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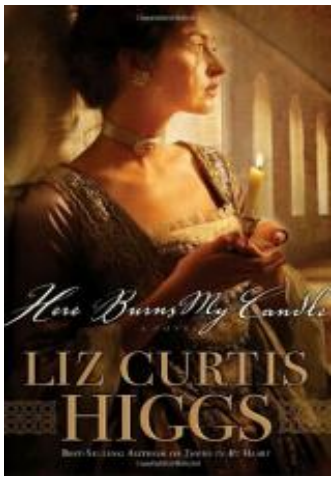
Here Burns My Candle

by Liz Curtis Higgs



About the Book

Lady Elisabeth Kerr is a keeper of secrets. Her husband has his own, well hidden from the household, yet whispered among the town gossips, while his mother conceals gold beneath her floor and guilt inside her heart. One by one the family's secrets begin to surface, as bonny Prince Charlie rides into Edinburgh to claim the crown. From award-winning novelist, Liz Curtis Higgs, comes a timeless saga of loss and redemption, flickering against the vivid backdrop of 18th-century Scotland.

Discussion Guide

1. History plays a major role in **Here Burns My Candle**. Not only Scottish history, but also ancient history steps onto the stage since our two main characters, Marjory and Elisabeth Kerr, are drawn from the biblical story of Naomi and Ruth. How did your familiarity with the original story shape your reading experience? What surprises did you find along the way? In what ways were the characters different than you expected? What are the benefits of taking a fictionalized look at a well-known story?

2. Although Elisabeth Kerr is featured on the cover, the novel opens by introducing us to her mother-in-law, Marjory Kerr. How would you describe Marjory in the first chapter? And in the final chapter? What changes did you notice in her attitude toward the Almighty One over the course of the novel? And how did your feelings toward Marjory change, if at all, from first page to last? In your own experience, is growth more often borne of joy or of pain? Why might that be the case?

3. Ruth is celebrated as one of the "good girls" of the Bible, yet we often forget she began life as a pagan Moabitess, captured here in Elisabeth's worship of the Nameless One. Why do you think Elisabeth continued the auld ways even after marrying into a church-going family? In what ways does the power of tradition shape our attitudes and actions? In chapter 4 Elisabeth poses many questions about the Almighty One. If you were sitting across from her right now, how

would you answer her?

4. Donald and Andrew have their biblical counterparts too. Donald is based on Mahlon, whose name means "weakling" or "infertility." How does that description fit Donald? What other words might you use to characterize him? What, if anything, did you like about Elisabeth's husband? Andrew is patterned after Chilion, whose name means "pining" or "consumptive." Again, how do those words suit Andrew? Would Lord John have been proud of his sons, as Marjory was on that October eve in the forecourt of the palace, described in chapter 42? Why or why not?

5. Faithfulness and forgiveness are two themes interwoven throughout the story. In what ways are Marjory, Elisabeth, and Donald faithful? And unfaithful? For what does each need forgiveness and from whom? If you were in Elisabeth's place, faced with a loved one's request to "Forgive me... for all of it," how might you respond? In what ways do these characters' struggles with faithfulness and forgiveness reflect our desire to connect with others on a more meaningful level?

6. The epigraphs that open each chapter are meant to capture the heart of the action to come. How does the quote from George Herbert --- "Words are women, deeds are men" --- suit chapter 32? To what extent does his statement reflect your assessment of female-male differences? Choose an epigraph you especially like from the novel. Why does it appeal to you, and how does the quote match the chapter it introduces?

7. Marjory calls Elisabeth "a keeper of secrets." In truth, all the major characters in this story have something to hide. When Simon reveals his painful past, how does that impact Elisabeth's heart? When Donald confesses his litany of sins on paper, how does that affect the lives of those around him? And what secrets do Marjory and Elisabeth each harbor? In life, as in fiction, how might keeping secrets cause more harm than sharing the truth with those we love and trust?

8. Though Rob MacPherson has no biblical counterpart, he plays an important role in this story. What do his interactions with Elisabeth reveal about her character? And what does his relationship with Marjory tell us about her? How does Rob compare with Donald? Do you find Rob appealing or disturbing, and why? In what ways does Rob fall short of true hero status? What sort of future would you choose for him?

