

Book Club Kit



PLAYLIST



Listen to Tammy Oberhausen's **complete** playlist for *The Evolution of the Gospelettes* on Spotify

- Angel Band—Peasall Sisters
- Keep on the Sunny Side—The McKinney Sisters
- One Toke over the Line—Brewer & Shipley
- God Is Not Dead—Albertina Walker
- Me and Bobby McGee—Kris Kristofferson
- A Voice from on High—Bill Monroe
- Put Your Hand in the Hand—Ocean
- American Pie—Don McLean
- Turn Your Radio On—Merle Haggard & The Strangers, Bonnie Owens, & The Carter Family
- I Feel Like Traveling On—Loretta Lynn
- Stuck in the Middle with You—Stealers Wheel
- You Are My Sunshine—The Dead South
- Take My Hand, Precious Lord—Sister Rosetta Tharpe
- Welcome Table—Jason Eady & Courtney Patton
- Voodoo Chile—Jimi Hendrix
- I Saw the Light—Hank Williams & the Drifting Cowboys
- Return of the Grievous Angel—Gram Parsons
- Where No One Stands Alone—Elvis Presley
- This May Be the Last Time—Mavis Staples & Levon Helm
- Get Right with God—Lucinda Williams



MENU

Some southern favorites for your book club meeting

- Fried chicken or Nashville hot chicken & biscuits
- Pimento cheese & crackers
- Banana pudding
- Peach cobbler
- Iced tea
- Mint juleps (a Kentucky specialty)

COMPANION BOOKS

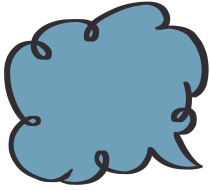


- The American Religion: The Emergence of the Post-Christian Nation* by Harold Bloom—1993 book of religious criticism examines the distinctive features of American religion
- Daisy Jones & The Six* by Taylor Jenkins Reid—2019 novel about the rise of a 1970s rock band
- God Spare the Girls* by Kelsey McKinney—2021 novel about sisterhood and evangelical culture
- The Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory: American Evangelicals in an Age of Extremism* by Tim Alberta—2024 book examines the modern evangelical movement in the US and its disconnect from scripture
- The Poisonwood Bible* by Barbara Kingsolver—1998 novel featuring four daughters of an evangelical preacher on a mission to the Belgian Congo in 1959
- Singing the Glory Down: Amateur Gospel Music in South Central Kentucky, 1900-1990* by William Lynwood Montell—1991 book by renowned Kentucky folklorist



COMPANION FILMS & SERIES

- The Apostle*—1997 movie, written and directed by and starring Robert Duvall, about an evangelical preacher's revenge and redemption
- The Clark Sisters: First Ladies of Gospel*—2020 Lifetime drama series about five sisters in a Black gospel group
- Daisy Jones & the Six*—2023 Prime limited series about a fictional 1970s rock band
- The Eyes of Tammy Faye*—2021 movie about the rise, fall, and redemption of televangelist and singer Tammy Faye Bakker
- Gaither Homecoming*—video series beginning in 1991 featuring many of the great artists of southern gospel music
- Gospel*—2024 PBS documentary, hosted by Henry Louis Gates Jr., explores Black spirituality in sermon and song
- The Righteous Gemstones*—2019 Max comedy series about a greedy, dysfunctional family of televangelists



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What effect do you think Garland's story of the angel visitation had on Jeannie and Junior? In what ways was the angel's prophecy fulfilled?

Personal connection: Consider the role that positive or negative parental expectations, or the lack of expectations, have played in your life or in the lives of people you know.

2. Why do you think Garland refuses to allow Jeannie to go to college? Is his fear understandable, given his background and worldview? How does this refusal change the trajectory of Jeannie's life?

Personal connection: Discuss decisions you made early on (or your parents made for you) that determined the direction of your own life.

3. How do you understand the Gospelettes' faith? Does it seem sincere? Why or why not?

Personal connection: How do you react to religious practices and beliefs that are different from your own? Do you find them interesting? Amusing? Mystifying? Why?

