

CHRISTIAN'S HOPE

Return to Northkill, BOOK 3

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Study Guide by Rachel Miller

Part I

1. Christian returns to his father's home, but the white way of life now seems strange to him, and his Indian ways baffle Jacob and Anna. In what ways do their early interactions help their understanding of each other? In what ways do they make things worse?
2. Anna relies on an almanac for advice on planting and harvesting. She also values the plants she tends for their various properties, and finds that gardening directs her thoughts to God. How are her practices like or unlike the attitude toward nature that Christian learned from the Shawnee? How are they like or unlike your own actions or experiences?
3. Christian is delighted to spend time with Joseph, because Joseph's similar experiences mean he understands what Christian is going through. When in your own life have you felt the relief of being understood? When in your own life have you been able to extend understanding to someone else?
4. How are Christian's early interactions with the adults in his family different from his interactions with his nieces and nephews?
5. Anna takes on a mediator role between Christian and Jacob. What are some of the ways she reaches out to Christian? What are some of the ways she supports and encourages Jacob? How significant are her actions in the lives of her husband and stepson?
6. Anna has an upsetting encounter with Silas on her way to visit a friend, but keeps the incident to herself. Why does she not speak up for herself? What challenges do victims of abuse face, both then and now?

7. Anna seeks advice and counsel from Catharine, but finds there are some things she can't bear to actually share with the other woman. What things did she keep to herself, and why? What are some of the reasons you might keep something secret, even from trusted friends?
8. Members of the Northkill community react to Christian's presence with varying degrees of hostility and curiosity, but their words and actions often leave him upset or angry. How does Christian respond to each situation? How would you respond if you were in Christian's place? How would you respond to him if you were a member of his community?

Part II

1. Anna thinks Jacob's relationship with his sons would be better if they talked more, shared their grief and confusion, and passed on stories, such as the story of Jacob's wampum belt. Do you agree with Anna? Why or why not?
2. Christian feels great relief when he dresses fully as a Shawnee for the trip to the Indian villages. In what ways can our clothing or appearance become a symbol for our internal struggles and joys? When has this happened in your life?
3. Christian eagerly anticipates his return to the Shawnee village, but he ends up feeling relieved when it's time to leave. How did reality fail to meet his expectations? Have you experienced a similar situation? How did it affect you?
4. Anna has not had the close relationship with her stepdaughter Barbara she would like, but an honest conversation helps mend things between them. What were some of the important aspects of their conversation? How can honesty affect our relationships?
5. Christian resists reliving the painful memories of the night Indians attacked his family, but once he does remember those terrible events, he also starts remembering things that were happy and good. What effect do these memories, both good and bad, have on Christian? Do you think facing pain is necessary before we can fully experience joy?
6. While Christian reacted negatively to attending the Amish church, his reaction to Elder Klein and the Dunkers is much different. What are some of the things that draw Christian to the Dunker church? Are the things Christian finds attractive in a church the same things that appeal to you?
7. Months after Christian's wigwam was burned down, the culprits finally confess. Christian wants the boys to be punished, but Joseph helps transform the situation into something positive. Would you have reacted like Christian or like Joseph? How would things have been different if Joseph hadn't shared his wisdom and helped make peace?

8. Hearing the Moravian missionary Christian Frederick Post speak is a turning point in Christian's journey. Why was it so significant for him? How does it change him? Do you have a similar turning point in your own faith journey?

Part III

1. Christian himself wonders why he's willing to cut his hair to join Elder Klein's church when he wasn't willing to do it at his father's request. Why do you think this is?
2. Anna is relieved and glad when Catharine comes with an apology for not believing her accusations against Silas. Why is this so significant for Anna? Have you experienced a situation in which, even though the actual circumstances are still the same, having someone believe and sympathize makes a world of difference?
3. In order to become a member of the Dunker church, Christian must give his testimony, be examined by several of the brethren, be accepted by the church council, and then get baptized. As he moves through these stages, which ones present the biggest challenges to Christian, and why? How is the membership process in that church like or unlike your own experiences?
4. Anna hopes for advice on how to attend Christian's baptism, but instead is told to pray and let God direct her. To her astonishment, it works. How do you think Anna's prayers affected the situation? In what ways have prayers and seeking direction from God influenced your life?
5. Being baptized reminds Christian of an incident in the Shawnee village when he was dunked and scrubbed to remove his whiteness and make him part of the tribe. In what ways are the two practices similar, and how are they different? How would you explain the difference between being baptized and being bathed?
6. Anna encounters Silas's bullying at the market, but Christian steps in and makes Silas back down. What do you think of Christian's actions? How do they reflect both his Shawnee upbringing and his new Christian faith? What impact do you think this encounter will have on Silas?
7. After Christian and Orpha are engaged, Jacob finally initiates a conversation about the painful memories they share. What impact does this conversation have on Christian? Anna? Orpha?
8. Christian decides to break a Shawnee taboo in order to tell Orpha about his dead family members, deciding it is more important that Orpha and their future children understand this part of him and his past. Do you agree with his reasoning? What kinds of things might be important enough to make you go against a custom with which you were raised?

9. In the epilogue, Jacob avoids a potentially sticky situation by not writing a will, but instead verbally expressing his wishes on his deathbed. What is your opinion of his actions?
10. If you have read all three books in the Return to Northkill series, you may feel like you have known Jacob and his family as personal friends. What are your feelings as the series comes to a close? How will the characters continue to live in your imagination? Does knowing that the series is based on actual events and people change how much influence these books have on your life?