

Everyday Women

Ever-Faithful God

“Join Old Testament Women on Their Walk
from Fear to Faith”

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Week One

The Walk from Fear to Faith

Time Period: Creation through today

“When I am afraid, I will trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can mortal man do to me?” PSALM 56:3-4

DAY ONE STUDY

I. The Gift of Fear

You know that feeling. The pit in your stomach, pounding of your heart, and rush of your thoughts as you go from just the possibility of a job loss to starving and being homeless on the streets—all in a matter of seconds. Gripped by fear, although an imagined one.

Fear is a normal human emotion designed by God to alert us to danger so that we will take action against it. It has a purpose. It tells us to take precautions, to be wise in our dealings with strangers and strange situations. We need to think of it as a gift.

We know fear has a dark side as well. Bible teacher Jill Briscoe has often said, “Women are a feardriven, performance-oriented species.” Just watching the daily news can panic us. What did she mean by fear-driven? Why would fear drive us? And, what does fear drive us to do?

Women in general are created with a nesting instinct, a need for security and stability, and a desire to control our environment in order to create that security for us and for those we love. Our American way of thinking is this: we can fix it—whatever IT is. When we cannot fix it, we panic. And, fear can bring out the worst in us, especially in our uncertain world rife with the threat of terrorism. The damaging effect of constant fear is a disorienting sense that no place is safe.

Fear can be real or imagined. For me, a real fear is meeting a snake in my woodsy yard while gardening. I know they are there so I carefully do everything I can to avoid interaction with them. I experienced an imagined fear as my youngest daughter was growing up. That fear manifested itself in ongoing nightmares about her being kidnapped or molested. She was never threatened that way, but she was friendly and outgoing. I guess I thought she was more vulnerable than my older, more cautious daughter. When that young daughter became a strong teen girl who was daily hockey checking her older brother into the wall as they met each other in the hallway, those nightmares stopped. I guess my subconscious recognized that she could handle herself.

Is it realistic to think we can live without fear? No! Our faithful God understands this about us. He doesn’t want us to stay there, disoriented, and hopeless. He gives us the answer—Himself!

1. Read Psalm 56:3-4. Write out these verses in the space provided below.

2. Reading back over those words you just wrote, underline the phrases that tell you what to do when you are afraid. Then, write them below.

Notice that David doesn't write, "If I am afraid." He says, "**When** I am afraid." Fear will happen. We can let fear take root in us so that we give way to panic and hysteria. Does that ring any bells with you? Are you prone to hysterics? God knows this about us. When we are afraid, God wants us to trust Him and not give way to fear. Learning to do that is your walk from fear to faith.

II. Trusting a Faithful God

Since God understands the tendency to fear and panic in us, the Holy Spirit inspired Peter to write encouragement and instructions to women in 1 Peter 3:3-6.

3. Read 1 Peter 3:3-6. What does God consider of great worth in His sight (verse 4)?

Although the context of this passage is a marriage relationship, the principles apply to any woman's character ("inner self"), especially the qualities of a GENTLE and QUIET spirit that are precious in God's sight. These enable a woman to "do what is right and not give way to fear" (verse 6). But, you may be thinking, "How can that apply to me? I have a bubbly personality. I'm not naturally quiet." Before you start feeling put out about these words or afraid that you could never measure up to this, let's find out what "gentle" and "quiet" actually mean.

Scriptural Insight:

"GENTLE" means **"controlled strength"**. It does not mean passive, weak, or someone who cannot help herself. Picture a mother cradling a newborn. She has the physical strength to harm that child but doesn't because her strength is under control. If you are going to have a gentle spirit, what will you need? Strength under control. A woman with a gentle spirit has a humble heart that bows itself before God, recognizes God's dealings with her as good, and chooses not to be contentious or resistant against Him.

"QUIET" means **"tranquility arising from within"**. It does not mean whisper, silent, or bland. "Quiet" includes the idea of causing no disturbance to others. Think how a woman's hysterics affect those around her— family, friends, and coworkers. A woman with a quiet spirit has an inner peace and calmness in the midst of any circumstances. We can have a tranquil spirit in the midst of chaos. See how it fits with the "strength under control" attitude?

Gentleness and peace are fruits of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5: 22-23) in a believer's life and available to every Christian woman who desires them—that includes you and me! Now that you know the real meanings of these words, are you more likely to desire these qualities?

4. Why do you think these qualities in a woman would be so precious – of great worth – to God?

5. Read 1 Peter 3:5-6 written below and underline the three choices women can make, identified by (1), (2), and (3).

“For this is the way the holy women of the past who (1) put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master. You are her daughters if you (2) do what is right and (3) do not give way to fear.”

Peter identifies these examples for us as “holy women of the past.” The word “holy” means set apart for God’s special use. These women are holy because they’ve learned to trust in God when they were afraid. As holy women, these women were beautiful in God’s eyes (regardless of their outward appearance, age or social status). This beauty attributed to them by God Himself was based on three choices they made (“used to make themselves beautiful”) that every woman can make today:

- **Choice #1:** You can put your hope in God—in God and His Word rather than the fickleness of ourselves or others.
- **Choice #2:** You can do what is right—according to God’s way of approaching life, not the world’s way, especially those cultural practices that go against God’s Word.
- **Choice #3:** You can choose to not give way to fear. Let’s examine this one more closely.

III. Choose to Not Give Way to Fear

What does that mean—not give way to fear? We know this: God is not saying, “Don’t ever feel fear.” God gave us the gift of fear as a normal human emotion designed to alert us to danger so we can take action against it. God is saying, “You don’t have to stay terrified and paralyzed by your fear.” We are to TRUST GOD—in whom we have put our hope and by whose Word we are taught to do what is right.

6. Have you ever felt terrified? How did you respond?

7. God says that having a gentle and quiet inner spirit will make it easier for us to not get so terrified and stay that way. What's harder for God: rescuing us from desperate circumstances or developing in us a gentle and quiet spirit? Why?

Did you select the "developing in us a gentle and quiet spirit?" I agree because it involves our cooperation! Is it too difficult for Him? No! But here's the key: a humble, peaceful heart makes it easier for us to make that choice to trust in the faithfulness of God rather than the fickleness of ourselves or others when we are tempted to panic and succumb to hysteria.

We have a faithful God. That's not imaginary. In 1 Peter 3:5, Sarah represents several other everyday women who lived in Old Testament days who put their hope in God and found Him worthy of their trust. This was their walk from fear to faith. What is that? We'll find out in the Day Two Study.

Think About It: "When we experience anxiety or fear, the enemy can try to use I as an opportunity to make us feel guilt or shame. That's when we pause and ask God for help, knowing He understands and never condemns us". (Holley Gerth, "Fear Not," *Homelife Magazine*, March 2016)

8. **Your Life's Journey:** What might be holding you back from trusting God whenever you are afraid?

DAY TWO STUDY

I. *The Walk from Fear to Faith*

In the Bible, “walk” refers to following a certain course of life or conducting oneself in a certain way. It’s your daily life. How you choose to live daily. What motivates you. What guides you. What decisions you make in how you will respond to life. Will your daily walk (life) follow God’s way of approaching life or the world’s way of approaching life (usually very different)? Your walk is your choice.

For the purposes of this study, your choice will involve moving away from fear and toward faith. Most of us have a pretty good understanding of fear in our lives. But, what is faith? God defines that for us Himself through the writer of Hebrews.

1. Read Hebrews 11:1 and 6.
 - What is faith (v. 1)?

 - What must you believe about God in your faith (v. 6)?

Did you notice that faith is related to confidence? Confident hope and assurance that what we believe is true. Confidence that our God exists and is good to anyone who seeks Him. This confidence pleases Him. Hebrews 11 continues to relate the lives of men and women who had this confidence in God.

2. Read Hebrews 11:11, 23, and 31. Who chose faith in God over giving way to fear?

3. Read Hebrews 11:35 (first half of verse). By faith, what did these women receive?

Think About It: “When we look at life just with our own eyes, we become fearful, pessimistic, & negative. We become people who feel, ‘I don’t know if that can work. I don’t know if I can get through this.’ When we look at the Scriptures and begin to...see how God empowered normal average people like you and I, the Holy Spirit takes the Word of God and strengthens us and gives us courage that we didn’t know we had.”

These women are our examples of choosing faith in God over giving way to fear (1 Peter 3:5-6). By studying their lives, God’s Spirit will strengthen us and give us courage we didn’t know we had.

II. Connecting with Old Testament Everyday Women

If you have limited knowledge of the Old Testament, those women who lived so long ago may be strangers to you. Some you may have heard about—Sarah, Hannah, Abigail and Bathsheba. Everyone of Jewish birth can consider Sarah to be a great-great-grandmother. Others are unknown—Jael, Mrs. Manoah, and the Shunammite woman. Yet, they were still women like you and I are.

As everyday women, they cooked meals, did laundry, and raised children. They had responsibilities inside and outside of their homes, including home businesses. They experienced hormone fluctuations and menopause. They laughed with their friends, differed with their mates, and cried when a loved one died. They wrote songs and played musical instruments. I bet they all found ways to use their 20,000 words per day.

At one time, they were 20-somethings, then 40-somethings, then 60-somethings and more. They wore beads, earrings, and ankle bracelets. Their hair needed to be combed and fixed, and it turned grey as they aged. No doubt, some of them, if not all, had something on their bodies that sagged!

These women also experienced fear at various times in their lives just like we do. They faced invading enemies, sick family members, and empty pantries. They faced creditors and surprise houseguests. They even had “bad” days when things didn’t go right, sometimes due to their own choices. These were EVERYDAY WOMEN, just like we are.

4. As women in general, what kind of life experiences for them might have been the same as your own life experiences?

5. What kinds of fears did these women probably face that you also face?

Each one of these women had a story, and that story has been shared over and over to millions of eager listeners. You might be surprised how many times the scriptures refer to them actually telling their story to others around them. Their stories—snippets of their biographies—are preserved for us to get to know them, and to know their God who is also our God—an EVER-FAITHFUL God whose character never changes. He's as faithful now in our everyday circumstances of life as He was years ago to those women. We can feel confidence in His presence and active involvement, even when we can't see it. And, knowing this, we can trust in Him whenever we are afraid. 14. Using a dictionary, write the definition of trust that fits best with the concept of trusting God.

III. Trusting an Ever-Faithful Personal God

Trust is usually defined as a firm belief in the character, truth, ability, or strength of someone or something. In our walk from fear to faith, that trust is in God. As we study the lives of Sarah, Miriam, Rahab, and others, we'll see an ever-faithful personal God in action. These Old Testament women knew God by the personal name Yahweh. In our English translations, it is usually written as LORD in capital letters. In the Old Testament, you'll find the phrase "the LORD your God" or "the LORD our God" at least 500 times. Every time, that phrase is emphasizing, "We have a personal God. His name is Yahweh." It's the name by which God wished to be known and worshiped in Israel and by Israel. Yahweh means, "I am." This name expressed His character as constant, dependable and faithful.

