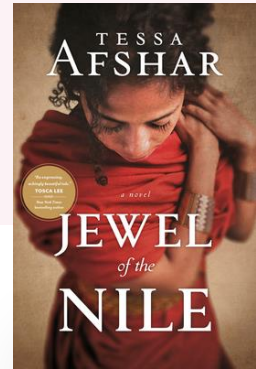




LEADER'S GUIDE

JEWEL OF THE NILE BY TESSA AFSHAR



"You may have no brother or sister. I don't know if you will ever find your father. But I do know this. As one who calls God Abba, Father, you are never alone. Your earthly father may have abandoned you. Knowingly left you, even. But your heavenly Father will not. He will remain with you always. And in his presence, there is fullness of joy. Soul-deep calm. Favor and grace."

THEO

THEMES

Identity Faith Prayer History Trust Surrender

HEADS UP! (TRIGGERS AND DELICATE TOPICS)

Slavery Unknown Identity Search for Biological Father

CHARACTERS

Chariline, half Roman and half Cushite, is orphaned as an infant when her mother dies giving birth to her. Growing up riddled with guilt and feeling responsible for her mother's premature death and believing her father dead, she craves love and acceptance, yet only finds her basic needs met by her quiet and closed off Aunt Blandina. The colour of her skin, darker than her Roman relatives, reveals her father's Cushite heritage, and it's not until she meets dark-skinned Cushite man, Natemahar, that she realises she's not the "only one". Growing up alongside the apostle Phillip and his family in her home of Caesarae, Chariline knows and loves the Lord but begins a journey of total trust and surrender to Him. She seeks by any means necessary to find her father, who is discovered after 24 years of lies – to be alive.

Theo; A big-hearted Christian merchant trading scented soap along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, finds Chariline as a stow-away on his boat. Theo has learnt through years of pain and hardship to trust the Lord and endure. Hailing from Corinth, he is a champion in the highly prestigious Isthmian games yet is still tortured by his past. Theo was conceived by rape, and his mother became emotionally unwell during his

infancy once it is confirmed he was the child of the criminal and not her husband Servius. In hopes of helping his wife recover, Servius abandoned Theo in the street. Yet her grief over losing the child became unbearable, and she committed suicide. As God intervened to save Theo, he was found and raised by Galenos in Corinth. Journeying with Chariline to help her find her father, Theo finds acceptance and redemption himself. (Theo is also one of the main characters in the novel "Thief of Corinth" by Tessa Afshar, a fantastic book to read alongside "Jewel of the Nile")

Natemahar; Treasurer and court official of Cush, trusted advisor to the Kandake, and cherished friend to Chariline. His character is based on the eunuch in Acts who meets evangelist Philip while travelling and is radically saved by Jesus and baptised. (see Author notes on pages 403-405).

Quintus Blandinus Geminus; Chariline's hardhearted Grandfather and Roman official serving the Empire in Cush.

Kandake; Queen and ruler of the Kingdom of Cush.

STORYLINE

The story takes place in the Kingdom of Cush and Roman Empire, with historical biblical figures such as Aquila and Priscilla, the Apostle Philip, the eunuch from Acts and Theo (a fictional character from "The Thief of Corinth" who's story continues in "Jewel of the Nile").

We journey alongside Chariline as she seeks to find her identity and her biological father, a man she believed to be dead for 24 years. Consumed with guilt over her mother's death, the hope of finding a family overwhelms her. Chariline, deeply desires a family who will love her beyond her emotionally distant aunt and her grandparents, who seem to have little affection for her. When Chariline is visiting her grandparent's home in Cush, she overhears the secret that her father is alive and working at the palace under the rule of the Kandake. Being friends with Natemahar, a court official, she begins to try everything within her power to seek and find the answers she's been longing for – including bringing Natemahar into the secret. While sneaking around the palace, she overhears a plot to kill the queen, which torments her consciousness as she tries to figure out how to inform and protect the Kandake, yet also the murderer she believes could be her father.

