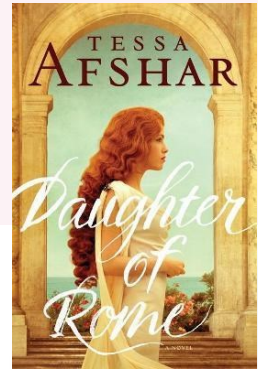




LEADER'S GUIDE

DAUGHTER OF ROME BY TESSA AFSHAR



"Shepard God, if you have room in your heart for a wayward sheep, will you fetch me out of this wilderness... help me be yours."

PRISCILLA

THEMES

Belonging

Identity

Womanhood

Evangelism

Grief and Loss

HEADS UP! (TRIGGERS AND DELICATE TOPICS)

Abortion

Infertility

Miscarriage

Murder

CHARACTERS

Priscilla, the daughter of a famed Roman general and a slave woman, struggles to find her place in Roman society after her father's death, leaving her living a little higher than an enslaved person in her brother's house. Reeling with shame, she struggles to forgive herself for her past actions, and her choices haunt her. Finding her faith in Yeshua brings forth an abundance of fruitfulness in her life, particularly the gifts of hospitality, caring for the sick, teaching and sharing the gospel with the gentiles. As Priscilla falls in love, marries, endures trials and experiences belonging for the first time, she slowly comes to learn the truth about grace and God's redeeming love.

Aquila is a proud Jewish man who has been cut off from his family since declaring his belief in Yeshua. Burdened with hurt and a constant desire to prove his commitment to his Jewish traditions, he unsuccessfully tries to win his family back and instead forms a legalistic attitude. He struggles to accept others, mainly gentiles, into Christianity, but slowly learns to see 'outsiders' the way God does. This transformation leads to him working alongside his wife Priscilla and sharing the good news with all people. Through the storms of life, he learns that salvation is through faith and grace – not good deeds.

Benjamin is Aquila's uncle, who is also a follower of Jesus. He accepts Aquila into his household after his brother rejects him and provides a place for him in Rome to work in his leather workshop.

Mary is a faithful servant of Jesus who attends the local synagog in Rome, where Priscilla first encounters Yahweh. Mary acts as a mentor towards Priscilla and is a beautiful role model of a faithful, fruitful, and loving Christ follower.

Marcus, the son of a very wealthy Roman man, finds himself homeless and starving after his father was murdered by his wicked uncle. Seeking refuge in Priscilla's shed, he is found and nursed back to health. He begins to flourish under Priscilla and Aquila's care, becoming their son.

STORYLINE

Priscilla is a woman with a devastating secret. After her father's death, Priscilla is forced to work and treated as poorly as a slave in her brother's home. He despises her and her late slave mother. Priscilla makes a dire mistake in her desperation to feel loved, and she is coerced into a sinful relationship with a man and becomes pregnant. After a visit to a physician, which exposes the secret of Antonia, the Emperor's unmarried niece, Priscilla returns home still pregnant and fearing for her life. In her distress, she neglects her health and miscarries her son – amongst her grief, shame and loss, Yahweh guides her path to a local synagog where she meets Mary and Rufus.

As Priscilla grows in her faith and knowledge of God, she meets Aquila, a proud Jewish man who is bent on proving his worth. After his father disinherited him, Aquila was forced to relocate to Rome, where his uncle Benjamin took him under his wing and allowed him to work in his leather goods shop.

Priscilla and Aquila fall in love, and despite many hurdles during their courtship, they settle down in Rome with a thriving business and growing gentile Christian church which meets in their home. Although they experience many blessings, their joy is overshadowed by a constant threat over Priscilla's life and the sudden appearance of Marcus, a young boy who's clearly from a wealthy family yet starving and secretive.

When the Emperor declares that any Jewish person who is not a Roman citizen must leave Rome, Priscilla and Aquila must take their family and business to Corinth. This new journey proves difficult. Aquila is anxious to provide and see his business thrive. His heart becomes closed off to Priscilla, who mourns her empty womb.