Several times in the gospels, Jesus applied God's name "I am" to Himself (John 4:26; 8:58). So, the ever-faithful, promise-keeping God of the Old Testament is embodied in the Lord Jesus Christ of the New Testament and forever. We still have a personal God.

6. Read John 14:27 and 16:33. What does Jesus promise to you?

Take heart! He is with you through any trouble. You can trust Him. Our God is trustworthy.

7. **TELL YOUR STORY:** Has there been a problem in your life where you needed to make a choice to do right, but the possible consequences filled you with fear? Have you learned to trust God and live by faith in that area, or are you still struggling with it?

DAY THREE STUDY — *Four Truths Essential to Faith*

As we join these Old Testament women on their faith walk, we will see consistent truths that we can apply to our lives today in our WALK FROM FEAR TO FAITH.

Truth # 1: God Loves You

1. Read the following verses. What do you learn about God's love for you?

- John 16:27 —
- Romans 5:5 —
- Ephesians 5:1 —

As a believer in Jesus, the Father Himself loves you. He pours out His love in your heart. You are one of His dearly loved children. ***You can count on Truth #1 — God loves you.***

Truth # 2: God Knows What Is Going on in Your Life

2. Read the following verses. What does God know about you?

- Matthew 6:25, 31-32 —
- Psalm 139:1-10 —

God is everywhere and knows everything. That's part of His character. He knows what is going on in your life and my life. If He doesn't, then He isn't really God. He knows how best to meet your needs, how to get you through anything. It is a given. ***You can count on Truth #2 — God knows what is going on in your life.***

Truth # 3: God Can Do Something About It

3. Read the following verses: What does the angel say to each woman about God's power?

- Genesis 18:14 —
- Luke 1:37 —

Since the angel lives in heaven with God, he should know. So, is anything impossible for the Lord? The answer is, NO! Notice that both of these often-quoted statements are made to women concerning the deepest hurt a woman could experience at that time—barrenness. What is the deepest hurt you can experience in your culture? Your God can do something about that, too.

Jesus said to the men and women following Him, “All things are possible with God.” (Mark 10:27) Our God is all-powerful. He is capable of doing anything He chooses to do that is in agreement with His character and His will. ***We can count on Truth #3 — God can do something about it. Whatever IT is.***

Truth # 4: You Can Trust His Goodness In Whatever He Chooses To Do

This is the sticky part, isn't it? Is God good? Can I believe that He is good all the time?

The day before my dear friend died of breast cancer, she softly spoke to me these words, “God is good.” I finished her sentence with “all the time” because I had heard her say that repeatedly. She replied, “I don't understand all of this.” And, most of the time, we can't understand. But, we've got to bank on God's goodness.

4. Read Psalm 119:68. What is declared about God?

5. Read Proverbs 3:5. What wisdom is given to us?

God is good all the time. That's a fact. What He does is always good. As we study each of these women, we'll see that during her faith walk, a loving God said “no” to some things. Yet, she chose to trust Him rather than submit to fear. And, God rewarded her faith with an outpouring of His blessing in other ways. You can do the same. So, here's ***Truth #4 — You can trust His goodness in whatever He chooses to do!***

Sweet friends, God may not choose to rescue you from everything that is threatening you at this time. But, in any and all situations, you can count on these truths...say them aloud, making them personal:

- God loves me
- God knows what is going on in my life
- God can do something about it
- I can trust His goodness in whatever He chooses to do

The 4 Truths Illustrated by Jesus Himself

6. Read John 11: 1-15. This is one of the best biblical examples of these four truths in action. The need: Martha informed Jesus that her brother Lazarus was sick.

- **Truth # 1:** Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus (John 11:5).
- **Truth # 2:** Jesus knew what was going on in Martha’s life—Lazarus died (verses 6, 11, 14).
- **Truth # 3:** Jesus could do something about it—He had healed from a distance (John 4:50-53).
- **Truth # 4:** But, Jesus chose to do something different, even better than what anyone could imagine though it caused pain and suffering to those He loved and a lot of waiting, too (John 11:14-15).

After 4 days of being dead, Lazarus was brought back to life, and good things happened. God’s goodness showed up—Lazarus had his life restored, his sisters saw their now healthy brother returned to them, the disciples witnessed an amazing work of God, and many people now believed in Jesus who had not yet believed in Him. Martha could now say to herself with assurance, “God loves me. God knows what is going on in my life. God can do something about it. I can trust His goodness in whatever He chooses to do.” And so can you!

7. **Your Life’s Journey:** What will be your biggest challenge when it comes to believing these four truths apply to you and your situation? Be honest with the Lord. It’s okay to say, “Lord Jesus, I have a hard time believing that _____

_____ (fill in the blank).

I ask you to help me learn to trust you in your choice of how to be good to me and my loved ones.” Then, watch what He does!

DAY FOUR STUDY – *The Walk From Fear To Faith*

1. **Your Life's Journey:** read the words to the song below. Then pick one thing that is causing you fear today. What are your choices for acting on that fear? Apply the 4 truths you learned in the Day Three Study to your situation. Respond to the Lord about what He's shown you today.

When You don't move the mountains, I'm needing You to move

When You don't part the waters, I wish I could walk through

When You don't give the answers, as I cry out to You

I will trust, I will trust, I will trust in You! (Lauren Daigle, "Trust in You")

Week Two

Sarah – A Woman Like Us

Time Period: The Patriarchs ~2100-1800 B.C.

“Let your beauty not be external – the braiding of hair and wearing of gold jewelry or fine clothes – but the inner person of the heart, the lasting beauty of a gentle and tranquil spirit, which is precious in God’s sight. For in the same way the holy women who hoped in God long ago adorned themselves by being subject to their husbands, like Sarah who obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. You become her children when you do what is good and have no fear in doing so.” 1 PETER 3:3-6

DAY ONE STUDY

I. Historical Perspective

The term *patriarch* denotes the father or male leader of a family or tribe. In the Bible, “patriarchs” usually refers to the three main characters in Genesis 12-50—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Great civilizations dotted the Ancient Near East. Ur was a thriving city with efficient government and impressive buildings. Under God’s direction, Abraham abandoned Ur, with its culture and conveniences, for the land of Canaan (today’s Israel). Patriarchal life was semi-nomadic as they wandered from place to place, searching for grazing land and water for their animals. They measured their wealth in livestock and movable goods such as silver, gold, and tents.

Archeology has given rich insights into patriarchal times. In the early 1900’s, Sir Leonard Woolley excavated Ur. He discovered the glory of the city, but he also recognized the sin. Idol worship characterized the city. It is little wonder that God called Abraham away.

The patriarchal era is important to us. Through Abraham and his descendants, God began to develop a people of His own. The Abrahamic Covenant (God’s unconditional pledge to Abraham) contains many precious promises: Abraham would have numerous offspring; his descendants would possess the land of Canaan, and the Messiah would come forth one day from his line. These promises passed on to Isaac and Jacob. Jacob’s sons formed the nucleus of the twelve tribes of Israel. Through one son’s kindness (Joseph), the infant “Israel” (70+ people) entered Egypt and grew into a great nation.

When we are introduced to this power couple in the history of Israel, their names are Abram and Sarai. For consistency’s sake, we’ll use the more common names “Abraham” and “Sarah” (names later given to them by God) throughout this lesson.

II. Moving from home (at 65 years old)...

1. Read Genesis 11:27-12:9. Describe Sarah and her circumstances in life at this time.

2. **Deeper Discoveries (optional):** Research the city of Ur to find out what Sarah willingly left.

3. Barrenness for a woman in Sarah's time was very painful, not unlike for a woman in our time. Sons, in particular, were needed to carry on the family name and livelihood. How do you think Sarah's barrenness would have affected her feelings of security (particularly with Abraham) and significance (her status in society)?

4. Read Genesis 12:10-13:2. Why do you think Sarah went along with Abraham's "Tell them you're my sister" plan?

Historical Insight: *Curious about Abraham's "Tell them you're my sister" plan? One historian said that if a married man of Abraham's day found himself in enemy territory, he could be killed for his wife. But, if Abraham were known as her brother, someone wanting her would have to make marriage arrangements with Abram because in that society, a woman's brother gave his sister in marriage. So Abraham would have been the negotiator thus giving him the chance to act in his own interest.*

5. Consider how frightened Sarah might have been as she went along with Abraham's plan and was then taken into Pharaoh's harem. God honored Sarah for not giving way to that fear (1 Peter 3:5-6). When Abraham failed to protect Sarah in this incident, what did God do for her?

DAY TWO STUDY

I. 10 years later (Sarah is now ~75) ...

1. Read Genesis 15:1-6.
 - What was Abraham's "Plan B" to provide an heir?

 - What was still God's plan?

 - How many times had He told Abraham this already?

Historical Insight: *In ancient times, a man who had no son could adopt a favored servant as heir to his possessions. Or, a man who had no son could take a second wife to produce an heir. Some marriage contracts even spelled out this provision. A wife was obligated to have children. If she could not, she was encouraged to find her husband another wife who could.*

2. Read Genesis 16. This is Sarah's "Plan B" to fix Abraham's need for an heir. Discuss her idea and the emotions she might have experienced. Notice that Abraham had not already sought a second wife.

3. Sarah's "Plan B" becomes a nightmare! Our example was no perfect woman. She was just like we are. How did Sarah react?

4. What was threatened in Sarah's life, and what confirmation did she need from her husband?

Scriptural Insight: Sin now drives a wedge between Hagar and Sarah. Hostility and mutual recrimination loom large, resulting in Hagar's fleeing her mistress's home precipitously, and pregnant at that. But in fleeing Sarah, several things happen to Hagar. She is the first person in the Bible to whom "the angel of the Lord" appears (16:11a). She is the first woman in the Bible to whom God directly makes a promise (16:11b-12). She is the only person in the Old Testament to give God a new name (16:13). And lastly, her meeting with the angel "is the only encounter between God and a woman that results in a commemorative place name (16:14)". (Adapted from Handbook on the Pentateuch, page 91)

II. 13 years later (Sarah is now ~89)...

5. Read Genesis 17:1-6, 15-22. God once again told Abraham His plan to provide descendants for Abraham and a faithful people for Himself.

- How did Abraham respond this time?

- What additional information is given in Romans 4:18-21?

6. Read Genesis 18:1-15. When the visitors came by Abraham's tent, what did the Lord give Sarah for the first time?

7. What was Sarah's initial response? Why? [NOTE: The Hebrew word translated "pleasure" in verse 12 is eden, which is synonymous with sensual pleasure.]

