



# WESTWARD HEARTS

by Melody Carlson

## Book Group Discussion Questions

1. Elizabeth Martin is in a dark place when the book begins. Aware of how much sharper her grief feels in the middle of the night, she longs for morning. Can you relate to this in any way? Why does the dark of night make problems seem worse?
2. Elizabeth considers living out her deceased husband's dream by taking her children to Oregon on the Oregon Trail. Did you see her as brave? Foolhardy? Unrealistic? Adventurous? How would you have advised her?
3. Were you relieved when Matthew, her brokenhearted brother, decided to go to Oregon? Describe a time when you took on a big challenge thanks to someone who was willing to go alongside you.
4. Initially, Asa and Clara both solidly oppose Elizabeth and Matthew's plans to go west. What do you think made them change their minds?
5. Can you imagine restarting your life with only a wagonload full of goods that you need to survive? What items (beyond food and clothes) would you not be able to leave behind?
6. Were you surprised to discover that Ruby used to run a "dance hall"? How did you react to the way that Asa handled this potentially explosive situation?
7. Many things about life, although challenging, seemed simpler back in the 1850s. What one characteristic of that era do you wish you could incorporate into your own life today?
8. Did you suspect that Jess was really a woman? What did you think when you realized she was? Have you or someone you know ever pretended to be something different? Describe.
9. Many lessons have been learned on the Oregon Trail, and many more are coming. What lesson do you think would have the most impact on your life?
10. Both Eli Kincaid and Will Bramford seem to have their eye on Elizabeth. Which one do you think would be the best match? Why?
11. Gertie Muller is a difficult person for many of her fellow travelers. Why do you think she's so cantankerous? Do you have a difficult person like that in your life?
12. What is your general impression of the Taylors (the missionary couple)? Do you think they're sincere in their claim to be serving God? Why or why not?