Just as Priscilla is losing her joy and hope, Paul arrives, and God miraculously provides work for him in the family leather business. As their gentile church grows in Corinth, Priscilla happens across a half-dead homeless person on the street; to her horror, it is Antonia. Knowing this woman is responsible for the attacks on her life and her displacement from Rome, Priscilla asks the Lord for compassion and strength to nurse her back to health. As Antonia recovers, an abduction and attempt on Paul's life brings about a daring rescue mission involving Theo. Marcus embraces the opportunity to return to Rome, seek justice for his father, and claim his rightful inheritance, accompanied by Priscilla. While in Rome, Priscilla attends to her dying brother and successfully restores Marcus's inheritance. Upon returning home, Priscilla says a heartfelt goodbye to Antonia and decidedly leaves her heartbreak and regret over her unborn child with the Lord – she is finally at peace and revelling in the Lord's unmerited yet overflowing forgiveness and redeeming love.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS & TALKING POINTS

1

Q. Tessa has a wonderful way of bringing people from the past and the Bible to life. Which character from 'Daughter of Rome' 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. Both Aquila and Priscilla experience rejection from their families. How does Christianity help us heal from rejection, and feel accepted?

TALKING POINTS

When we accept Jesus, belonging is no longer about finding a 'place' to feel welcome. It's more about 'belonging' to Christ and finding welcome among a community of believers to learn and worship together, and help one another;

- In an ideal world, this happens. But the reality is that we live in a broken and sinful world. Even though we know we belong to the Lord and that He will never reject us, humanly, rejection and longing for a community can still hurt and make us weary.
- But, "God places the lonely in families" – Psalm 68:6. When we have nowhere to belong spiritually, we can seek the Lord in prayer and ask Him to provide.
- Even Priscilla, who fears she'll never truly belong because she is a gentile, learns that God's kingdom belongs to ALL who believe.

3

Q. Priscilla experiences freedom from guilt, grief and distress when she openly shares her past with her Christian community. Why is confessing our sins to one another so important?

TALKING POINTS

As we harden our hearts against the Lord, committing known sin and stifling the Holy Spirit, it becomes easier to compromise our beliefs and engage in more unholy behaviour.

- Sin can often escalate quickly to become more destructive.
- The more we sin, the easier it is to sin again.
- The world can corrupt or distort our views of sin and what is and is not sin.
- We must refer to the Bible for knowledge of what is right and wrong.
- We need to allow the Holy Spirit to convict us of sin.

Confessing our sins in the safety of a healthy Christian community is important because;

- Healthy Christian friendship addresses our sins lovingly and helpfully.

- Accountability partners can be helpful to help overcome sin.
- If we are sharing sin we have repented of, the journey of confessing to others may help us forgive ourselves and heal.

We must remember that confessing our sins in a safe and small community of believers can be very helpful. However, gossip, slander and oversharing are all detrimental. We must use our discernment to decide how, what, when, where, and why we share our sins and confess to others. This protects our hearts and ensures we receive Biblical support, encouragement, and life-giving outcomes.

4

Q. Throughout the book, Tessa uses examples of faithful women from the Bible to encourage us to give our past over to God. What can we learn from these women, whom God loved and used despite their lineage or past?

TALKING POINTS

Reading stories of the faithful women of the Bible can encourage our faith. These stories display God's mercy and goodness and remind us that we're forgiven and accepted into God's family when we declare Jesus as Lord;

- Rahab's story reminds us that God does not limit us because of our sins and past mistakes.
- Ruth's story reminds us that we are welcomed into God's family as gentiles.

5

Q. "God had not healed her body. But He had healed her heart." (p164). Discuss.

TALKING POINTS

The context of this quote is when Aquila and the church are praying for Sabinellea's healing.

Prayer for healing invites us into the space between desire and demand, taking a risk on God that He will heal, yet His sovereign will be done;

- The biggest miracle any of us will ever experience is our salvation – we were dead in sin and incapable of choosing to walk in the light. He miraculously saved us from death and gave us life and hope when He called us.
- Christ is by far the most incredible gift; it is okay to seek and ask for healing while maintaining faith in God's sovereign will.
- Miraculous healing does occur today.
- Think about it; why does God heal some people and not others?
- Encourage anyone who has experienced miraculous healing (or knows a family or friend who has) to share their experience.

Pain and suffering are never easy, especially when it seems God does not answer our prayers for healing. Here are a few things to remind your group of;

- There is a purpose in our sufferings, and God will use it for our good and His glory.
- In this world, we will have troubles, but Jesus has overcome the world.
- We can experience joy during sadness and peace during trials.
- We will receive a crown in heaven for our sufferings.
- We are victorious in Christ.