DAY THREE STUDY

1. Read Genesis 21:1-7. Describe Sarah's experience and the story she had to tell (vs. 6).

***Think About It:** Someone once said, "God's plan is completely different from what you could ever imagine and much more glorious than you would ever expect." Have you noticed this in your life? Is anything really too hard for the Lord?*

2. The name Isaac means "he laughs." In what ways is Isaac an appropriate name for this baby?

3. Through this whole experience, how do we know that God loved Sarah as much as Abraham?

3 years later (Sarah is now ~92) ...

4. Read Genesis 21:8-13. What situation existed between Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, and Ishmael?

5. Contrast the response of Sarah with that of Abraham to the situation.

6. Discuss God's response to the situation.

7. Abraham needed Sarah's insight and advice in order to fulfill God's promise. Sometimes our husbands or closest friends need our advice. How should we pray concerning giving advice to them?

8. Read Genesis 23:1-4, 16-20 and Genesis 25:1. Sarah lived to be 127 years old. What do you learn of Abraham's regard for her until death parted them?

9. Read Hebrews 11:11-13. What testimony does the scripture give about Abraham and Sarah?

10. From our study, write down at least 7 descriptive characteristics of Sarah, positive or negative, that will help you to remember her.

Respond to the Lord about what He's shown you today.

DAY FOUR STUDY – The Walk From Fear To Faith

God loved Sarah. He knew what was going on in her life. He was able to do something about it. But, God did not give Sarah a child early in her marriage nor did He prevent her from making a bad decision or spending time in a king's harem. During her walk, a loving God said "no" to some things. Yet, she chose to trust Him rather than submit to fear. And, God rewarded her faith with an outpouring of His blessing in other ways. Likewise, God may not choose to rescue you from poor decisions made by you or someone close to you. But, in any and all situations, you can count on these truths...

- God loves me.
- God knows what is going on in my life.
- God can do something about it.
- I can trust His goodness in whatever He chooses to do!

1. List all the situations in Sarah's life that could have "terrified" her.

2. Considering those "opportunities" for being terrified, in which ones did Sarah, by faith, do what was right and not give way to fear?

3. TELL YOUR STORY: Sarah is commended by God for trusting in Him and not giving way to fear. In what areas of your life have you learned greater trust of your God? Describe one area more fully in the space below.

Week Three

Jochebed & Miriam – Influential Women

Time: The Exodus approx. 1450 B.C.

“For by the grace given to me I say to every one of you not to think more highly of yourself than you ought to think, but to think with sober discernment, as God has distributed to each of you a measure of faith. For just as in one body we have many members, and not all the members serve the same function, so we who are many are one body in Christ, and individually we are members who belong to one another.” ROMANS 12:3-5

DAY ONE STUDY

Historical Perspective

For 430 years, Israelites lived in Egypt, at first in comfort because the “vice president” of the country was their relative Joseph. But after Joseph died, there arose a Pharaoh who did not know Joseph, and Israel’s welcome grew cold. Fearing Israel’s might, Egypt sought to cripple the growing nation. But Egypt’s efforts were in vain; God was with His people, and He was preparing to bring Israel out of the land.

Conservative scholars date the “Exodus,” a landmark in Israel’s history, at 1446 B.C. Born shortly after the decree to throw Hebrew newborn boys in the Nile, Moses escaped death through adoption by pharaoh’s daughter. About 1486, the reigning Pharaoh tried to kill Moses when he sought identity with his people Israel, but Moses escaped to Midian. Forty years later, the Lord appeared to Moses in a burning bush, and Moses returned to Egypt to stand before the Pharaoh of the exodus with his brother Aaron at his side.

Through Moses, God poured out His wrath upon Pharaoh and brought Egypt to her knees. Israel marched forth a free people, living proof of God’s gracious salvation. Yet freedom did not guarantee success. Israel lacked organization. At Mount Sinai, God molded His people into a nation. The Mosaic Covenant governed every part of Israel’s society: the civil, the ceremonial, and the moral. The covenant contained special promises, but it demanded obedience. Rebellion would bring severe judgment. Israel chose to rebel against her God. Sin brought judgment, and an entire generation died. Yet, God heard the prayers of Moses and preserved His people through the wilderness.

I. Miriam’s childhood and her mentors...

1. Read Exodus 1:1-2:10; Hebrews 11:23. Over several generations, God used brave women to thwart evil plans to eliminate His people. List the women mentioned in the Exodus passage who exhibited courage. These were Miriam’s “mentors.”

2. From Exodus 6:20 and Numbers 26:59, we get additional information about Miriam's family. Her parents are named Amram and Jochebed. The children are Miriam, Aaron, and Moses. Read Hebrews 11:24-28. What influence, if any, did the few years spent with his parents have on Moses?

3. Back to Exodus 2:1-10, how would you describe Miriam's mom Jochebed to someone? In other words, what character qualities do you "see" in her?

4. What choices did Miriam's parents (Jochebed and Amram) make because of their faith, and how did God reward that faith?

5. Miriam had the same home and parents as Moses. From the Exodus 2:1-10 passage (she's the sister mentioned), use adjectives to describe Miriam who was 7-12 years of age at this time.

From the Hebrew: Miriam's name in Hebrew means "bitterness". The Greek version of her name is Mary. In Israel's history after this time, Mary, Mara, and Miriam were popular girl's names.

6. As a young girl, then, what fearful situations did Miriam face, and how did she respond?

7. Your Life's Journey: Moses, Aaron and Miriam came from a home where parents were walking by faith in their God. In what kind of home did you grow up? How has this affected your ability to courageously trust God and not give way to fear?

DAY TWO STUDY

80 years later...

1. Read Exodus 14:1-31. Miriam is now in her upper mid-life, approximately 87-92 years old. What did she experience of God's faithfulness along with the rest of Israel?

Scriptural Insight: *According to tradition, Miriam was married to Hur, an honorable man who along with Aaron, held up Moses' arms during a major battle in Exodus 17:10-13. He was appointed magistrate while Moses was on the mountain (Exodus 24:14).*

2. Read Exodus 15:1-21. What was Miriam's response to God's faithfulness?

3. Read Micah 6:3-4. What does God say about Miriam's role for Israel? In what ways is she pleasing God and fulfilling His purpose for her?

4. Why do you think Miriam's support would have been important to Moses?

5. Looking more closely at Exodus 15:20. What is Miriam called? Read Numbers 12:2. What does Miriam say about herself?

6. A prophetess was a female prophet—one to whom and through whom God speaks, revealing Himself and His will especially in the absence of the written word of God. God used a number of women to speak forth (prophecy) His Word at critical times in history. One was Deborah whom we'll be studying in an upcoming lesson. Another such woman was Huldah. Read 2 Kings 22:1-20. This occurred about 700 years after Miriam's time. What was going on, and how did Huldah serve God and the leader of Israel?

7. Prophesying also could involve an enthusiastic praising of God inspired by the Holy Spirit. Read 1 Samuel 10:5-10 and 1 Chronicles 25:1.

- What activities were associated with prophesying?

- In what ways does Exodus 15:20-21 fit this description of prophesying?

Scriptural Insight: The song in Exodus 15 is the first recorded song in the Bible—a song of redemption. Such celebration was common after victory in battle. Since the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit residing in believers continues to inspire enthusiastic praising of God. We don't call it prophesying any longer, but it still fits the biblical definition. The Holy Spirit inspires and gifts believers today to compose songs, poems, prayers and testimonies that glorify God.

8. Tell Your Story: Miriam testified about God's faithfulness through her use of poetry, song, and dance. The Holy Spirit still inspires us to break out in enthusiastic praise to God through various means.

- Have you written a song, a poem, prose, created a work of art, or simply sang praise songs to Him? What led to this expression in your life?

- Even if you've never testified like Miriam did, your STORY of God's faithfulness in your life is your testimony about Him. Write a short paragraph telling of an area in your life where you have recognized God's faithfulness to you. This is a part of your STORY of God's faithfulness.

DAY THREE STUDY

About 2 years later...

1. Read Numbers 12:1-16. Why did Miriam and Aaron begin to talk against Moses?

2. What do you think was the real reason for their complaining?

Think About It: *One of the torments of envy is that it can never turn away its eyes from the thing that pains it. Envy blocks our trust in God, hurts our relationships, makes us resent God's goodness to others, and blinds us to God's goodness to us.*

3. Discuss the Lord's response to their behavior (vs. 2-10).

4. What is implied by the fact that the Lord punished only Miriam? See also James 3:5-6.

Scriptural Insight: *Spitting in one's face expressed contempt (Deut. 25:9). The Lord expressed His contempt for Miriam's presumption by the skin affliction.*

5. Why was a skin disease such as leprosy so awful? See Numbers 5:1-4.

Think About It: *Miriam bucked her authority, claiming equal prominence with Moses. Because of her attitude and resulting action, God disciplined her through banishment, opposite of what she really wanted!*

6. How did Miriam's brothers respond to the discipline of their sister?

7. Read Deuteronomy 24:8-9. What do you think was the effect of Miriam's banishment from the camp for 7 days ...

- on her?
- on the people?

Historical Insight: *Sometimes Miriam was a good example; sometimes a bad example. Just like we are, she was not perfect every day. Yet, she had been given a sphere of influence by God. She lived through 38 years of wandering and died just before Aaron in the 40th year out of Egypt at approximately 130 years old (Numbers 20:1).*

8. Read Romans 13:1-2 and Hebrews 13:7,17. How does what you read in Numbers 12 illustrate these passages?

DAY FOUR STUDY – THE WALK FROM FEAR TO FAITH

God loved Miriam’s family. He knew what was going on in their lives. He was able to do something about it. But, God did not give Jochebed her son back permanently to raise nor did He prevent them from having to go through the agony of hiding baby Moses. Miriam was given great responsibility and privilege, yet she also had to live with the consequences of her sin. During her walk, a loving God said “no” to some things. Yet, Miriam and her family chose to trust Him rather than submit to fear. And, God rewarded their faith with an outpouring of His blessing in other ways. Likewise, God may not choose to rescue you from your “Egypt.” But, in any and all situations, you can count on these truths...

- God loves me.
- God knows what is going on in my life.
- God can do something about it.
- I can trust His goodness in whatever He chooses to do!

1. What situations could have caused fear for Jochebed? How did she respond to God by faith?

2. Thinking back through Miriam’s life, what situations did she face that could have terrified her? How did she respond to God by faith in those situations?

3. **Your Life’s Journey:** Here is a biblical tool you can use to apply faith to your fear. Go through this “Applying Faith to Fear” process to write out your plan of action to apply faith to one of your fears right now. Find a copy of this “Applying Faith to Fear” process at the end of this study guide that you can cut out and keep with you in your Bible.

APPLYING FAITH TO FEAR

Step 1. Confront it. What fears do you have right now?

Consider your fears. The real ones and the imaginary ones. Which are the most likely to tempt you to panic or to be terrified?

