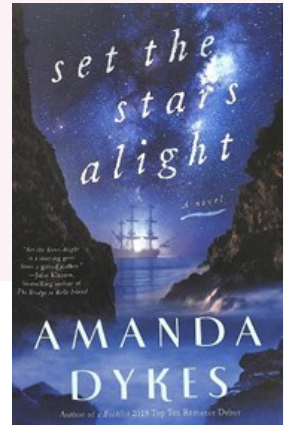




# LEADER'S GUIDE

## SET THE STARS ALIGHT BY AMANDA DYKES



*"The world is dark, so dark we sometimes forget the stars. But they are always there - we need only fight to see these brilliant places of light, these echoes of the truest story. Of a man who gave his life for another - and of a Man, centuries before him, who gave His life for the world. The One who is coming...and coming...and coming after you. Fighting for your heart... He sets the stars alight... And we open our eyes to this in benevolent defiance of the dark... by remembering"*

**SIMON CLAREMONT**

### THEMES

Friendship

History

Redemption

Romance

Belonging

Sacrifice

Mystery

Hope

Forgiveness

Storytelling

### HEADS UP! (TRIGGERS AND DELICATE TOPICS)

Napoleonic Wars

Death

Violence

### CHARACTERS

*Lucy Claremont*, the daughter of a great watchmaker and storyteller, grows up listening to stories from the past. These stories ignite a fascination for the history of the high seas, leading her to become a marine archaeologist. When her father passes, Lucy is heartbroken. She has lost both parents, and her closest friend, Dash, has moved away. In her search to unravel the mystery of the Jubilee's disappearance, Lucy is reunited with her long-time childhood friend, finding comfort and hope in his presence.

*Dasher Greene*, a lost boy with his head in the stars, becomes the missing piece in Lucy's family she never knew they needed. His love of the stars motivates him to become a forensic astronomer. He travels the world and space to decipher stories written in the stars, but finds the answers to the most important questions when reunited with his childhood friend, 'Matchstick girl'. Dash joins Lucy on her quest to find the lost ship; filled with peace and long-awaited answers to those questions his heart had always yearned for, he is finally content.

*Frederick Handford*, known as a 'sea brat' in his younger years, and leaving a legacy as the Traitor-Man once grown, is a deeply misunderstood man. Painfully craving his father's affections as a child and riddled with guilt over the death of Sherperd Tom Heath (Juliette's father), he lives daily, striving to make things right. He is fiercely loyal and brave and keeps his promises – sacrificing everything faithfully to fulfil his childhood oath of protecting and providing for Juliette.

*Juliette Heath* is a free-spirited and fearless girl born on the day of the great sea flood. The ocean runs through her veins, and her personality is as feisty as an ocean storm. After the death of her beloved father, which she blames Frederick for, she holds a grudge and hardens her heart.

*Elias Flint* was found as a young boy homeless and starving by Tom Heath, who took him in and cared for him. As a man, he falls in love with Juliette and befriends Frederick on the HMS Avalon, tying their lives together. Elias struggles with bouts of darkness as his past haunts him, and in his grief and desperation, he makes terrible decisions with deathly consequences.

*Killian Blackaby* is a poet and sailer aboard the HMS Avalon and author of "The Ballad of the Traitor-Man."

*Simon Claremont* was Lucy's father, a watchmaker, and a master storyteller. As a descendant of Killian Blackaby, he has been entrusted with passing down the story of the Traitor-Man.

*Aerie Rivers*, daughter of Fred (Frederick) and Juliette Rivers.

## STORYLINE

### The 2000s

In London, Lucy and Dash meet as children and grow up together at the knee of a great storyteller, Lucy's father. His stories are full of magic and mystery and build a scaffolding of adventure, hope and ultimate truth in their young hearts. Lucy's fascination with her father's stories of the high seas sets her on course to uncover the mystery of the lost ship Jubilee, and she is determined to find out if this fable is real. Many years later, her long-lost childhood friend, Dash, joins her in her search for the legendary vessel. As they both search the seas and the stars for answers, they find themselves on an old mysterious estate surrounded by a community of souls that may hold the answers and healing they both desperately seek, along with the realisation that some things are hidden in plain sight.

### The 1800s

Two hundred years earlier, Frederick Hanford, son of a cold and withdrawn admiral and orphaned Elias Flint, were bitter enemies. When captured and set to work on the HMS Avalon warship, they build an unbreakable bond of brotherhood, finding solace and a sense of family in each other. As war rages, the boys grow into men. Mistakes, betrayal and sacrifice unfold, leaving Frederick lost and his reputation shattered. A select few learn of his true story and keep his secret, passed through the generations as a poem, "The Ballad of the Traitor-Man."

