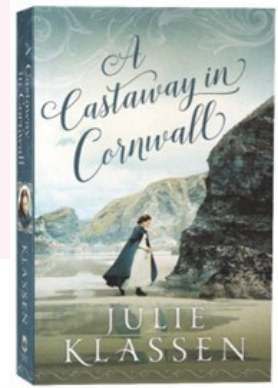




LEADER'S GUIDE

A CASTAWAY IN CORNWALL BY JULIE KLASSEN



"Sometimes I wonder how I ended up here in Cornwall, so far from my childhood home. I feel like a castaway, set adrift on the tide by the long-ago deaths of my parents, and left wanting answers."

LAURA CALLAWAY

THEMES

Belonging

God's Sovereignty

War

Betrayal

Forgiveness

Friendship

Romance

HEADS UP! (TRIGGERS AND DELICATE TOPICS)

Chronic Illness

War/Treason and the Death Penalty

Infant/Child death

CHARACTERS

Laura Callaway is a lonely young woman with no known living blood relatives. Her home is with her uncle (by marriage) and his family in Cornwall, yet she has never felt truly welcomed by her uncle's new wife. Laura has a deep yearning to belong and is a self-described castaway. She battles feelings of neglect and abandonment, mostly aimed towards her parents, who left her as a young girl. Laura finds a purpose for her life as she scours the dangerous coastline for keepsakes washed ashore by shipwrecks and returning them to their owners.

Alexander Carnell is a French Captain and prisoner of war who washes up on the Cornwall coast as a sole survivor of a shipwreck. Attempting to hide his identity while being nursed back to health by Laura, he is on a mission to return to France and secure the release of his brother who is on death row for treason. Alexander left France bitter and angry at his father and brother and intends to return home to seek forgiveness.

Francois LaRoche is Alexander's oldest childhood friend. He looks out for his best interests and has no qualms about betraying, hurting or crossing others. He has no true loyalty to the British or French, his only concern being his own wealth and security. After experiencing a deep sense of betrayal, his motives towards Alexander become sinister, and he tries everything within his power to get revenge.

Aunt Susan is Laura's only blood relative, who was thought to have died years ago when her parents died from an illness. As Laura arrives in Jersey sick, her aunt nurses her back to health and reveals the long-lost letter from Laura's mother.

Uncle Matthew is Laura's uncle through marriage. After the death of her parents, he takes her in and cares for her.

STORYLINE

Set on the rugged coast of Cornwall in 1812, known for infamous smugglers, shipwrecks, and suspicious locals, Laura Callaway longs for answers. Why did her parents leave her? Will she ever find a home – a place to truly belong? Has her life been lovingly planned by a sovereign God, or is she like the unclaimed shipwrecked treasures she finds along the windswept coast, set adrift on the tides, washing up wherever the waters take her?

On a stormy night, when another ship washes ashore, a sole survivor is found by Laura and nursed back to health. Although kind, quiet and handsome, Laura knows her patient is hiding something. Who is this man, and what was he doing aboard the ship? Which side of the war is he on, the British or the French?

Finding peace and comfort in her work, Laura continues wondering the coastline after the shipwreck, finding lost personal treasures washed ashore from the sea and aiding her uncle with identifying the victims. Laura writes letters to the victim's families, and returns lost goods to their owners or next of kin, yet many items remain unclaimed. One of these is a silver flask, which Laura stores with the other lost items.

As legendary wrecker Tom Parsons becomes interested in Laura and her shipwreck survivor, Laura struggles to trust Alexander, knowing that prisoners of war were on the boat. With known smugglers in the area and the devastating war with the French, Laura must decide if she will help and trust this mysterious man.

When another shipwreck survivor, Francois, is found, the secrets intensify, and Laura's curiosity gives her the boldness to approach Alexander, seeking the truth. Initially, Francois comes across as gentlemanly, yet Laura knows he's hiding a sinister intent. Francois accuses Laura of stealing his flask and Alexander of being a Prisoner of War. Discovering a letter within the flask which would free Alexander's brother from death for treason, the two initiate a plan and daring escape to get Alexander back to France to rescue his brother. Laura decides she will go part of the way to Jersey, hoping to get some answers.

As Laura and Alexander flee, pursued by Francois, romantic tensions between them flare, and both endure together to find the answers they seek and the home they've been searching for.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS & TALKING POINTS



1

Q. Who was your favourite character from 'A Castaway from Cornwall'? Why?

TALKING POINTS

These are some reasons we may feel connected or drawn to a particular character;

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

2

Q. Laura has lived in Cornwall for much of her life but feels like an outsider. Do you think Laura's attitude prevents her from experiencing a sense of belonging, or is it more so the distrust of outsiders by Cornwall residents?

TALKING POINTS

"Sometimes I wonder how I ended up here in Cornwall, so far from my childhood home. I feel like a castaway, set adrift on the tide by the long-ago deaths of my parents, and left wanting answers" (p8).

- Residents were not very accepting of outsiders, both due to the war and because of tradition and culture.
- "Here, anyone not born and bred in Cornwall is eyed with suspicion" (p8).
- Laura acknowledges that her pride and unwillingness to accept local customs and assimilate have affected her relationships with the Cornwall community.
- "I don't belong here, yet here I am" (p8). Laura never truly tried to fit in and make Cornwall her home.

3

Q. Laura feels angry, betrayed and abandoned by her parents (p83). How does reading her mother's letter help her to heal? Can you relate to Laura's experience?

