God for the blessings we do have; food, shelter, safety, freedom to worship, family and friends.

## 8

Q. Throughout the book, we see Eve having to live with severe consequences to her sin. What are your beliefs about Sin, Consequences, and Punishment? Does God punish sin, or are the natural consequences of sin itself our punishment?

### TALKING POINTS

Views of punishment, sin, and consequences may vary greatly within the group and include;

- We reap what we sow (universal law).
- God may or may not remove the consequences of our sin once we have repented and the sin is forgiven.
- The consequence of sin is our punishment.
- All actions have consequences, and the consequences of sin are often difficult to deal with, yet can be a reminder of why we ought to stay away from sin.
- God does punish people for unrepented sin.
- God disciplines us, just as a loving parent disciplines a child (this may include punishment for our actions).
- God's discipline corrects sinful behaviour and sets us on the right path.
- I don't think God punishes us.

Keep the conversation flowing and do not allow any one individual to dominate with their perspective. It is OK to disagree and engage in lively discussion if it is kept loving and respectful. It is also OK not to agree or be able to answer this question - we may never fully understand this side of eternity.

## 9

Q. Once we have accepted Jesus into our lives, how can we be sure we have been 'made new', and truly believe that we have been forgiven for our sins, past, present and future?

### TALKING POINTS

Some of the reasons we may doubt we have been made new are;

- The fruit of the Spirit seems absent in our lives; fruit begins as seeds; we need to allow the Holy Spirit to nurture the seeds, to grow them and allow them to blossom in our lives.
- We doubt we're truly saved because our sin seems unforgivable; if we declare with our mouth and heart that Jesus is Lord, we will be saved - once we repent, we're truly forgiven and rest in Jesus and His forgiveness.
- Other's may mock us or tease us and cause us to question what we believe.

How can we accept God's forgiveness?

- Truly repenting; understanding that repentance is a total transformation in our hearts to come into agreement with the Lord that our sin is wrong, and a confession that we turn from that wrong towards God.
- Believing God's word, when we have truly repented and asked for forgiveness, we are forgiven through Jesus sacrifice on the cross.
- Acknowledging Jesus as Lord of our lives and surrendering to Him; admitting God is sovereign and all-powerful.

- Forgiving others as God forgives us; understanding that forgiveness is a choice not an emotion and that Bible says God will forgive us in the same way we forgive others - unforgiveness is a sin.

10

Q. Were you satisfied with the conclusion of the story? Do you think it was a realistic representation of the forgiveness of sin? Or do you think in real life, it would have been much harder for those Eve had manipulated and betrayed to forgive her?

### TALKING POINTS

Answers may vary and include;

- The forgiveness extended to Eve at the conclusion of the story is true to the Christian faith, and because of this, it was a realistic ending.
- Audrey and Eve's friendship was miraculously restored through Christ, and this is realistic and possible.
- The ending was unrealistic (forgiveness may not have come so freely and quickly).
- Audrey's American family may have offered forgiveness to Eve for her lies and betrayal, yet asked her to leave because trust was broken.
- Eve should have told Louis he was a father.
- The natural consequences of Eve's sin would have been greater in real life.
- Audrey and Eve's friendship would not have survived so much envy, betrayal and lies.
- God's timing is important, secrets should be revealed at the right time.

What is true Biblical forgiveness?

- Forgiveness is not accepting sin yet cancelling the debt owed by the individual who has sinned against us. This protects our hearts from resentment and bitterness.
- Offering forgiveness does not mean that we need to put ourselves at risk and re-enter dangerous or toxic relationships with others.
- We can forgive another person without them being aware.
- Asking for forgiveness can be rejected by others (our apologies may not always be received by people - but are always received by God when we've truly repented).



## ADDITIONAL NOTES FOR LEADERS

Discussion questions from the author are available at the back of the book. You may like to encourage your group to reflect on these questions before your monthly meeting and keep a reflective journal to record their notes. These questions will allow your book club sisters to examine the text before the meeting, and as the month progresses, you may like to discuss these through your group's online platform (a Facebook group/ messenger or what's app chat group etc.) to keep connected and engaged throughout the month.

Check out this fun book club kit from Crazy 4 Fiction with interviews from the author, an 'If I Were You' quiz, 1940's English food recipes for your book club meeting and other goodies.

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