### Epilogue

The tale ends as the River's family move into a small dwelling at Stone Throw's Farm, located nearby the empty Hanford estate and just visible at the distant seaside edge. The Rivers' children live wild and free beneath the light of the sun and the love of a mother and a father whose devotion knew no bounds. The father's story- The Traitor Man - a tale of life and light was kept faithfully by Killian Blackaby and passed on through his descendants, who in turn carry the tradition of truth and storytelling on and on.



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS & TALKING POINTS



1

Q. Which character from 'Set the Stars Alight' did you relate to the most?

### TALKING POINTS

We may connect to a character for the following reasons;

- We feel empathy or sympathy for their circumstances.
- We share similar character traits or personalities.
- We share similar desires, hopes, or dreams.
- We have made similar mistakes or poor decisions in our own lives.
- We like or dislike particular characters because of our experiences with others.

2

Q. Which timeline, London 2002 or East Sussex, England 1802, did you most enjoy? Why?

### TALKING POINTS

Dual-timeline stories are becoming increasingly popular. The separate storylines, which form a larger narrative, add cliffhangers and suspense at the end of each chapter as we journey back and forth between times and characters. We may have enjoyed one timeline more than another because of;

- The love story between Lucy and Dash.
- The developing friendship and comradery between Frederick and Elias.
- The history; The Napoleonic War (1805-1815).
- The different ways of life (especially for women) between 1800s and 2000s.
- The unravelling of the mystery of the Jubilee in 2000s.
- The interesting science; forensic astronomy and marine archeology.

3

Q. Storytelling and stories are central themes in the novel. Dash says, "They [Lucy's parents] were building us a scaffolding. Story upon story, account after account, of true, impossible things – to uphold the truest story of all, when we would find it later" (p201). How have stories shaped your life?

### TALKING POINTS

"A book girl is story formed, shaped in her very concept of self by the characters she has encountered on the written page, by the narratives that teach her what it means to be a woman" – Sarah Clarkson, Book Girl (p66);

- As we wrestle with questions such as; Who am I? Who should I be? What does it mean to live and love? What does it mean to be a woman? We can find encouraging and truthful answers in the lives of the noble, honest, and pure characters we read about in our cherished books.
- Good books reveal what it looks like to be good or evil, brave or cowardly, happy or hopeless.
- Good books take hold of us, filling us with the capacity to learn, dream, think, and shape our world around us.
- Lasting stories hold elements of truth, such as good overcoming evil, vice and virtue, and hope.

# 4

Q. Frederick's declaration, "Take me" (p174), is the epitome of his internal promises to God, Juliette and Elias, incited by his guilt and grief over Juliette's father's passing. Do you think this guilt was his to bear? Why, why not?

## TALKING POINTS

It's important to remember that terrible things happen in our broken world, often which seem meaningless and are ultimately nobody's fault. We carry many burdens as broken, hurting people – not yet fully restored. Some burdens we may carry are;

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

Frederick was faithful to his oath of protecting Juliette, to the point of "Laying down his life for a friend" (p292). Frederick's self-sacrificial life, for Juliette's sake, was admirable. However, we must remember that we cannot be Jesus to anyone, and perhaps in his grief, Frederick confused the boundaries of what was in his power to provide for her and what was ultimately in God's control. As Frederick gave his life for Juliette and Elias's future, Elias' sin still caught up with him, and things did not go as Frederick had planned.

# 5

Q. Elias let Frederick and Juliette down when he promised, "I will do good, I promise. It will not be for nothing" (p215). Who can we truly trust not to let us down? Why?

## TALKING POINTS

Ultimately because of the broken and sinful world we've inherited, the harsh truth is that people are untrustworthy. In 'Holier Than Thou' by Jackie Hill Perry says;

- We were created to bear God's image. However, when God's law was broken, our inheritance of sin made us unlike God.
- People are problematic because of sin, and the same sinful nature that caused Cain to kill Abel is within us all.
- We have enough experience with our own sin to know sinners are untrustworthy.
- People can be negligent, wicked, hurtful and horrible.
- "This world has never been as safe as heaven, so for protection, we exist in it [the world] guarding ourselves from the trauma of it" (p56).