- Our hope is in Jesus and our eternity in heaven.
- God will wipe away our every tear in heaven.
- We can look forward to a future without pain and suffering in eternity.
- Jesus understands our pain, suffering and hardship.
- Time can help us adjust our perspectives.
- We see our trials and suffering through our earthly eyes, yet the Lord sees the complete picture.

6

Q. Aquila and Priscilla are good stewards of what the Lord has blessed them with, declaring, "This is God's house!" (108). Has this encouraged you to reconsider how you steward your blessings?

TALKING POINTS

How can we be better stewards of our resources;

- Home; Have we declared, "This is God's house"?
- Money; Do we tithe? Are we generous with what remains after our tithe?
- Time; Do we serve our families, friends, community and church? Do we give others our time?
- Gifts; Do we use our gifts to glorify God? To serve in His church? To direct others towards Him?
- We are blessed (with time, money, resources and gifts) not only for ourselves, but to be a blessing to others.
- When we bless others, we are blessed in return. In Priscilla's circumstances, all of those she cared for came and helped her build her home in Rome (p204). Our blessings may not always return in a physical sense of help or money, but the spiritual blessing of more fruitfulness in our lives, more intimacy with the Lord and displaying Jesus more effectively to others.

7

Q. Priscilla's journey of unplanned pregnancy, miscarriage, and infertility, is something many women experience today. As the church, how can we better support and love women through these challenging circumstances?

TALKING POINTS

We love our sister-in-Christ well by;

- Acknowledging their heartache and grief as valid.
- We can mourn with them.
- Let them share their grief with us in a judgmental free, caring and compassionate way – realising they may prefer a listening ear without our commentary.
- We can pray for them fervently. We can ask for the Lord to intervene and grant the desires of their hearts according to His will.
- We can help them adjust to these life changes—either helping plan for a baby or packing up a nursery after loss. We need to be available, having hands and feet willing to work practically on behalf of Jesus.
- Ask them if they have a need and how we can meet it. It may be support for a health check-up, prayers during a pregnancy test, referral to a health professional for support.
- Direct them towards help when they're ready. You may be able to help them find a mentor or friend who's experienced something similar and can assist in carrying the burden through a shared experience.

8

Q. Priscilla and Aquila learn grace and forgiveness as they endure and grow together. Which part of their journey resonated the most with you?

TALKING POINTS

Marriages and relationships all experience time of flourishing and times of trial;

- Aquila learnt that his proud view of Priscilla being "not good enough" for him was false (p146).
- Aquila learnt forgiveness and grace towards Priscilla (p153).
- Because of her past, Priscilla struggled to rid herself of shame and became physically closed off during intimacy.
- Priscilla and Aquila battled infertility while deeply desiring a child.
- Priscilla and Aquila grew in their faith and knowledge of Christ as they ministered to the gentiles together.
- Priscilla and Aquila's relationship grew distant at times through misunderstandings.

9

Q. When Priscilla and Aquila move to Corinth, they mourn the loss of the 'good things' the Lord was doing amongst them and their community in Rome. Has God ever called you to leave something good behind?

TALKING POINTS

God often calls us away from good things to do better things elsewhere. It can be very hard at the time because we cannot see the complete picture;

- Paul says, "He will take care of the church in Rome" (p257).
- We are not able to do all things well at one time.
- Sometimes we need to say no to good things, to say yes to bigger and better things that God has planned.
- Sometimes we don't understand God's ways, and it's not until we're on the other side of the changes that we see the fruitfulness and understand.
- We can praise God during these wilderness seasons, knowing nothing is wasted and that He intends it for His glory and our good.

10

Q. Evangelism is a theme in 'Daughter of Rome'. Paul says, "The Christ has come... But you don't need to believe my story to be convinced. I can show you the truth of it from scripture." (p164). How confident are you of sharing the good news through Scripture?

TALKING POINTS

It can sometimes be much easier to share God through our testimony, as our personal stories are our own and do not need to be 'learned'. And although sharing the gospel through our testimony is powerful and effective, we also need to be able to effectively give an account for the hope that we have through Scripture;

- Priscilla does this on page 109 as she makes a simple and powerful declaration of Jesus and what He has done. "The High Priest is also the sacrifice. The Good Shepard is also the Lamb of God. The Lamb of God is also the door. The one who provides himself is the offering."