Step 2. Ask about each one: What is my worst-case scenario?

Start with just one of those fears, perhaps the most terrifying one. What is the worst that could happen? Think realistically not hypothetically.

Step 3. Consider: If the worst I can imagine happens, could I handle it through the presence and power of Jesus Christ?

As a Christian, you have the power of the One who created the Universe living inside of you. Ask yourself, “Can He help me get through anything?” The answer is a resounding, “YES!” Hebrews 4:15-16; Ephesians 3:20; Romans 8:26

If the worst I can imagine happens, are you confident that you could handle it through the presence and power of Jesus Christ? If not, where do you need extra help?

Step 4. Remember the four truths essential to faith:

- God loves me. John 16:27; Romans 5:5, Ephesians 5:1
- God knows what is going on in my life. Matthew 6:31-32; Psalm 139:1-10
- God can do something about it. Genesis 18:14; Luke 1:37; Mark 10:27
- I can trust His goodness in whatever He chooses to do. Psalm 119:68; Proverbs 3:5

Repeat the 4 truths to yourself right now regarding your fear.

Step 5. Pray: Prayer is simply talking to God about anything and everything.

Thank the Lord for His presence and His goodness. 1 Thessalonians 5:18

Ask Him for the courage and peace to ride out the storm. Where the Bible is clear, you can claim God’s promises by faith. John 14:27; 16:33

Anytime, you can ask for deliverance and protection—but you cannot hold God to promises He hasn’t made. He hasn’t promised immunity from natural calamities, illness, and troubles.

Step 6. Live life securely in Him: What actions can you take?

What common sense precautions can you take? How can you be wiser in your world regarding what is making you afraid?

Trust God to show you what to do and give you strength when you are weak. What will you ask Him for now?

Week Four

Rahab - A Past And A Future

Time: Into the Land approx. 1400 B.C.

“By faith Rahab the prostitute escaped the destruction of the disobedient, because she welcomed the spies in peace.” HEBREWS 11:31

DAY ONE STUDY

Historical Perspective

After 40 years of struggle, Israel stood poised to enter the Promised Land. But she would enter without Moses for he was dead. Much work remained. This beautiful new land was dangerous. Numerous city-states dotted the landscape, each a well-fortified, walled fortress with a battle-tested army. Conquest would be a difficult, time-consuming task. But, God remained faithful to His people. He equipped a new leader, Joshua, who had been trained under Moses' leadership for 40 years for this job. Joshua knew that the 2.5 million Israelites plus their flocks and herds needed to cross a flooded river and begin their conquest of the land. So, he sent 2 spies to secretly scout the area of imminent war, particularly Jericho—the strategic point to reach the three passes through the wilderness to the rest of Canaan. God took care of the river crossing for the Israelites, miraculously providing dry ground for them to move through and onto Jericho—a walled city on ~9.5 acres—once around would have taken ~1/2 hour!!

1. Read Deuteronomy 4:32-40. Why did God bring the Israelites out of Egypt and into the Promised Land, especially accompanied by so many miraculous events?

Getting to know Rahab...

2. Read Exodus 15:15-16 and Deuteronomy 2:24-25. What was God's plan?

3. Read Joshua 2:1-11.

- What did Rahab, the people of Jericho, and the surrounding nations know about Israel and her history?

- As a result, what was the state of morale in Jericho?

***Historical Insight:** The citizens of Jericho were well prepared for a siege since a spring lay inside the city walls and the harvest had just been gathered (Joshua 3:15), providing an abundant supply of food, seen in the large jars of grain found in the houses. So, the inhabitants of Jericho could have held out for perhaps several years. The full grain jars show that the siege was short since the people inside the walls consumed very little of the grain, another historical verification of biblical accuracy.*

4. Use adjectives to describe Rahab in your own words.

5. What conclusion did Rahab make about the God of Israel? Could anyone else in Jericho have come to the same conclusion? Explain.

6. **Deeper Discoveries (optional):** Research the ancient city of Jericho. What was it like for Rahab to live there?

7. Rahab was given an opportunity to make a conscious choice for God based upon the facts she knew about Him, and she responded with FAITH! Faith resulted in action.

- What did she do that day?

- What risk was she taking?

8. Compare Rahab's choice to disobey & lie to her king with Sarah's choice to agree to Abraham's "Tell them you're my sister" plan. See also Miriam's mentors in Exodus 1:15-20.

***Think About It:** Rahab didn't know this new God well enough to know He could be trusted to protect His own people. This is something she would learn firsthand in just a couple of weeks.*

Respond to the Lord about what He's shown you today.

DAY TWO STUDY

1. Read Joshua 2:12-21. The spies made a covenant with Rahab.

- What part of the oath was Rahab's responsibility?

- What part of the oath was the responsibility of the spies?

Historical Insight: *The early church viewed the blood-colored cord as a symbol of Christ's atonement like the blood of the Passover lamb.*

After the spies' return, God parted the Jordan River for the people to cross. All of those men who had been born in the wilderness were circumcised. The Passover was celebrated. And, the people ate produce from the land. The manna stopped the next day.

2. Read Joshua 6:1-25. What was God's plan for defeating Jericho?

3. How did Joshua and the people respond?

4. Rahab had to wait those seven days also. Based on her responsibility in the oath, who else was waiting with her?

5. What might have been Rahab's emotions during this time of waiting? (See also Joshua 5:1 for the emotions of those around her.)

5. Someone once said, “Responsibility is my response to His (God’s) ability.” Rahab responded to God’s ability. What did God do for her and her family? Be specific.

Historical Insight: Surrounding Jericho was a tall embankment with a stone retaining wall at its base 12–15 feet high. Above that stood a mud brick wall 6 feet thick, 20 feet high. At the crest of the embankment was a similar 20-foot high mud brick wall reaching to approximately 46 feet above the ground level below. Humanly speaking, the fortress of Jericho was impregnable. Archeological evidence reveals that the mud brick city wall collapsed as the city met its end (approx. 1400 B.C.) except for a short stretch of the north city wall that did not fall as everywhere else. There were houses built against the wall as in Joshua 2:15. Excavations showed that the bricks from the collapsed walls formed a ramp against the retaining wall so that the Israelites could climb up over the top as is described in Joshua 6:20. The city was thoroughly burned. (Taken from “The Walls of Jericho” by Bryant Wood, Creation magazine, March 1999, pages 36-40)

6. Your Life’s Journey: “Waiting”

Scriptural Insight: The Hebrew word most commonly translated as wait (upon the Lord) is *qavah*, which means to hope and expect. It also means to bind together as in tying together loose ends. Waiting is rarely pleasant to us, but we make ourselves do it daily in various situations (doctor’s offices, traffic, checkout lanes). Our focus is usually not on the waiting itself, but on the end result of the waiting. When it comes to waiting on the Lord, the Bible communicates a clear message: we are to do it, and it’s good for us. Psalm 27:14 tells us waiting on the Lord will “strengthen your heart” (NKJV). Waiting on God brings us strength in all areas in our lives. It teaches us about Him, and His timing. During those times of waiting, our ear is more attuned to the work of God. Micah 7:7 says, “I will watch expectantly for the Lord.” We also make ourselves available to talk with Him in prayer. When we seek God for a solution in our lives, these times of waiting strengthen our relationship with Him as we learn to rely on His timing and trust in His goodness. It binds us together with Him. (Taken from “Entwined in Him” by Lisa Jenkins-Moore, Living Magazine, November 2016, pp. 1617)

Rahab had to wait patiently for God to act. Remember that she did not know the “marching” orders. We also must wait for God’s “always perfect” timing in answer to our prayers. Is this a problem for you? If you have become discouraged (or been discouraged in the past) from having to wait, write about it here.

Read the words to the song below. Consider that God is in the waiting, too, and that waiting binds you together with Him? How does this change your perspective of waiting?

“You are in the waiting in that moment of my life, when my faith and hope collide. My heart’s anticipating just how and when You’ll move. Oh, that’s when You prove You are in the waiting too” (“In the Waiting” by Shannon Wexelberg)

DAY THREE STUDY

1. Read Matthew 1:5, Hebrews 11:30-31, and James 2:25. This is Rahab's report card. What does it say?
3. In Hebrews 11:31, the word used to describe the rest of the people of Jericho is "disobedient," which means, "to refuse to be persuaded." See your answers to the questions in Day One Study. Did God give them an opportunity to be "persuaded"? Explain.
4. Since Rahab was likely a prostitute just as it is written, what does the mention of Rahab three times in the New Testament reveal about God's grace to her? In other words, how did God forgive her past and give her a new future?

Scriptural Insight: For centuries, Christians have tried to soften Rahab's reputation by arguing that she was only an innkeeper, but the New Testament references to her indicate that she was an immoral woman. The Greek word used to describe Rahab is *porne* the word from which we get "pornography." "Porne" is only used for immorality. This in no way mars the righteousness of God who used such a person in the fulfillment of His purposes. Instead this incident serves to bring His mercy and grace into bold relief. (*The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Old Testament, p. 330*)

5. **Your Life's Journey:** Do you feel that some sins in your past or present are so terrible that they can't be forgiven or that you are unworthy to serve God? What have you learned from Rahab's story that confirms to you God can forgive your past and give you a new future?

DAY FOUR STUDY — The Walk From Fear To Faith

God loved Rahab. He knew what was going on in her life. He was able to do something about it. But, God did not keep Rahab from losing the security of her home nor did He prevent her from having to go through the agony of watching the Israelites march around the city for 7 days. Remember, she didn't know that plan. When she stepped out in faith, He met her there. She trusted Him to rescue her, and He did. God judged her by her heart—the inward woman, not by her lifestyle—the outward appearance. He not only saved her life, but He forgave her past and gave her a new future. She chose to trust Him rather than submit to fear. Likewise, God forgives your past and gives you a new future. And, in any and all situations, you can count on these truths...

- God loves me.

- God knows what is going on in my life.

- God can do something about it.

- I can trust His goodness in whatever He chooses to do!

1. Consider all the opportunities for fear in Rahab's life. How did she demonstrate faith at those times?

2. **TELL YOUR STORY:** We will probably never be faced with the dramatic circumstances of Rahab, but we do have our own distressing situations in life. What distressing situations are you facing now, and what choices are available to you? Read Psalm 40:1-3 and 46:1-3 to give you strength. Journal about how you will trust God. This is part of your story.

Week Five

Deborah & Jael - Resourceful Women

Time Period: The Judges approx. 1400 - 1000 B.C.

