

Bible Study

Based on the life lessons in

Their Inheritance

by

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Synopsis of Their Inheritance

It is 1889 and the Williams siblings are mourning the loss of their parents. Seeking security, through routine they adhere to the daily responsibilities of managing the family farm, but soon seventeen-year-old James and sixteen-year-old Alexandra are overwhelmed in their efforts to raise their younger siblings. Through heartache and hardships, this young family must find a way to survive using the faith, love, and respect their parents taught them.

The lessons in this study guide are based on selected excerpts from *Their Inheritance*, written by Stephanie Townsend Ayers, which illustrates faith, prayer, devotion, and obedience. This study guide is designed to be used with the book, but can stand-alone.

The characters from this book, *Their Inheritance*, teach us many things about life and more specifically Christian life. At the center of their lives is their faith. Their faith in God is what sustains them through the difficult times they face and gives them direction in making difficult decisions. Their faith causes them to constantly pray and to daily read the scripture for comfort and direction. Their faith calls them to obedience to God's Holy Spirit, whether sending for a doctor for a friend or preparing for a storm.

During and after each lesson I would encourage you to consider the following questions:

What is this lesson teaching me?

Have you ever had a similar experience as the characters in the book?

How do you feel about this lesson?

How has this lesson challenged me to make a change in my life?

Remember to keep the Bible and prayer at the center of your lives. I would encourage you to start and end each lesson with prayer.

Remember: A Christian is *never* alone.

In Christ,

Minister Christopher Ayers

Lesson One

Facing Adversity

Key Verse: *“My help cometh from the Lord, which made the heaven and the earth.”*

Psalm 121:2

Scripture: ***Psalm 121***

Book excerpt:

How could she and James, her seventeen year old brother, take care of them. First it was Pa, then not a fortnight later Ma. Oh, Ma! As they lowered Ma into her grave, Alexandra felt a scream... a wail from the very pit of her soul rising to her throat! As hard as she willed herself not to cry, there they were; tears. Such a rush of tears down her face that they poured upon her breast! ‘Shame, Alexandra!’ she thought, ‘What would Ma think? I must bear up for the children’s sakes.’ Inside she wanted to take off across the field, through the forest, and run until she fell off the end of the earth! But, on the outside, she pulled out Pa’s handkerchief from her coat pocket, wiped her face, blew her nose, and closed her eyes.

“Forgive me, Lord. Make me strong and guide me. I don’t understand, but Ma always said you don’t give us more than we can handle. I hope I don’t disappoint you. Be patient with me. I promise to try harder to be courageous. Amen,” she whispered.

With her elbows on her knees, she rested her chin on her hands, “What are we going to do, James?” James looked down at Pa’s Bible.

He slid his hand over the opened page, “Here it says; **‘My help cometh from the Lord, which made the heaven and earth.’**

Adversity is defined as difficulties or misfortune. We all face adversity in our lives at some point. Maybe someone you love has died. Maybe you have lost a job or experienced financial problems. Could be you struggle in school or you do not feel like you have any friends. Maybe you feel alone or that no one understands you. Regardless of age or social standing, everyone faces adversity. When you have had adversity in your life, who or what did you turn to for help?

The excerpts from the book depict sixteen-year-old Alexandra at the burial site of her parents. Her mother is being buried just two weeks after her father. Can you imagine how she must feel? Instead of giving into her feelings of anger, hurt, frustration, or fear, Alexandra trusts in God, her

brother James, and the family's Christian friends. During their first devotion together following the funeral, seventeen-year-old James reads from *Psalm 121 verse 2*,

"My help cometh from the Lord, which made the heaven and the earth."

The foundation of this verse is the fact that God is the creator of all things and therefore who better or more powerful to trust in during times of difficulty?

If you have faith and believe that God is the creator of all things, then surely you can turn to Him for help during any trial in your life.

Book excerpt:

Mr. Alan Jackson, of the Jackson Mercantile, rose to give Alexandra the rocker by the fire. She thanked him with a smile and a nod.