Once Chariline returns home to Caesarea, she is introduced to Theo while sharing a meal at Philip's home, and immediately decides to stow away on his ship and head to Rome to continue seeking the answers to her questions. Along the way she is discovered, becomes chronically ill and is nursed to health by Theo. The two form affections for one another, and a romance begins to blossom. Once in Rome, Chariline is hosted by Aquila and Priscilla. She meets her mother's dearest friend, Vitruvia, who helps her uncover the secret of her heart – through letters Chariline's mother sent her before her death. All the while, she is unknowingly being pursued by a Cush warrior who is attempting to assassinate her.

Discovering Natemahar is actually her father, Chariline battles with intense feelings of rage, confusion and betrayal. Through the love and support of Theo, and a supernatural sense of peace from the Lord – Chariline forgives Natemahar for not disclosing his identity and quickly departs for the kingdom of Cush to inform the Kandake of the plot against her life. Along the way Theo proposes to her, and once in the palace all is made right and the Kandake excuses Natemahar from his service role, allowing him to move to Corinth with Theo and Chariline to begin a new chapter of his life – alongside his daughter.





DISCUSSION QUESTIONS & TALKING POINTS

1

Q. As we journey through the lands of Cush and the Roman Empire, we are introduced to an array of richly developed, unforgettable and engrossing characters. Which character did you relate to the most, why?

TALKING POINTS

Some of the 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. Hermione's grace, faith, and gentle heart capture the true beauty of a woman who fears the Lord. In this modern age, when outer beauty means more to the world than a quiet and gentle spirit, how can we regularly re-focus our gaze towards true beauty, which is pleasing to God?

TALKING POINTS

1 Peter 3:3-6 "Don't be concerned about the outward beauty of fancy hairstyles, expensive jewellery, or beautiful clothes. You should clothe yourselves instead with the beauty that comes from within, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is so precious to God. This is how holy women of old made themselves beautiful. They put their trust in God and accepted the authority of their husbands.";

- If we keep our eyes focused on Christ, it will be far easier to reject the culture of today and focus on our 'inner beauty' as opposed to worldly beauty.
- Seeking Christ and becoming transformed through ongoing sanctification into His image is true beauty.
- Reject social media and entertainment, which warps your perception of true beauty, hold tight to what is good.
- Surround yourself with other women who seek true beauty themselves and run this race together, encouraging one another in transformation and good works – things of true beauty.
- Acknowledge deep within your soul that you are fearfully and wonderfully made. God made you exactly as you ought to be. He does not make mistakes; you are the apple of His eye (Psalm 17:8).

3

Q. Throughout "Jewel of the Nile", we hear many names used to describe God. Do you have a favourite name for God?

TALKING POINTS

There are many names used to describe God in the Bible. Some include;

- Saviour, Redeemer, Lord, Shepherd, Provider, Healer.
- Prince of Peace, Friend, Our Righteousness, Immanuel, Lion of Judah.
- El Roi (the God who sees me), El-Shaddai (God Almighty)
- Abba Father, Alpha and Omega, Most High.

4

Q. "Take Heart" (p171). How do these words encourage you?

TALKING POINTS

When we are enduring hardship, we can 'Take Heart' knowing God's grace is all we need;

- Jesus will never leave or forsake us; He does not abandon us (p183).
- It is by faith alone through God's grace that we are set free – it does not depend on us.
- Grace is all we need, and God's power works best in our weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9).
- God's grace is His unmerited favour towards us.
- Grace is love, mercy and forgiveness.
- Grace is a gift from God that we cannot take credit for (2 Corinthians 12:9).
- His grace will help us when we most need it (Hebrews 4:16).
- God's grace provides freedom (Romans 6:14).
- God gives grace generously (James 4:6).

5

Q. "I'm not worth saving, girl. Not worth loving either" (p187). How does understanding that we are saved by faith through grace free us to accept God's free gift of salvation?

TALKING POINTS

A stumbling block for many seeking Christ can be their feelings of shame and unworthiness. The truth is, we are ALL unworthy, yet God, through His everlasting love and kindness, saves us from our sin and through Christ, we are justified and made righteous;

Once we've accepted Christ, we may still feel fearful and unworthy or doubt His salvation for us;

- 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. The Bible says God will forgive us in the same way we forgive others - unforgiveness is a sin.

6

Q. "All my life my grandparents lied to me... If I have learned one thing from their example, it is this: hiding truth gains nothing but an invitation for powers of darkness to multiply" (p201). Do you agree with Chariline? Why, why not?