“For we are his workmanship, having been created in Christ Jesus for good works that God prepared beforehand so we may do them.” EPHESIANS 2:10

DAY ONE STUDY

Historical Perspective

As Israel entered the Promised Land, God worked great miracles: the waters of the Jordan parted, the walls of Jericho fell, and the sun stood still over Gibeon. No task was too great for Israel’s God. At last, after more than six years of fighting, the initial conquest came to a close. Joshua sent the tribes forth to occupy their lands. As the tribes moved in, they were commanded to exterminate the inhabitants of Canaan, but they failed to complete the mission. The children of Israel had crippled the Canaanite peoples, but they had not destroyed them. The remaining Canaanites, a corrupt people, eventually turned Israel from God.

For almost four hundred years, Israel followed a monotonous cycle:

- Sin (mostly idolatry & immorality) — Not long after getting settled in her land, Israel adopted the religion and the lifestyle of the pagan Canaanites by worshipping idols and practicing immorality, theft, and murder. Her society fell apart. Tyranny and force became the norm; inept leaders were unable to check the excessive violence. Selfish desires for tribal glory and supremacy, as well as unwillingness to accept reproof, led to tragic civil wars.
- Suffering (having enemies rule over them or terrorize them) — Because of their idolatry and hard hearts, God brought severe judgment on the land, allowing the Mesopotamians, Moabites, Canaanites, Midianites, Ammonites, and Philistines to oppress and dominate His people for a time.
- Supplication (calling out to God, earnest prayer) — The enemies’ oppression of the people drove them back to their God and calling out to Him for help.
- Salvation (in this context meaning deliverance, aid, victory, or prosperity) — God would send human leaders called “Judges” to defeat the oppressing nations and bring periods of rest. These Judges—8 in all—were civil and military leaders who led the nation against its enemies. Their civil job was to urge repentance (turning back to God alone, in faith) and to give counsel. Then, the land would experience peace for 20-40 years during the lifetime of the “deliverer.” Not long after that person died, the people went back to their wicked ways, beginning the cycle again.

One such judge was Deborah, who came along ~150 years after Joshua died...

1. Skim Deuteronomy 28:1-25 and 29:16-18. What were God's general instructions to Israel concerning life in the land?
2. Read Judges 2:6-23. In verses 10-19, the repeating pattern of the book of Judges is described here. Why did the Israelites forget God and choose to sin so readily after Joshua died?
3. Deeper Discoveries (optional): Research to find out more about the Canaanite oppression during this time in Israel's history. How did it affect their daily lives?
4. Read Genesis 18:19; Deuteronomy 4:5-9, 29:24-27. Discuss cause and effect in these passages.
5. How is God's faithfulness demonstrated in the way He dealt with His people?

Think About It: *It's as though God was saying to them, "You don't think you need me. Let me show you what life is like without me."*

Respond to the Lord about what He's shown you today.

DAY TWO STUDY

Getting to know Deborah...

1. Read Judges 4:1-16. Israel was in what part of the cycle during Deborah's lifetime (verses 13)?
2. Based on what you glean from the text, describe Deborah using as many adjectives as possible.
3. From our study of Miriam, what was the role of a prophetess? (See Lesson 3.)
4. Referring to specific verses, how did Deborah act as a prophetess in this narrative?
5. Compare Deborah and Barak regarding the response of each to God's word and the courage to carry it out.
6. God commends Barak for his faith in Hebrews 11:32-34. How did Barak demonstrate it?
7. Considering Sisera's primary military weapons (vs. 3), why did God want the Israelites to encamp on a mountain 1300 feet high?

Historical insight: *Palastine is covered with wadis, or dry creek beds. During a sudden, violent rainstorm, these wadis fill with rushing water, which can destroy anything in its path. God routed the enemy by throwing them into a panic like the Egyptians at the Red Sea (Ex. 14:24). A similar army-defeating rainstorm happened when Napoleon defeated the Turks in the same place (Megiddo) in AD 1799. See the description in Judges 5:4, 20-21.*

8. Your Life's Journey: God can use any of our skills and talents to His glory when we focus on what we have, not what we don't have, and give it to Him. In fact, Ephesians 2:10 says that "we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." And, He gives us the ability to do the works He has created us to do. How are you serving God using your gifts as Deborah served Him using hers? What, if anything, is holding you back?

- Who helped and who didn't (14-18, 23) —
- The defeat of Sisera (19-21) —
- Jael and her role (24-27) —

Focus on the Meaning: *The Canaanites' God Baal was their storm god of rain and fertility. His symbol was a lightning bolt. God showed who was the real storm God.*

6. What does this narrative (Judges 4 and 5) tell us about God's use of women in civil leadership in a society?

7. TELL YOUR STORY: Think about how God used Deborah and Jael as they functioned in their various roles as women with the resources available to them every day. Consider how your everyday womanly skills and resources have benefited others. Write about one specific time when God used your ordinary life skills to do something unexpected or greatly needed.

DAY FOUR STUDY – THE WALK FROM FEAR TO FAITH

God loved Deborah and Jael. He knew what was going on in their lives: the burden of responsibility, the risks they faced, and their fears. He was able to do something about it. He didn't give them easy choices to make, ones that would've made their lives much more comfortable. Deborah chose to use the gifts God gave her to glorify Him and to bolster Barak's courage and reputation. Jael took great risks and confirmed her people's allegiance to the tribe of Israel by her actions. And they both chose to trust God rather than submit to fear. God rewarded their faith with victory. You may face what seem like insurmountable circumstances in your own life. But just like Deborah and Jael, you can count on these truths...

- God loves me.
- God knows what is going on in my life.
- God can do something about it.
- I can trust His goodness in whatever He chooses to do!

1. What opportunities for fear did Deborah have? How did she respond to God in faith?

2. What could have terrified Jael? How did she respond instead?

3. *Your Life's Journey:* A courageous attitude begins long before you are ever called upon to use it. When was the last time you showed courage in living for Christ—such as testifying publicly about your faith, challenging others to do right, forgetting the opinion of the crowd, expressing love and appreciation for those in authority, etc.?

Week Six

Naomi & Ruth – Mothers And Daughters

Time Period: Judges approx. 1400 - 1000 B.C.

“When the fig tree does not bud, and there are no grapes on the vines; when the olive trees do not produce, and the fields yield no crops; when the sheep disappear from the pen, and there are no cattle in the stalls, I will rejoice because of the Lord; I will be happy because of the God who delivers me!” HABAKKUK 3:17-18

DAY ONE STUDY

Historical Perspective

One of the ways that God disciplined Israel for her sin was by bringing famine into the land, usually through drought but also by pests such as locusts. During one of these episodes of famine, a man from Bethlehem named Elimelech took his wife Naomi and his two sons to the neighboring country of Moab. During the ten years the family lived in the land of Moab, Elimelech died leaving Naomi a widow. However, her two sons grew up and married Moabite women. Then, the sons died. Naomi was left with only her daughters-in-law.

Getting to know Naomi and Ruth...

1. Read Judges 21:25. This is considered the key verse of the book of Judges. What does it reveal?

2. Read Ruth 1:1-22. Describe each of the women.

- Naomi —

- Ruth —

3. ***Deeper Discoveries (optional):*** Research Moab and the Moabite religion to get a better feel for how Ruth was raised, what Naomi experienced living in that land, raising her own children, watching them marry Moabite women, and other details that bring this story alive to you.

4. What does Ruth's statement in 1:16-17 especially tell you about her and what she had already learned from Naomi?

5. What relationships might she be giving up to pursue her new faith?

6. Your Life's Journey: Has your faith caused a separation between you and your natural family or someone previously very close to you? Explain.

7. A good guess of ages would be that Naomi was in her 40's and Ruth was in her teens or 20's. As in-laws, describe their relationship and ways they could help each other.

8. TELL YOUR STORY: Naomi makes an emotional statement in 1:20-21. She was experiencing grief—a normal human emotion that often causes an aching heart and extended sadness. Write about a time in your life when you grieved over something or someone lost. What was it like? How long did it last? Did you, like Naomi, feel that God “dealt very bitterly with you” (1:20)? What got you through that to the other side where you didn't bawl every time you thought about it?

5. Read Ruth 3:1-4:12. In 3:1-6, what advice does Naomi give to Ruth?

6. The law of “Kinsman-Redeemer” is introduced to the Israelites in Leviticus 25:23-55. Read those verses. What was God’s purpose in providing this option?

Scriptural insight: *“This law [Kinsman-Redeemer] helped to protect the poor from being exploited and the rich from taking property from one tribe to another. The redeemer had to be a near kinsman who was able to redeem and willing to redeem. He was not obligated to do so, but it was expected of him. To refuse was to hurt the family and tribe as well as his own reputation. By being born at Bethlehem, Jesus Christ became our near kinsman. He was able to save and willing to save; He saves all who will put their trust in Him”. (W.W. Wiersbe, With the Word, pg. 157)*

7. Read the following references. Briefly tell what is redeemed in each case. [NOTE: “avenger” and “kinsman-redeemer” are translations of the same Hebrew word *goel*.]

- Leviticus 25:25-28 —

- Leviticus 25:47-49 —

- Deut. 25:5-10 —

8. Ruth is introduced to the concept of “Kinsman-Redeemer” in Ruth 1:11-13; 2:20; and 3:9-13. From 4:1-10, what other information do we see about how this law was carried out?

9. What did Ruth learn about God's faithfulness to her through the law of the "kinsman-redeemer"?

Respond to the Lord about what He's shown you today.

DAY THREE STUDY

1. Read 4:13-22. What did God give to Ruth and Naomi?
2. How did God bless us through this marriage? See Ruth 4:22; Matthew 1:3-6; and Luke 3:32.

Scriptural Insight: Boaz descended from Rahab (Lesson 4)—an outsider who also experienced the kindness of the Lord and His people.

3. Ruth and Naomi both characterized loyalty.
 - Use a dictionary to define “Loyalty.”
 - To whom and to what should we be loyal? Explain your answer.
4. Read Titus 2:3-5.
 - In what ways is the older woman to counsel and encourage the younger woman?
 - What mindset must the younger woman have?
 - What are the potential benefits for both?

5. *Your Life's Journey:* God knows we need each other. He hasn't left us alone. In the Body of Christ, we are all sisters. Christian women should be encouraging each other, especially in our society where women are so often uprooted and transplanted to places miles away from their families. There are some things only another woman can understand.

- Younger women—Is there someone in your group or life whom you would trust for advice and encouragement? Go to her and let her know of your need and willingness.
- Older women—Is there someone in your group or life whom you could befriend and encourage? Go to her and let her know of your need and willingness.
- In-laws—If you are married or one of your children is married, evaluate your own mother-in-law / daughter-in-law relationship. How can you apply this lesson to improve your relationship?

DAY FOUR STUDY – THE WALK FROM FEAR TO FAITH

God loved Ruth and Naomi. He knew what was going on in their lives. Naomi voiced her grief over the death of her husband and sons but never stopped trusting Him to do something about her situation. Ruth's relationship with God started the same way most relationships with Him do. She came to know and value someone who knew Him well. That someone was Naomi. These women were not only God's provision to each other but also a way for Him to make Himself known through their lives. You may face grief and seemingly overwhelming challenges in your own life. But just like Naomi and Ruth, you can count on these truths...