TALKING POINTS

Laura realises that she had misinterpreted the situation and her mother's affection toward her for most of her life. "Tears overflowed, streaking her cheeks and cleansing the final traces of resentment from her heart" (313).

It's easy to assume the worst behind someone's motives and actions while we are hurt or offended. The consequences are often:

- Misunderstanding
- Miscommunication
- Misinterpretation of the situation

Before we make assumptions, we should remember it's important to:

- Try and understand both sides of the story.
- Do not project 'what we would have done' onto the situation.
- Offer grace and support to those who we believe have made poor decisions.
- Acknowledge we are all only human and make mistakes.
- Acknowledge that we all have limitations.
- Always assume the best of people.

4

Q. Laura wonders, "Does God truly hold my fate in His hands, or has my entire life all been happenstance?" (p8). Discuss.

TALKING POINTS

Laura is exactly where God needs her to be. Her kind-hearted work of rescuing cargo and persons from shipwrecks ultimately leads her toward her bright future with Alexander.

Often when we cannot see the complete picture, we question where God has us situated. In these moments:

- Our circumstances may feel pointless, and we may feel forgotten, neglected, or confused.

- We can accuse God of not caring for us or not wanting what is best for us.
- God loves His children, has a good and perfect plan for our lives (Romans 12:2) and will work all things together for our good (Romans 8:28).

5

Q. Throughout the story, many good people are revealed to be working alongside smugglers to provide food for their families, while others do dishonest work for personal gain. Discuss.

TALKING POINTS

Is it ever okay to break the law?

- Only God can decide whether our actions are sinful.
- It's important to remember that sin begins in our hearts, and the heart posture is something the Lord is concerned with.
- Many involved in smuggling were self-sacrificing and putting themselves at risk for the good of others; to feed their families and help their communities. They did not lie and scheme for selfish ambition.

6

Q. Alexander and Francois's motto for friendship is, "Friends share everything." How is the theme of friendship explored in this novel?

TALKING POINTS

Although much of Alexander's and Francois's relationship was toxic and harmful, while Francois lay dying, he relented of his hate toward Alex and entrusted his soul to God's careful and tender care.

Here are some notes on healthy, life-giving and God-honouring friendship.

"Like all good gifts, Christian friendship is to be sought and stewarded with wisdom and grace." – Jen Wilkin in the introduction of 'Closer Than A Sister' by Christina Fox.

- Sought; The seeking of life-giving, sister-friendships is a very intentional activity.
- Stewarded; As good stewards of our gifts, we lavishly pour into our friends' lives, seeking to be more others-focused and entering relationships wanting to bless others. Ultimately thinking more about our sister and less about what we can get out of the friendship.
- Wisdom; God generously pours wisdom into our lives when we ask for it. We need His wisdom to enter into the right relationships and maintain those relationships as we grow and learn together.
- Grace; As imperfect women, we require grace to cover one another's faults, forgive one another, and flourish together.

7

Q. Betrayal and forgiveness are themes in *A Castaway in Cornwall*. Why can it be so challenging to forgive someone who has betrayed us?

TALKING POINTS

It can be easy to forgive someone who has unknowingly offended us or has accidentally sinned against us. But it can feel like an impossible task to forgive someone who has betrayed us, especially those we love and trust the most. The good news is that what is impossible with man is possible with God.

What is true biblical forgiveness?

- Forgiveness is not accepting sin, but cancelling the debt owed by the individual who has sinned against us. This protects our hearts from resentment and bitterness and is expected of us by God, who has forgiven our great debts (Matthew 6:14).
- Forgiveness is not an emotion but a daily decision with the Lord's strength.
- Often forgiveness results in the restoration of the relationship, but not always.
- Choosing forgiveness does not mean we must put ourselves at risk and re-enter dangerous or toxic relationships with others. We can forgive someone and not re-enter relationships with them until trust is developed or repentance has occurred.

8

Q. As Alexander returns home, he struggles with deciding whether to marry Leonie, his brother's widow and wonders, "Where did his duty lie?" (p353). Can you relate to his sense of duty? Have you ever had to sacrifice something for the benefit of another?

TALKING POINTS

Although Alexander and Leonie do not marry, many of us have experienced times when we've had to forfeit our desires for the good of others;

Answers could include:

- Caring for an elderly, sick, injured or disabled friend or family member.
- Choosing a pathway that supports those around us (school, work etc.) when we may have preferred a different career or job.
- Sacrificing aspirations, dreams, and careers for motherhood and raising children.

We can experience peace in these circumstances, knowing that God calls us to a task for our good and His glory. God will equip us for good deeds, and His love pours into our hearts so we can love others well and live sacrificially – just as Jesus did!

9

Q. What did you find most interesting about Cornwall in the 1800s?

TALKING POINTS

See the author's historical notes on pages 379-382:

- The common nature of shipwrecks, theft, and disregard for the dead sailors washed ashore.
- The Napoleonic war.
- The medical care provided to patients.
- The role of women within society.
- Smuggling and Prisoners of war.

10

Q. At the novel's start, Laura is a self-described castaway, while Alexander is physically shipwrecked. By the completion of this story, the two castaways have found a home within one another. What was your favourite part of their story?

TALKING POINTS

Laura and Alexander grow in their faith, trust and reliance on God. They choose to do selfless and difficult things for the benefit of others and, despite all odds, endure together. Although Laura may never feel at home in any one place, home is where Alexander is, and the two castaways find joy and belonging in one another.

Answers may vary and could include:

- The way Laura nursed Alexander back to health.
- Laura and Alexander's daring escape from Cornwall.
- The happy ending after enduring so much hardship.



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