TALKING POINTS

Reasons sharing the truth is important as Christians;

- Often when we are keeping secrets, it is because it is related to sin and shame. The sin may be our own, and therefore hard to admit to others, or the shame can be because of someone sinning against us.
- Bringing the truth into the light can help us unravel the lies we have believed, help our hearts to heal, as well as help us to overcome our sin.

Reasons sharing the truth can be complicated or a task for the future;

- Sometimes sharing the truth is not as simple as opening up immediately, especially when the hurt or sin is deep.
- We may require prayer, guidance, and professional support before we can share our sins and hurts with others.
- God will provide us with the right time to share the secret with another, whether immediately or in the future.

7

Q. Chariline is plagued by guilt over her mother's death and unnecessarily carries this burden (p193). What burdens have you carried that the Lord has graciously lifted from you?

TALKING POINTS

We carry many burdens as broken, hurting people – not yet fully restored. Some burdens we may carry are;

- Undisclosed or known sin which needs repentance, prayer, healing, and/or forgiveness.
- Hurts, offences, and trauma, as others have sinned against us.
- Accidents which have harmed us or others.
- Past mistakes, sin, and choices of which we must suffer the consequences.
- Illness (physical, emotional, or spiritual).

8

Q. "Sometimes, in the frustration of what we don't have, we forget to rejoice in what we do." (p109). Why do you think it's hard for us to focus on what we're lacking, instead of our blessings?

TALKING POINTS

Mary K. Mohler, suggests we can maintain a focus on our blessings through practising gratitude. She defines two types of gratitude in her book "Growing in Gratitude";

Natural Gratitude (Giving thanks for our blessings);

- Giving God all the glory for our blessings and admitting everything we have is the Lord's.
- Verbally giving thanks to those we share our lives with.
- Kind gestures to others (notes, phone calls, unexpected hospitality and gifts).
- Keeping a prayer and gratitude journal.
- Thanking God for our blessings during our prayer time.

Gracious Gratitude (Thankfulness for God himself);

- Ultimately have our hearts focused and thankful on God and His goodness.
- Gratitude towards the Lord for His holiness, justice, and faithfulness.
- Marvelling in God's creation and how it reveals His character and sovereignty.
- Praising and finding delight in the Lord when we are enduring trials, hardship, and suffering.

9

Q. Prayer is a powerful theme in "Jewel of the Nile". Has reading this book encouraged you in your prayer life?

TALKING POINTS

Throughout the book, we see prayer used as a powerful weapon. Not only does the Lord miraculously answer prayers of the characters, but prayer is also used as a tool to align the hearts of the characters to Him and His will – ultimately growing their faith, relationships, gifts and more;

- Theo who has a heart for prayer, mentions this is a result of dedication and practice made easier with time (p39)
- Chariline discloses that she often struggles to pray and settle her mind on the Lord (p65), and even forgets to ask God for His will.
- Natemahar prays sincerely and passionately to the Lord just as an expectant child comes to his father. He begins with praise and then offers his requests.
- Hermione (p110-111) is given the gift of prophecy through her prayers and incredible insights into the Lord's desires and plans.

10

Q. As Chariline learns to let the Lord fill her deep need of love and acceptance, we are reminded of our tendency to try and "do it ourselves" or rely on other things apart from God to fill those needs. How will you commit to letting God into your heart to fulfil every need?

TALKING POINTS

We can start by surrendering that area of our lives to Him through repentance and prayer;

- Trust that the Lord IS who He says He is.
- Trust that the Lord is good and is working everything together for the good of those who love Him.
- Trust that we can be filled with God's supernatural peace, joy, and hope.
- Trust that Jesus' work on the cross was for us and is for our personal salvation.
- Believe the Bible and what God says; regularly renew and fill your mind with His truths.



ADDITIONAL NOTES FOR LEADERS

The author provides very thorough and well thought out questions at the end of each chapter for personal reflection. You may like to encourage your Bookclub sisters to keep a journal while reading the text and answer these questions, and as the month progresses, discuss these through your group's online platform (a Facebook group/messenger or whatsapp chat group etc.) to keep connected and engaged throughout the month.

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