- God loves me.
- God knows what is going on in my life.
- God can do something about it.
- I can trust His goodness in whatever He chooses to do!

1. List all the circumstances that could have terrified Naomi. Instead, how did she respond to God by faith?

2. List all the circumstances that could have terrified Ruth. Instead, how did she respond to God by faith?

3. Your Life's Journey: Read Habakkuk 3:17-18, Daniel 3:16-18, and the song lyrics below.

I can count a million times people asking me how I can praise You with all that I've gone through. The question just amazes me. Can circumstances possibly change who I forever am in You. Maybe since my life was changed long before these rainy days. It's never really ever crossed my mind to turn my back on you, oh Lord, my only shelter from the storm. But instead I draw closer through these times. So I pray... Bring me joy, bring me peace, bring the chance to be free. Bring me anything that brings You glory. And I know there'll be days when this life brings me pain. But if that's what it takes to praise You, Jesus, bring the rain ("Bring the Rain" by Mercy Me)

What decision should you make when things are tough? Do you trust God enough to make that decision? If so, give an example from your life when you have done so.

Week Seven

Hannah & Mrs. Manoah – Mothering Challenges

Time Period: The Judges approx. 1400 - 1000 B.C.

“She said, ‘Just as surely as you are alive, my lord, I am the woman who previously stood here with you in order to pray to the Lord. I prayed for this boy, and the Lord has given me the request that I asked of him. Now I dedicate him to the Lord. From this time on he is dedicated to the Lord.’ Then they worshiped the Lord there.” 1 SAMUEL 1:26-28

DAY ONE STUDY

Historical Insight

The faithful who lived in Israel during this time endured repeated cycles of enemy oppression followed by deliverance and a time of peace before Israel rebelled against God again. The women in this lesson lived in the last part of the time of the Judges.

Mrs. Manoah’s son, Samson, was the “judge” (deliverer) during the time period when Hannah’s son, Samuel, was born so the two were contemporaries. Samuel was the last judge because during his life, Israel demanded a king. God gave them a king.

Getting to know Mrs. Manoah...

1. We don’t know her name, but we know of her famous son Samson. Let’s find out what his mom was like. Read Judges 13:1-24. Use words and phrases to describe Mrs. Manoah.

2. What needs did the Lord notice and prepare to meet?

- personal —

- national —

3. How did God communicate to Mrs. Manoah His plan?

From the Hebrew: The angel says that his name is “beyond understanding” (vs. 18). The same Hebrew phrase is translated in Isaiah 9:6 as “Wonderful,” applying to One who would come as “Mighty God”.

4. ***Deeper Discoveries (optional):*** Do a study on the “angel of the Lord” appearing in the Old Testament. Who was this? To whom did he appear and on what occasions?

5. The name “Samson” is derived from a Hebrew word meaning sun or brightness. Notice God’s purpose for Samson. Nazirite is from a Hebrew word meaning “separated” or “dedicated.” Read Numbers 6:1-8. What 3 things did a Nazirite vow to do that distinguished him as being set apart to God?

6. What was Mrs. Manoah’s responsibility while pregnant? Note how this scripture supports the value of the life of an unborn child before birth.

7. What was Manoah’s response, and what does he ask the Lord?

8. How does God respond to Manoah's request? Notice the declaration of Manoah's faith in Judges 13:12.

9. Discuss what happens in verses 15-21.

10. Before this, Manoah and his wife thought a "man of God" or prophet had appeared to her. When they realized an angel of the Lord had appeared to them (to her twice!), what do their individual responses (verses 22-23) reveal about their faith?

- Manoah —

- Mrs. Manoah —

11. Read 13:24-14:9. From the previous verses, we discovered that Manoah and his wife were a faithful, God-honoring couple. Their son had a life purpose to follow from birth. Discuss the kind of a son Samson turned out to be and what kind of disappointment this might have brought to his parents.

Scriptural Insight: "This was from the Lord" (verse 4) is evidence that the Lord uses even the sinful weaknesses of men to accomplish His purposes and bring praise to His name. Other instances are in Joshua 11:20 and 1 Kings 12:15. According to Judges 16:28-30 and Hebrews 11:32-34, God in His faithfulness strengthened Samson in his weakness.

12. Deeper Discoveries (optional): Read the rest of Samson's story in Judges 14:9-16:31. How many Nazirite vows did Samson break? NOTE: Mrs. Manoah had several more children after Samson. There is no indication that she had to follow the same dietary restraints for them.

13. Your Life's Journey: God gave Samson godly parents and special abilities to do the work that God had prepared for him to do. Yet, Samson made the choice to follow his own instincts rather than adhere to his family's faith and humility before God.

- If you are a parent or relative of a "prodigal" son or daughter, how do you feel about it?
- If you are a parent of a young child, do you fear that he will become a prodigal because you will do something wrong as a parent?
- Although no parent is perfect, remember that everyone makes her own decision whether or not to act on the knowledge of God she has received. Faith is an act of the will. Share with someone any fears or feelings of guilt and disappointment you might have. Commit that loved one to the Lord; pray for the "prodigal" to return to his or her God.

DAY TWO STUDY

Getting to know Hannah...

1. Read Deuteronomy 28:9-11; Psalm 127:3-5. In ancient Israel, children specifically were an indication of what?
2. Read 1 Samuel 1:1-19. How would you describe Hannah if you were there watching her?
3. Discuss everything that was causing Hannah distress.
4. Discuss Elkanah's response to his wife's distress.
5. ***Your Life's Journey:*** Elkanah's response does not seem to acknowledge Hannah's emotional needs. Does your husband or closest friend ever misunderstand your feelings? How do you react?
6. How did Hannah grow spiritually because of her barrenness? What did she learn about God?

Scriptural Insight: Vows are voluntary promises regarding personal commitment and piety. They were common in Old Testament times, were regulated by the Mosaic Law (Nu. 30), were expected to be carefully thought out (Pr. 20:25; Eccl. 5:4-6) and were expected to be fulfilled accompanied by thanksgiving offerings. Vows other than marriage vows are not generally taught or modeled in the New Testament (Paul's vow in Acts 18:18 being a holdover from his Jewish upbringing).

7. God uses prayer to get us into partnership with Him, and then we recognize His blessing. Hannah had a fallible High Priest (Eli) interceding for her. We have far more available to us as believers. Read the following verses and discuss who is helping us as we pray and how.

- Hebrews 4:14-16 —

- Hebrews 7:24-25 —

- Romans 8:26-27; 31-34 —

How does knowing this make you feel?

Scriptural Insight: God remembered Hannah (1 Samuel 1:19). To “remember” in the Bible is not merely to recall to mind. It is to express concern for someone to act with loving care on their behalf.

8. *Your Life's Journey:* Hannah had to endure her barrenness for some time because Peninah had at least 4 children. Sarah endured hers for at least 30 years! Do you consider yourself barren? Like Hannah, is it making you very sad? What should you do about your feelings / attitude? Is there some opportunity available today where you can use your time to minister to someone else with your built-in mothering instincts? Ask someone to pray with you about this.

9. *Deeper Discoveries (optional):* A number of women are identified in Scripture without any reference to children at all. Try to find several and consider how they spent their time. Example: Priscilla, in Acts 18, discipled new believers, entertained guests, and taught the Scriptures.

DAY THREE STUDY

1. Read 1 Samuel 1:20-2:11. God gave Hannah a son. What did she do then?
2. Hannah's prayer is her psalm of praise and thanksgiving. What emotions does she express, and what truths does she affirm about her God?
 - Emotions —

 - Truths —

***From the Hebrew:** Hannah's prayer song is prophetic, anticipating the establishment of kingship in Israel. Her son Samuel crowns the first king, Saul, as well as the second king, David. It also contains the first reference in the Bible to the Lord's anointed (1 Samuel 2:10). "Anointed" is the Hebrew word *mashiyach* from which "Messiah" is derived. The Greek translation of this Hebrew term is *Christos*, from which comes the English word "Christ."*

3. Read 1 Samuel 2:12-26. How did God continue to answer Hannah's prayer (1:10-11) even after she completed her vow?
4. In what kind of "home" did Hannah leave her boy?
5. Why didn't that terrify her? Refer back to 1:22-28. Whom could she trust? Why?
6. How did Hannah continue to mother her boy (2:19)?

7. Read 1 Samuel 3:1-4:1. Hannah's trust in the Lord was rewarded through His faithfulness to her son. List all the verses in 2:11-4:1 that reveal God's faithfulness to Samuel as he grew up as well as Samuel's response. Discuss how much God was involved in raising this boy.

Scriptural Insight: *Samuel grew up to be the most respected Judge that Israel had.*

8. ***Your Life's Journey:*** Are you in a situation where you have to be a mother from a distance? How does it make you feel? Have you talked to the Lord about it? Are you able to trust Him with that child? In what ways have you creatively cared for that child?

DAY FOUR STUDY – THE WALK FROM FEAR TO FAITH

God loved both Hannah and Mrs. Manoah. He knew what was going on in their lives. He was able to do something about it. But, God did not give Mrs. Manoah a peaceful land without invading enemies or a perfectly obedient son who sought to use his gifts for God's glory. Nor did God tell Hannah not to fulfill her vow and leave her son with Eli at the Tabernacle. Both endured years of barrenness before having children. Both were separated in some way from their firstborn sons. During their walk, a loving God said "no" to some things. Yet, Hannah and Mrs. Manoah chose to trust Him rather than submit to fear. And, God rewarded their faith with an outpouring of His blessing in other ways. Likewise, God may not choose to answer your prayers quickly. But, in any and all situations, you can count on these truths...

- God loves me.
- God knows what is going on in my life.
- God can do something about it.
- I can trust His goodness in whatever He chooses to do!

1. Considering the little we know about Mrs. Manoah, how did she demonstrate her faith?

2. List everything that could have terrified Hannah. How did she respond to God by faith instead?

3. **TELL YOUR STORY:** Read Psalm 107:1-43. Notice the different kinds of people who call out to God and how He responds to them. Verse 43 says, "Whoever is wise, let him take note of these things! Let them consider the Lord's acts of loyal love!" Both of these women, Mrs. Manoah and Hannah, experienced God's love as He took care of them in specific situations. Write about the great love of the Lord for you and how He took care of you in 1 or 2 specific situations in your life.

Week Eight

Abigail & Bathsheba – Two Wives

Time Period: United Kingdom approx. 1010 - 900 B.C.