Jackie also clarifies that it is God alone who deserves our complete trust (p4-7);

- God's holiness and trustworthiness are essential to his nature; it's not merely one part of who He is that can be turned on or off.
- God reveals Himself as our heavenly parent, a faithful friend, and our Lord. We shouldn't mistakenly project onto God the nature of those who have sinned against us" (p56).

# 6

Q. "Tradition is like oxygen around here... So every year, the Shepherd's Bells ring, and we remember" (page 198). What traditions help you to remember significant occasions or events?

## TALKING POINTS

Notes on Traditions from "Treasuring God in Our Traditions" by Noel Piper;

Good traditions become woven into our lives so that they are also habits and customs;

- God is the inventor of traditions.
- Traditions are repeated.
- "A tradition is a planned habit with significance." (p26).
- Traditions pass down information, beliefs and worldviews from one generation to another through regular repetition, ceremonies or celebrations (p26).

"Our traditions are displaying the Treasure of our lives" (p18);

- Can our circle of family and friends see Jesus as our greatest Treasure?
- Do our traditions focus more on worldly things?
- Does how we spend our time reflect our greatest Treasure?
- When others think of us, would they immediately think of our love for Jesus?

God's purpose for traditions are;

- So that His people remember what he has done for them.
- So He can be honoured for all He has done.
- So what He has done can be passed from generation to generation.
- Traditions proclaim that God is the great "I AM".

# 7

Q. In chapter 18, Barnabas says, "none of us know quite what to do when something is broken... But if we do nothing, it'll surely stay broken" (p138). How do fellowship and authentic friendships help us heal?

## TALKING POINTS

"Friendship is born at that moment when one person says to another: What!?! You too? I thought I was the only one." – C. S. Lewis ;

- Authentic friendship and fellowship allow us to rejoice and mourn with one another.
- We bear one another's burdens and therefore lighten each other's loads.
- During fellowship, we lift up fervent prayers for one another.
- We can experience accountability for overcoming sin together.
- We can share hurts and trauma in a non-judgemental environment, seeking comfort, advice and support.
- We can encourage one another to seek professional help where needed.
- We help one another run our Christian race well.

# 8

Q. Many characters in the novel struggle with a deep and, at times, unfulfilled desire to belong. Can you relate to this yearning?

## TALKING POINTS

Home can be a place where we live, or a feeling of belonging, safety and acceptance. Homes are not always safe and comforting places – and if they are, we may still experience the sense that we don't belong.

Answers may vary and could include;

- I had a home that was warm, loving and safe while growing up.
- I moved around a lot as a child and didn't have a house to call home, but I had a family which made me feel like I belonged.
- My home was not a safe place, or somewhere I felt accepted.
- I grew up without a home or anywhere to belong.

As sojourners in this world, the longing for wholeness and our heavenly home will not be complete on this side of eternity. We dwell in the "now, but not yet"; where the promises of God are ours to have and hold, but not all are yet fulfilled.

# 9

Q. In Chapter 24, Dash says, "It's nice not being constantly connected. It makes us... more connected, ironically" (p194). Discuss.

## TALKING POINTS

Notes from "Social Sanity in an Insta World" by Jen Wilkin (and more);

- "We like the 'social' in social media because we were made for connection." (p95);
- "When we use social media well, as a limited tool to build relationships – it can be a beautiful way to connect with others" (p104).
- God values relationships and authentic community, and pursuing relationships in a godly way is a privilege that believers have through the Holy Spirit (p95).
- Social media can allow friendships to continue over distance and time.
- However, social media is not always authentic; more often than not, only a small portion of our lives is made visible. "All people see on my social media is the carefully controlled space I invite them into" (p94).
- Sometimes our relational standing with others feels like it depends on our online presence, which is unhealthy.
- Posting a highlight reel can keep relationships shallow as we project a life we're not living and show none of the difficult things we are facing.
- We can become so busy online that we neglect the people right before us!
- Social media also has difficulty distinguishing authenticity from oversharing, negativity, complaining, gossip and drama.

# 10

Q. "The stars are magnificent, Lucy...But no more magnificent than the ground beneath our feet, where life grows from dirt and sunlight. Or the depths of the ocean. Or the very air we breathe. It all points to the same truth" (201). Discuss.

## TALKING POINTS

Throughout the entire novel, we see God's fingerprint, presence and care over all things. Ultimately the world was designed to show us the invisible God and point to the truth of the gospel of Christ Jesus;

- "The heavens declare the glory of God, the skies proclaim the works of His hands", Psalm 19:1 NLT
- "For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can see his visible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God" – Romans 1:20 NLT



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