He nervously fingered his hat, "Me and the missus are very sorry for your losses, Alexandra. Please call on us if we can help in anyway."

"Thank you kindly, Mr. Jackson. James and I truly appreciate your generosity to our family."

Another way that God sees us through adversity is through the help of family and Christian friends. In the book excerpt, neighbors offer comfort and assistance. Throughout the book, the siblings lean on each other and often receive help from Christian friends at unexpected times. Also, Alexandra and her siblings help each other through these difficult times by offering a kind word, a meal, scripture references, praying with each other, or simply by listening. According to God's Word we are to bear one another's burdens and love our neighbor as ourselves.

Things to consider:

Describe an adversity that you have been through in your own life and how you got through it. Was your faith increased or decreased? Was there a particular Bible verse that helped you?

How do you feel about the fact God does not promise us a problem-free life? Or that we do not always know why things happen to us or to the ones we love?

Do you believe that God is with you in any adversity? How does that make you feel?

Have you had others help you through adversity? How did you feel when others helped you?

Have you helped others through difficult times and how did that make you feel?

From this lesson, what have you learned about dealing with adversity?



Lesson Two

Being Obedient to God's Call

Key Verse: *1 Samuel 3:10* "And the Lord came, and stood, and called as at other times, Samuel, Samuel. Then Samuel answered, Speak; for thy servant heareth."

Scripture: *1 Samuel 3: 1-10*

Book excerpt:

Alexandra shut the door, "James hurt his ankle some kind of bad. But, how did you know to come?" Mrs. Unruh and Doc went straight over to James.

Doc chuckled, "Widow Stephans sent me. Poor soul did not sleep a wink. She walked to my house first light today. Says the Lord spoke to her heart. Put quite a burden on it in your honor, son. Now tell me about this ankle of yours."

Obedience is defined as being submissive to the command of authority. To hear and to recognize the leading of God's Spirit is very important. Think about the evangelist Billy Graham. What if he had ignored God's call on his life? Maybe thousands of people would have never heard the gospel preached or responded to it. In today's busy and loud pace of life, sometimes it can be hard to hear and recognize who is calling us. In *1 Samuel*, God called Samuel but Samuel did not recognize God's voice. Samuel initially thought Eli was calling him. Samuel had to be taught that it was God calling him and how to respond to that calling. It takes time and experience to learn God's voice and how to properly respond to it.

In the excerpt from *Their Inheritance*, James hurts his ankle while climbing a ladder. Alexandra wants to go get the doctor, but James is afraid that she could get caught out in a winter storm, so she does not go. However God calls saintly Widow Stephans during the night. Through her experience and her relationship with God, she recognizes her Shepard's voice and is obedient. The next morning she tells Doc Cannon that he needs to go to the Williams' home because the Lord has told her that the family needs help. Then it is the doctor's turn to recognize that God has spoken to the widow and consequently to him to go help this family. Doc Cannon is obedient and goes to the Williams' home and provides the medical aide needed. If Widow Stephans or Doc Cannon had failed to hear, recognize, or be obedient to God's call, then James would not have gotten the medical attention he so desperately needed.

Book excerpt:

Then she looked directly into his eyes, "Why are you so concerned?"

He slowly shook his head. He knitted his brow and chewed the inside of his mouth.

Finally, with a heavy sigh, he whispered, "I do not know how to explain it. I truly do not feel worried. I just feel this tremendous burden to prepare. I wonder if this is how God spoke to Pa. Remember when he and Ma would sit up by the fire and Pa would lean his elbows on his knees. He and Ma would speak in low deep whispers. Ma would sigh and reach over and pat Pa's hand." James paused and bit his bottom lip. Alexandra could see him going back to one of those times in his mind's eye. James continued, "Once, after I witnessed it, I closed the book I was suppose to be reading here at the table. I sat until Ma went on to bed, though. I went over and asked Pa if everything was all right." James looked at Alexandra, "He looked troubled. I wanted to help somehow. Pa looked at me for a moment as if he did not know me, then he softly smiled. He told me to sit down; so I sat on his footstool. He rubbed his hands back and forth slowly for a time. He sighed and said, 'Nothing is wrong, son. I am just trying to do as I am told, and ... well... it is not always so easy to understand the directions,'" James said after a time, "Then Pa looked at me and smiled. I wanted to ask - what directions? Who is giving you directions? But I just could not." He paused, "I think I have the answers to those questions now."