9. Loss is one of the central themes of the novel, summarized in Marjory's own fears: "Surely a grieving widow could not lose everything. Not all she owned. *Not everything.*" Name all the things, big and small, that are taken from Marjory. Which of these losses struck you as most unexpected? If you've experienced one or more of these losses, how was your life affected? How would you cope if you truly lost everything? To what or whom would you look for strength and help, whatever the extent of your loss?

10. When Elisabeth chooses which direction her future will take, do you think she is running *away* from something or *toward* something, and why? Does Elisabeth fit the definition of a true heroine: a woman who loves sacrificially? If so, how? If not, what is she lacking? Her newfound faith will surely be tested in the sequel, *Mine Is the Night*. What indications do you have about how Elisabeth might respond to future trials and tribulations? What about Marjory? What course do you imagine their relationship will take in the months ahead?

11. Now that you've read this 18th-century interpretation, read the real story in Ruth 1:1?18. As you consider the passage verse by verse, what parallels do you find between the Scottish novel and the biblical original? What "famine" might Lord John and Lady Marjory have experienced that sends them packing for Edinburgh? Why do you suppose Orpah

turns back, just as Janet does? In Ruth 1:18 Naomi falls silent; Marjory does the same in the final chapter. Why, in each story, might that be the case?

12. Our Readers Guide opens with a quote from Thomas Carlyle, a 19th-century Scottish historian and essayist. In what ways does the historical reality of the Jacobite Rising of 1745 serve as a fitting backdrop for this story? What more recent historical event might also provide an interesting setting for this story and its themes? What eternal truths did you find illuminated in the hearts and lives of these characters? Finally, what do you love most about historical fiction, and what did you enjoy about **Here Burns My Candle** in particular?

Author Bio

Liz Curtis Higgs is the author of nearly 30 books, with more than three million copies in print. Her popular nonfiction books include BAD GIRLS OF THE BIBLE, REALLY BAD GIRLS OF THE BIBLE, UNVEILING MARY MAGDALENE, SLIGHTLY BAD GIRLS OF THE BIBLE, RISE AND SHINE and EMBRACE GRACE.

She?s also a bestselling novelist, creating both contemporary and historical fiction, including her latest award-winning novels, HERE BURNS MY CANDLE and MINE IS THE NIGHT. And she?s written five books for young children, including GO AWAY, DARK NIGHT.

Her children?s *Parable Series* received a 1998 ECPA Gold Medallion for Excellence, her nonfiction book EMBRACE GRACE won a 2007 Retailers Choice Award, and her novel WHENCE CAME A PRINCE received a 2006 Christy Award for Best Historical Novel. HERE BURNS MY CANDLE was named 2010 Best Inspirational Romance by *Romantic Times* Book Reviews, and her 2011 novel, MINE IS THE NIGHT, was a *New York Times* bestseller.

Liz was also an award-winning columnist for *Today?s Christian Woman* for 10 years. Additional articles by Liz have appeared in *Faith&Friends* in Canada, *WomanAlive* in Great Britain, and *Enhance* in Australia. And more than 4,500 churches nationwide are using her video Bible study series, *Loved by God*.

A gifted professional speaker, known by her audiences as An Encourager®, Liz has presented more than 1,600 inspirational programs in all 50 United States and fourteen foreign countries, including Israel, Thailand, Portugal and Indonesia. When the National Speakers Association honored her with their Council of Peers Award for Excellence, Liz became one of only 35 women in the world named to their CPAE-Speaker Hall of Fame. Her alma mater, Bellarmine University, presented her with a Distinguished Alumni Award in 2005, and she received an Honorary Doctorate from Georgetown College in 2010.

Feature articles about Liz have appeared in more than 250 major newspapers and magazines, as well as on Salon.com, Beliefnet.com, Spirituality.com, HopeforWomenMag.com, Kyria.com and many other websites. She has been interviewed on more than 600 radio and television stations, including guest appearances on PBS, A&E, MS?NBC, NPR, TBN, CBC Canada, BBC Radio Scotland, Shine TV New Zealand, Radio Pulpit South Africa, Focus on the Family, Life Today, 100 Huntley Street, and Midday Connection on the Moody Network.

On the personal side, Liz is married to Bill Higgs, Ph.D., who serves as Director of Operations for her speaking and writing office. Liz and Bill enjoy their old Kentucky home, a 19th-century farmhouse in Louisville, and are the proud (and relieved!) parents of two college grads, Matthew and Lillian.

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