

# Reclaiming Joy: A Primer for Widows

By Ella Wall Prichard

## Book Club Guide

### Summary

Nearly a million women are widowed each year in the United States. Hardly anyone is prepared for the days, months, and years that follow the loss.

New widows grieve, but they also battle psychological, spiritual, and social upheaval from all directions. From discovering a new identity to finding different ways to relate to old friends, life becomes unfamiliar. Practical changes—both legal and financial—are inevitable. Just as there’s no simple prescription that makes grief disappear, there is no clear way to address all the challenges widows face.

In *Reclaiming Joy: A Primer for Widows*, Ella Wall Prichard writes the book she needed, but could not find, after her husband died. She recounts her turn to the Apostle Paul’s letter to the Philippians, a letter that features joy as a source of comfort and hope—and shapes *Reclaiming Joy*.

Prichard offers practical advice on how to achieve joy. Each chapter focuses on a different trait needed to move from grief to joy. The primary narrative arc is spiritual, even though stories of struggle, conflict, and loss are recurrent themes.

*Reclaiming Joy* is part memoir, part guide, part inspiration. It captures the pain felt in the first years of widowhood in the move from grief to joy. It offers encouragement and advice to women who seek the strength to rebuild their lives and reclaim their joy.

Though Prichard writes for widows, her source—Paul’s letter to the Philippians—was written to encourage a small, poor, struggling, discouraged, divided group of first-century Christians; and the lessons to be learned in *Reclaiming Joy* can be applied to anyone who wants to move from loss, discouragement, or depression to joy.

### Topics and Questions for Discussion

1. Prichard’s book is part memoir, part guide, part inspiration. As you read the book, which part dominated? In what section do you think *Reclaiming Joy* belongs in the local bookstore? Why?
2. In her introductory letter (p. xiii), Prichard suggests three ways readers might approach the book: “You can read it through in a day or two. Use it as a daily meditation guide, creating a

quiet space in your day to nourish your soul; or check the table of contents to find a chapter that addresses what is on your heart at that moment.” Which approach did you take? If you read it like a novel, from beginning to end, can you think of a time when you might want to return to a specific chapter or use it for daily meditation?

3. Chapter 1 is about *grace*—an important word in the language of the Church. At the end of the chapter (p. 8), Prichard describes grace as “the bottomless well of God’s unconditional love, mercy, forgiveness, and pardon.” Do you think that grace is only available in a religious context, or do you believe that all of us are capable of extending unconditional love, mercy, forgiveness, and pardon to others—especially to those we love most? Is it easier to offer that kind of grace to others, or to accept it? Is it easier to offer grace to others than to ourselves? Is forgiving ourselves sometimes hardest of all? Why do you think that Prichard lists grace as the first step in moving from grief to joy?

4. Chapter 2 is about the importance of gratitude, which is one of the main themes of the book—the importance of staying focused on what we have to be thankful for, rather than on our fears and losses. Have you had periods in your life where you consciously sought to live in gratitude mode to stave off depression and pity parties? Did it work, or do you think the concept is too simplistic?

5. Another major theme is the importance of relationships, including the idea that “it is more important to be rightly related than to be right.” Do you agree with that? What would be some of the exceptions? Of all Prichard’s stories and observations about relationships, which one struck you the most? Did you come away with any ideas for how you might strengthen your relationships or establish new relationships?

6. Prichard describes how she looked for role models as she sought to rebuild her life after her husband’s death. Who are your role models for widowhood? What attributes do you especially admire? Did you gain any insights about what you can do while you are still half a couple that will make life alone easier or better?

7. Unlike most spiritual memoirs, Prichard writes at length about the messiness of settling the estate and how unprepared she was to take over the family business and deal with bankers, lawyers, and accountants. Her issues were perhaps more complex than the average widow’s. Did this part of her story detract from the more spiritual aspects of *Reclaiming Joy*, or did it give a more complete picture of what early widowhood can be like?

8. In the midst of twenty-seven mostly positive chapters, Chapter 16, “Beware!” jumps out. What was your reaction? Have you or someone you know experienced betrayal? If it was a personal experience, how did you handle it? How do you guard against it?

9. At the end of the book, Prichard concludes: “A giving spirit flows from the acknowledgement that everything one has is a gift. The open hand of friendship and generosity—not the closed fist that clings tightly to every penny, as well as to every feeling of hurt, anger, bitterness, and unfairness—is the key to joy.” Do you agree? Why or why not? If you were to sum up your

personal way to moving from grief or depression to joy, what would it be? What will you carry away from this book?

### **Additional Resources for Christian Book Clubs**

“Philippians 101,” an historical and biblical background of Paul’s letter to the Philippians, is downloadable now on this website. By September 15, additional downloadable resources will be added, including a four-session small group leader’s guide and a daily meditation guide. Meanwhile, see Ella’s blogs on Philippians:

- [What About Those Who Are Not Religious?](#)
- [Moving Toward Joy: Meditations for Advent](#)
- [Porchtime at the Parsonage](#)
- [12 Keys to Reclaiming Joy](#)
- [Content, Whatever the Circumstances](#)

The author relied on David E. Garland, “Philippians,” in *Ephesians–Philemon*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary 12 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006).

***Reclaiming Joy*** goes on sale at Barnes and Noble September 15, or you can order online from the Baylor University Press, Amazon, or Barnes and Noble [here](#).