Discuss these examples of obedience and disobedience from the Bible. Explain if each illustrates obedience or disobedience and what if the characters had acted differently.

Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3)

Moses when God told him to return to Egypt to speak to the Pharaoh (Genesis 3, 4)

Children of Israel when God told them to take the land of Canaan (Numbers 13, 14)

David when facing Goliath (I Samuel 17)

Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22)

Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5)

Has there been a time in your life when God spoke to you and told you to do something? Were you obedient? What was the outcome? What do you think the outcome would have been if you had reacted differently to God's call?

From this lesson, what have you learned about listening, recognizing, and obeying God's call?



Lesson Three

Christian Happiness

Key verse: *“And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart,” Acts 2:46*

Scripture: *Acts 2: 41-47*

Book excerpt:

He looked up at his sister, “A part of me wants to jump at the chance to get together with my pals. But, well, we don’t have much in common now. Seems like their biggest worry or responsibility is to remember not to giggle at the supper table. How could they understand what my priorities are now?”

Alexandra looked James directly in the eyes, “So that explains why you did not sit with your friends this day at church. Shame on you, James Edward Williams! I don’t reckon any of your friends will ever understand your life now. You won’t give them the chance. You can’t keep everything bottled up inside. The weight of your load will break your spirit. Pride. P-R-I-D-E. You seem to think letting your friends be a friend is some kind of sign of weakness on your part. Even Pa liked to cut loose and laugh sometimes. He was an honest hard-working man, he was! Yet he knew when to stop and enjoy life, too!” She paused to temper her emotions, “This house was a home because of the love, security, and laughter that filled it. Right lately, with all the grief and losses, it is just a house. It is time to make it a home again.” For a while, James just looked at her. Alexandra tried to steady her breathing.

Then he slowly smiled, “Remind me to think twice before I ask you what you think again, okay?” Alexandra blushed and smiled. “All right, sis. We will go to the meeting, weather permitting,

Happiness is defined as a state of well-being and contentment. Christians should be the happiest people on earth. The fact that our sins are forgiven and we have the promise of eternal life should keep a permanent smile on our faces. How did you feel when you first became a Christian? It is likely that your joy and happiness knew no bounds. Too often, over time, our happiness gets buried beneath the cares of life. From time to time, we all need to go back in our lives and remember what it was like when we were new Christians.

The scripture for this lesson is taken from the book of Acts. This passage describes the early Christians and how they interacted with each other. The scripture says that they ate together, were

of one heart, and praised God together. Spending time together in worship and fellowship is a key ingredient for a Christian's happiness as well as spiritual health. If you do not spend time with fellow Christians, then you are more likely to be adversely affected by the burdens of life. The happiest times in life occur when you are interacting with others. Conversely, times of struggle occur when you are isolated.

In the excerpt from *Their Inheritance*, Alexandra and James are discussing whether they should attend a youth Bible study. This is the first social event they face since their parents' funerals. James is hesitant as he feels the weight of his new responsibilities of running the family farm and raising his younger siblings. Alexandra reminds him that their Pa worked hard and handled his responsibilities, yet still liked to have fun and laugh at times also. Life is not meant to be all work and no play. The book of Ecclesiastes teaches us that there is a time for everything, including fun and laughter.

Questions for discussion:

Is it important to gather with Christian friends for worship and fellowship? Why or why not?

Do you feel happiness when you are with other Christians or when you are alone? Give some examples.