“But he said to me, ‘My grace is enough for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ So then, I will boast most gladly about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may reside in me. Therefore, I am content with weaknesses, with insults, with troubles, with persecutions and difficulties for the sake of Christ, for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.” 2 CORINTHIANS 12:9-10

DAY ONE STUDY

Historical Perspective

The establishment of the monarchy was a momentous event in Israel’s history. As we study this era, we must not conclude that the monarchy itself was wrong. Centuries before, God had predicted that a king would rule over Israel. But in requesting the monarchy, Israel’s motives and timing were wrong (1 Sam 8). She blamed her problems on the absence of a king, not on her sin. She cast her eyes on her pagan neighbors rather than on God. If Israel had simply been patient, the monarchy would have come. Within a few years, David, the Judean shepherd boy, came onto the scene. Had Israel waited a bit longer, God would have placed the son of Jesse on the throne. But Israel’s impatience brought Saul to the throne. Physically impressive, Saul was the picture of a king. For many years, he strengthened his nation, until pride welled up in his heart. His subsequent sin led to judgment, and Saul died a tragic death on the mountains of Gibeon.

David’s reign ushered in the golden age of Israel. He unified the nation, established a strong government, and built the most powerful empire of his day. He conquered Ammon, Moab, Edom, and Syria. Philistia submitted to his authority. As the “sweet Psalmist of Israel,” David received God’s special blessing. He would be the ancestor of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. His leadership was decisive and effective. He captured Jerusalem from the Jebusites and made it his royal city and residence. Shortly afterward, he brought the ark of the Lord to Jerusalem, publicly acknowledging the Lord’s kingship and rule over himself and the nation. The nation prospered, defeated its enemies, and extended its borders from Egypt to the Euphrates. The Lord announced that He would establish the line of kings through David.

About 10 years after David was established in the city of Jerusalem, David’s weaknesses and failures began to be revealed. Even though David remained a man after God’s own heart, he nevertheless fell short of the ideal king. His sin with Bathsheba and his leniency both with the wickedness of his sons and with the insubordination of one of his advisors led to intrigue, violence, and bloodshed within his own family and the nation.

1. Read 1 Samuel 13:13-14; 16:1-13, 18. What information is given about God's choice of David and anointing him as king?

2. **Deeper Discoveries (optional):** For more insight into the character of David, read the rest of 1 Samuel 16 through chapter 24. This section sets the stage for our lesson on Abigail.

Getting to know Abigail...

King Saul, jealous of God's choice of David, spent the latter part of his life chasing and trying to kill David. The story of Abigail is sandwiched between two incidents where David used self-restraint to spare Saul's life because Saul was the Lord's anointed.

3. Read 1 Samuel 25:1-13. Describe Nabal and Abigail.

- Nabal —

- Abigail —

4. Discuss the kind of marriage and home life Abigail and Nabal might have had based on what is mentioned about them so far.

5. Compare David's request to Nabal's response. [NOTE: Nabal's pastureland was about a mile away from his home.]

6. Read 1 Samuel 25:14-35. From information in these verses, add to your description of Abigail's qualities.

7. **TELL YOUR STORY:** Abigail didn't panic. Perhaps she was accustomed to such calamities given her husband's character! Would you have panicked? Have you ever been in such a dangerous (or perceived dangerous) situation? How did you get through it?

DAY TWO STUDY

1. Read 1 Samuel 25:14-35. Why didn't Abigail tell her husband what she was going to do?
2. Abigail provides us with a successful pattern for dealing with confrontation. Discuss her strategy in appeasing David and her conversation with him.
3. Read 1 Samuel 25:36-44. Once the danger was thwarted, how did Abigail deal with her husband?
4. How did Abigail do what was right for her husband, household, and David while "not giving way to fear"?
5. How did the Lord deal with Nabal?
6. What signs do you see of spiritual maturity in Abigail's life in spite of living in such a difficult situation?

DAY THREE STUDY

Getting to know Bathsheba (about 15 years later)...

1. Read 2 Samuel 11:1-5. What information about Bathsheba can be gleaned from these verses?

2. In what two situations did Bathsheba find herself, and how did she respond in each?

Scriptural Insight: Bathsheba's grandfather was one of David's counselors. Her father was one of David's bodyguards. She was married to a Gentile, one of David's royal guards, who must have adopted Israelite customs. Consider the impact of familiarity on this incident. The Bible does not call this rape as it does in other situations (2 Samuel 13:14). Bathsheba succumbed to David's advances.

3. Read 2 Samuel 11:6-25. Contrast Bathsheba's husband Uriah to Abigail's husband Nabal.

4. What did David's actions cost Bathsheba?

5. Read 1 Corinthians 10:13. Remembering how Abigail prevented an angry David from doing evil, do you think Bathsheba could have likewise appealed to David?
6. Read 2 Samuel 11:26-12:25. How did God view what David did to Bathsheba and Uriah?

Scriptural Insight: *The author [of 2 Samuel] points his accusing finger at David, not Bathsheba. It was not Bathsheba's indiscretion in bathing herself, for she was simply obeying the ritual of purification outlined in the law—in the evening when the sun is setting. It is nearly dark. It was David who, by means of his lofty elevation and view, looked inappropriately at Bathsheba, violating her privacy. The sequence of sin in David's life does not end with his adulterous union with Bathsheba. It leads to a deceptive plot to make her husband Uriah appear to be the father of David's child with Bathsheba and culminates in David's murder of Uriah and his marriage to Uriah's wife, Bathsheba. (Bob Deffinbaugh, "David and Uriah," Bible.org)*

7. Based on 2 Samuel 12:10-14, what did the prophet Nathan say would be the consequences of this sin, both immediate and long-term? Was David the only one who would suffer? Explain.

Scriptural Insight: *Psalm 51 is David's heartfelt repentance (agreement with God about his sin and decision to change his behavior). It reveals his tender heart for God. Also, of all David's wives, God chose Bathsheba to bear David's successor, Solomon. She joined two other women with marred reputations, Tamar and Rahab, in the genealogy of Jesus Christ (Matthew 1: 6-17).*

8. How did God show His goodness to both David & Bathsheba after the baby died?

9. Read 1 Kings 1:1-35; 2:13-25; and 1 Chronicles 3:4-5. What other information do you glean about Bathsheba as a woman?

10. *Deeper Discoveries (optional):* Read the rest of 2 Samuel to see how Nathan's prophecy came true.

11. *Your Life's Journey:*

- Perhaps you had an immoral relationship with your husband (or other person) before marriage or caused a first marriage to be broken up by your relationship to each other, and you are feeling guilty or fearful of the consequences. Agree with God that you have sinned. Accept the forgiveness He provided through His Son Jesus for all your sins—past, present, and future—then forgive yourself and the other person. Then, ask the other person to forgive your part in the past.
- Read Psalm 103:10-14. God has already removed your sins from you as far as the east is from the west. You will still have to deal with the consequences of your actions, but thanks be to Christ, not the guilt! Romans 8:1 says, “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” Are you able to trust God to help you even through the consequences of sin? If not, ask someone you trust to pray for you regarding this.

DAY FOUR STUDY – THE WALK FROM FEAR TO FAITH

God loved Abigail and Bathsheba. He knew what was going on in their lives. Marriage difficulties, the temptations they faced, the losses they suffered—He was there for all of it. He was able to do something about it. Abigail’s life was spared by using the strengths God gave her. Bathsheba, though she suffered the consequences of sin, was blessed with the birth of Solomon, heir to the throne. During their walk, a loving God said “no” to some things. Yet, Abigail and Bathsheba chose to trust Him rather than submit to fear. Likewise, God may not choose to relieve you from a difficult marriage or prevent you from experiencing the consequences of sin (yours or someone else’s). But, in any and all situations, you can count on these truths...

- God loves me.
- God knows what is going on in my life.
- God can do something about it.
- I can trust His goodness in whatever He chooses to do!

1. List the situations that could have terrified Abigail. How did she respond to God in faith?

2. What opportunities did Bathsheba have to fear? How did she respond to God in faith?

3. *Your Life’s Journey:* Scripture describes both Abigail and Bathsheba as being beautiful women. God creates beauty so this is a good thing. In his commentary, Matthew Henry wrote, “The fear of God reigning in the heart is the beauty of the soul.” What does the Bible teach about the relationship between physical beauty and a person’s character? See Proverbs 31:10, 30; 1 Peter 3:1-6, and any other verses you can find to support your answer.

Recommended: Listen to the podcast “Abigail-Having a Wise Heart” after doing this lesson to reinforce what you have learned. Use the listener guide on the next page.

PODCAST LISTENER GUIDE

Abigail—Having a Wise Heart

God is glad when our hearts are wise. Wisdom from Proverbs.

Wisdom & A Woman's Heart

“Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.” (Proverbs 4:23)

What 1 Corinthians 8:1 says about this—

The Foolish Woman: What kind of heart does she have? Proverbs 9:13-18; Proverbs 11:22; Proverbs 30:15

The Contentious Woman: What kind of heart does she have? Proverbs 27:15-16; Proverbs 19:13; Proverbs 21:9, 19

The Immoral Woman: What kind of heart does she have?

Proverbs 7:5-23; Proverbs 2:16-19; 5:3-6; 6:24-29; 12:4; 20:16; 22:14; 23:27-28

"This is the way of an adulteress: She eats and wipes her mouth and says, 'I've done nothing wrong.'" (Proverbs 30:20)

The Wise Woman: What kind of heart does she have?

Proverbs 31:10-31, a practical application of Proverbs 14:1

What kind of heart do you want to have?

“My daughter, if your heart is wise, then my heart will be glad.” (Proverbs 23:15)

Week Nine

Two Widows – Single with Children

Time: Divided Kingdom - Israel approx. 900 - 722 B.C.

“So then, don’t worry saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ For the unconverted pursue these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But above all pursue his kingdom and righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. So then, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Today has enough trouble of its own.” MATTHEW 6:31-34

DAY ONE STUDY

Historical Perspective

David reigned on the throne of Israel for 40 years. Solomon, who was God’s choice to inherit his father’s throne, strengthened Israel’s defenses, conducted trade throughout the known world, and engaged in numerous building operations including a magnificent temple for God and a massive palace for himself. Famed for his wisdom, which he requested and received from God, Solomon wrote the books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon. But tempted by his foreign wives, Solomon unwisely turned his heart away from God. As a result, God promised judgment upon Solomon’s death—the kingdom would be divided.

Here’s how it happened: For centuries friction had existed between the northern and southern tribes. This friction was evident throughout David’s reign. From 1010 to 1003 B.C., David ruled over the southern tribes (Judah), while the northern ten tribes (Israel) supported Saul’s son Ishbosheth. Following Ishbosheth’s death, Israel accepted David as king (2 Samuel 5) but then rebelled briefly toward the end of his life (2 Samuel 20).