4. Early on, we learn that "Garland was always on guard against the dangers of interstate highways, elevators, hippies, motel rooms, drugs, water fountains, airplanes, caves, tornadoes, electrical outlets, universities, restaurant food, and public toilets." To what do you attribute his excessive fearfulness? What effect does this have on his family?

Personal connection: How has fear (your own or that imposed on you by others) affected your choices and opportunities in life?

5. What do you think motivates the Gospelettes to perform in the beginning, before they are making any money?

Personal connection: Are there artistic endeavors, hobbies, or other activities that you have devoted yourself to that others might question? What drove you to continue despite the absence of outer reward?

6. What do you think was the attraction between Jeannie and Wick? Did you consider them a good match at the beginning? Did you change your mind at the end? How did their relationship change over time?

Personal connection: Consider relationships that you had as a younger person versus today. Do you want the same things in relationships now that you did then?

7. Do you think Garland and Big Jean are naïve about the cultural changes that will affect their children's lives? If so, in what ways are they naïve, and how does this play out for the family? What do you think they could or should have done differently?

Personal connection: Were your parents unprepared for the cultural changes in your generation? If so, how? If you have children, how do you think you handled or are handling such changes?

8. In a conversation with Wick, Jeannie describes the feeling she gets while performing as a “buzz” or “vibration.” Why do you think Jeannie views this experience with music as spiritual? Wick suggests that he gets the same sensations from getting high. What do you think about these comparisons?

Personal connection: Consider what activities in your life have engendered spiritual or transcendent experiences. Do you consider joyful experiences in your life (music, literature, art, sports, etc.) as spiritual? Or do you have other ways of explaining the feelings brought on by these experiences?

9. How do you interpret the power that Brother Oren Alford has over the congregation at the tent revival and later over the audience of his TV program and the congregation of The Church at Holliman Farms? Why do they support him financially? What needs is he meeting in them?

Personal connection: What sources of power or inspiration have you turned to in your life? Religious or political leaders? Authors? Musicians? Celebrities? Influencers? Groups or organizations? Do you see a difference in your devotion to those sources and that of the characters in the novel? What about similarities?

10. Brother Oren Alford’s “name it and claim it” theology or “prosperity gospel” has been popular in some evangelical Christian circles (as well as in New Age spirituality, where it’s known as “the law of attraction” or “manifestation”) for many years. What effect do you think this belief system has on the characters in the novel? Is it beneficial or detrimental—or both?

Personal connection: What do you think about this philosophy that positive thinking can influence outcomes in one’s life? Is it something you practice? Or are you skeptical?

11. Do you think Jeannie is right to feel responsible for what happens to Debbie? Why or why not?

Personal connection: Do you harbor regrets for things you didn’t do? Have you ever felt responsible for other people’s life choices? Do you think such feelings are fair to you? Are they helpful?

12. By the 1990s, Jeannie, who had always been the most devout and the moral leader of her siblings, finds herself in the unusual position of being unsure what she believes. Meanwhile, her more rebellious siblings have become more dogmatic. What do you think may have caused this reversal?

Personal connection: In what ways have your views changed over the years? What about siblings, friends, or others you were close to growing up? How did these changes affect your relationships? Why do you think people from similar backgrounds and experiences sometimes have such different views?

13. Jeannie observes that different preachers tend to focus on different scriptural themes: “Brother Clarence preached about love and forgiveness. Garland mostly talked about judgment and tribulation. Brother Alford was all about health and wealth.” What do these preferences reveal about them?

Personal connection: In your own belief systems (religious, political, moral, or other), do you find yourself preferring some tenets and practices over others? Are there parts of your belief system that you ignore?

14. The novel ends not with a gospel song but with a folk song about a frog, an owl, a bat, and a bumblebee, as well as the sounds of a cow, a bumblebee, a dove, a killdeer, and a bobwhite quail. Why do you think the author made this choice?

Personal connection: What songs would you include if writing a story about your life? Why? Make a playlist and share.