Tell of a time when attending church, youth group, or a Bible study made you feel better.

What have you learned from this lesson and will this change the way you live your life?



Lesson Four

Relationship with God through Prayer and Bible Study

Key verses: “*Pray without ceasing.*” **1Thessalonians 5:17**

“*But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.*” **Psalm 1:2**

Scripture: **Matthew 26: 36-44**

Book excerpt:

“Looking into his lap, Alexandra saw the underlined passage. “*Psalms 121*. Does it help, James? I hurt so bad I can hardly bear to read. I pray for guidance, but I feel so numb. I know it is sinful, James, but... I’m... I feel... I feel just full of anger! How could God take both Ma and Pa, James! How could He?” Fresh tears blazed her cheeks as sobs heaved in her chest. Shame flushed her and she hid her face in her hands. Tears welled up in his eyes as James stroked Alexandra’s hair. He flipped through the Bible and stopped at *Psalms 23*, “Alexandra, we have to pray what Ma taught us when we were too young to even remember. Pray and wait. We can’t question God. He is our shepherd. Oh girlie, I feel like a whole load of logs are resting on my chest and an ox is sitting on my shoulders. I’m scared. Real scared, but this here Book tells me to trust in Him. Without that, there is nothing. I’d be lying if I said I haven’t had some angry thoughts, but that’s over now. Tomorrow is a new day. There is work to be done, children to be fed, and a farm to manage. Ma said to take one day at a time. That is the only answer I have for now. Let’s get through tonight and in the morning, we will talk about that day, okay?” He looked down at her and smiled. Alexandra wiped away her tears and nodded. They knelt together and James prayed.

Relationship is defined as a state of connection existing between beings. All relationships require spending time together and communicating. If you and your best friend did not see each other for a long period of time or you did not talk for a long period, your relationship will likely weaken. The same is true between a husband and wife. One of the main reasons that marriages fail is a lack of communication between the spouses. If we stop our communication (praying) with God, then our relationship with Him becomes weak. Conversely, a strong prayer life will lead to a strong bond (relationship) with God. The key verse tells us to pray without stopping. A prayer does not have to be long or full of big fancy words. A prayer can be as simple as “Help me Lord.” But it can also be as long as you need it to be to pour your heart out to Him. The Bible

teaches us to not use vain words when praying, but to let our spirits commune with God. Sometimes we can be so happy or so distraught that we do not know what to say. At those times, we must let our spirit communicate with God. Prayer is a Christian's life blood.

Reading the Bible is a Christian's food. Similar to praying, a Christian must read and study the Bible in order to have a strong relationship with God. If a Christian does not read his Bible, how does he know how to live? Just like a worker receives instructions on how to do a job or a driver reads a map to see how to get to his destination; a Christian must read his Bible. As an example to us, the gospels tell us how often Jesus studied the scripture and prayed. If Jesus had to study and pray, then how much more time should we spend in prayer and reading God's Word?

In the excerpt from *Their Inheritance*, James and Alexandra sit alone on the evening after their mother's funeral after their younger siblings are in bed. As Alexandra questions why Ma and Pa have died, James does what his parents have taught him. He opens his father's Bible to a familiar passage (*Psalms 23*) and reads. James explains to Alexandra that they must pray and wait. He reminds her that the Bible says to trust God. Throughout *Their Inheritance*, James and Alexandra have morning and evening devotions (Bible readings and prayer). They also have quiet unplanned prayer throughout the day. Without their diligent prayer life and dependence on God's Word, James and Alexandra would have most likely been overcome with grief. Just as they prayed and read their Bible daily, so should we.

Questions for discussions:

How important is prayer in your life?

How important is Bible study in your life?

How do you feel about the statement "You can tell what is important to someone by how much time they spend with it."?

What is your favorite Bible verse? Explain why this verse is so important to you.

Tell of a time when a prayer and Bible study helped you get through a difficult time?

What have you learned about prayer and Bible study from this lesson?

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