As Solomon inherited David’s kingdom, the seeds of discontent became apparent. The Israelites chafed under heavy taxation and forced labor. Upon Solomon’s death, they sought relief, which finally came but only through permanent division. The prophet Ahijah appeared to one of Solomon’s officials, Jeroboam (1 Kings 11), and prophesied the divided kingdom, ordaining Jeroboam king over Israel. Solomon’s son Rehoboam proved himself foolish and unworthy to rule, and the northern tribes rallied around Jeroboam (1 Kings 12). When the dust cleared, the United Kingdom was no more. Jeroboam, however, refused to obey God’s Word. He founded a renegade religious system and led his nation on the pathway to ruin. Israel’s history featured religious apostasy and unstable leadership. Godless kings turned the people away from their God. Sin always brings judgment, and in 722 B.C. the Assyrians destroyed Samaria, Israel’s capital, bringing the Northern Kingdom to an end.

Besides godless kings, Israel’s history also featured religious apostasy characterized by an ineffective or nonexistent priesthood. God called men to become His mouthpiece, that is, receiving a message directly from God and proclaiming it to God’s people. Unlike the priest or the king, the Hebrew prophet did not inherit his office. He received his calling directly from God. Some examples are Jeremiah before birth (Jer. 1:5), Samuel as a young boy (1 Sam. 3),

and Amos as a farmer (Amos 1:1). The prophet's life was usually difficult, sometimes involving grave physical abuse.

Jeremiah was held captive in a muddy pit, and according to tradition Isaiah was sawn in half.

Ahab ruled Israel in the middle 800's B.C—the 6th king after Jeroboam. His kingship made idolatry a household accepted practice. An idol is any human-created God substitute. Idolatry is giving glory to something else that belongs only to God. Israel's idolatry was particularly the worship of Baal—one of the leading Canaanite gods. Baal, whose name meant simply "lord," was considered the god of storms and thus of fertility, for the rain he supposedly sent watered the crops and provided a bountiful harvest. The prophet Elijah lived during this time. Elijah's name (meaning "The LORD is my God") was the essence of his message.

1. Read Exodus 20:2-6 and Deuteronomy 11:13-17. What did God promise to Israel if they set up idol worship?

2. Read James 5:17 and 1 Kings 17:1. Elijah prayed according to God's promise (Deut. 11:16-17), and then he told Ahab about it.

- What do you think was God's point by Elijah's message in 1 Kings 17:1?

- According to James 5:17, how did God answer Elijah's prayer?

- Why would this challenge the people's idolatry?

3. Imagine that kind of drought. How would God's answer to Elijah's prayer affect the land and people in Israel and surrounding nations as well as on himself?

DAY TWO STUDY

Getting to know the widow of Zarephath...

Zarephath was located between the two cities, Tyre and Sidon, on the Mediterranean Coast northwest of Israel. This was Gentile territory and, specifically, the home of Ahab's queen Jezebel and Baal worship.

1. Read 1 Kings 17:7-16. Based on the information given, what words would you use to describe the Widow of Zarephath if you were there watching her?

Spiritual Insight: *The meaning of commanded is "chosen, planned." It was God's decree. God was not bound by His covenant with the Jews to bless this Gentile woman. But, He did. God's grace and mercy is always available to individuals.*

2. What was her problem, and how was she trying to deal with it?
3. What might have been her emotions at this time?
4. What did Elijah ask the widow to do?

Think About It: "Receiving promises requires obedience". (Ron Holton, pastor of Rockpointe Church, January 2017)

5. List the many ways that her faith and obedience were rewarded. [NOTE: Only a true God can provide flour and oil in a drought!]

6. Your Life's Journey: Elijah stayed with the widow and her son, eating flour and oil cakes twice a day for almost 3 years. Imagine that. A modern-day equivalent could be peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. As I heard someone say recently, we can get so used to our blessings that we complain about them. Think about how long you could stay grateful while eating those twice a day for 3 years! Reflect on the words of the song below.

Had a lot of dreams that never came true. Things I could have done, but never got the chance to do. When I couldn't see the path of the storm your wisdom wouldn't let me go that way. And it broke my heart, but now my heart can say...Thank you for the times you said, No. Thank you for the doors that you closed. All the ways you never let me go and the things you never gave me. So many times I didn't understand and wouldn't let you take my hand. But now I want to fall at Your feet and thank you for the things you never gave me. ("Things You Never Gave Me" by David Meece)

How grateful are you for what the Lord has already done in your life? Do you thank Him for the times He says, "No"? See Colossians 1:11-12; 2:7; 3:15-17.

7. Read 1 Kings 17:17-24. What was her problem now, and how did she respond?

8. What do you think she meant by saying, "Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?"

Focus on the Meaning: *This is a common reaction among people who do not know God's ways well when personal tragedy hits their lives. It's the pagan view of life: "When things go well, the gods are pleased with me. When things go wrong, the gods are angry with me". Jesus declares in Matthew 5:45 that God sends sunshine and rain on both the righteous and the unrighteous equally. It was not her sin but God's opportunity to take this woman another step along her faith walk, making it personal.*

9. Discuss Elijah's response and how God answered Elijah's prayer.

10. Read Acts 2:22; Hebrews 2:3-4. Why does God perform miracles? Did it work this time?

11. Read Matthew 6:31-34. Apply this passage to today's lesson.

12. *Your Life's Journey*: Through a near tragedy, this woman came to know the living God in a personal way. Do you know of someone who turned to the Lord only after exhausting all her/his other resources? When might it be good to pray for someone to reach desperate circumstances? What if those desperate circumstances might involve you as well?

DAY THREE STUDY

Getting to know the prophet's widow...

Elijah served God as His prophet and priest in the northern kingdom for many years. He mentored Elisha, a farmer's son, to help him and continue the ministry after Elijah was taken to heaven (2 Kings 2:1-25). Three characteristics distinguished God's true prophet: 1) He was loyal to Yahweh alone, 2) His predictions came to pass, 3) His message agreed with previous revelations. The performance of miracles was not the primary test, because false prophets could perform miracles through the power of Satan (Deuteronomy 13:1-2).

1. Read 2 Kings 4:1-7.
 - What was this woman's crisis situation?

 - How did she deal with it?

Historical Insight: *The widow's husband had been part of the company of prophets who remained faithful to God. The company of prophets can be considered similar to modern seminaries where men and women learn from distinguished God-gifted teachers such as Samuel, Elijah and Elisha. One community of prophets was located at Bethel, just north of Jerusalem.*

2. The Mosaic Law provided for paying off debts by working. See Leviticus 25:39-41. How did God limit this practice?

3. Read Deuteronomy 10:17-18; Psalm 68:4-5. What does God promise to do for the widows and orphans?

4. Read Exodus 22:22, 23; Deuteronomy 14:28-29; 24:19-22 to see how God would use the community to provide for widows and orphans. What was God's plan?

5. The widow sought Elisha, God's representative to her. List all the things that Elisha commanded her to do.

- First (verses 3-4) —

- Next (verse 7) —

Historical Insight: Olive oil was expensive and time-consuming to make. It was used for cooking, lighting lamps, dressing wounds, and as a deodorant when water wasn't available for bathing. The wealthy used it for bathing and as a skin softener. It was also used for anointing kings and the dead for burial as well as for ritual offerings. The widow had a valuable commodity.

6. When Elisha told the widow to ask her neighbors for jars, what could have been the benefits of doing so...

- to them?

- to her?

7. How do you think this incident impacted her sons?

8. Looking at the kind of help this woman had sought from God and what she actually received, how did God “defend her cause” (Deuteronomy 10:18)?

9. *Your Life’s Journey:* Read 1 Timothy 5:3-8,16; James 1:27; and Romans 12:13.

As followers of Christ, what does God expect of us as women in our homes, church, and community to help the needy?

- In today’s society, who would be considered widows? What do they need besides material provisions?

- Study these passages and ask God to reveal a specific area where He wants you to be obedient to Him as you reach out to meet the need of someone in your sphere of influence.

DAY FOUR STUDY – THE WALK FROM FEAR TO FAITH

God loved the two widows and their children. He knew what was going on in their lives. He was able to do something about it. But, God did not give the widows their husbands back nor did He prevent them from having to go through the agony of watching food supplies dwindle or facing threats from a creditor. His provision was not luxurious foods or easy money. During their walk, a loving God said no to some things. Yet, they chose to trust Him rather than submit to fear. And, God rewarded their faith with an outpouring of His blessing. Likewise, God may not choose to resuscitate your dead loved ones. But, in any and all situations, you can count on these truths...

- God loves me.
- God knows what is going on in my life.
- God can do something about it.
- I can trust His goodness in whatever He chooses to do!

1. What kind of fears did the widow living in Zarephath face? How did she respond to God by faith?

2. What could have terrified the prophet's widow? How did she demonstrate faith?

3. ***Your Life's Journey:*** Often, we overlook what God has already provided for us and concentrate instead on what we don't have. Notice that God used what both women already had as a resource. How has God done this in your life?

Week Ten

Woman of Shunem – A Story to Tell

Time Period: Divided Kingdom - Israel approx. 900 - 722 B.C.

“Now the king was talking to Gehazi, the prophet’s servant, and said, ‘Tell me all the great things which Elisha has done.’ While Gehazi was telling the king how Elisha had brought the dead back to life, the woman whose son he had brought back to life came to ask the king for her house and field. Gehazi said, ‘My master, O king, this is the very woman, and this is her son whom Elisha brought back to life!’ The king asked the woman about it, and she gave him the details.” 2 KINGS 8:4-6a

DAY ONE STUDY

Historical Perspective

God’s concern for women and their special needs is clearly seen in the scriptures we’ve studied so far. While women were regarded as inferior to men in most ancient Near Eastern societies, God demonstrated His compassion for them in many different ways.

Elisha, God’s prophet to Israel and successor to Elijah, ministered in and around Mt. Carmel on the western edge of the Plain of Jezreel—a strategic area of Israel and a fruitful farming valley. Shunem was a little town in this valley about ~20 miles away from Mt. Carmel. This little village was not far from Nazareth, where Jesus grew up centuries later. Getting to know the woman of Shunem...

1. Read 2 Kings 4:8-17. Describe this woman. List everything you can infer from the text.

2. How did she approach her husband with her idea?

Scriptural Insight: *A few years earlier, the prophet Elijah thought no faithful worshiper of God was left in Israel but himself. God reassured Elijah that 7,000 people remained in Israel who had not “bowed their knees” to Baal. Those Israelites were still faithful to God alone. Perhaps the Shunammite woman and her husband came from families who were part of that 7,000.*

3. How did Elisha respond to their generosity (verses 11-13)?

4. What need did she withhold, and why do you think she withheld it?

5. How does Elisha find out about her unexpressed need?

6. What does Elisha, as God's representative, do about her need, and what did the woman learn about God as a result?

7. Your Life's Journey: Homemaking is a ministry. For her, it all started with a meal—extending hospitality—and thus supporting Elisha's ministry. Home is wherever you live. Whether your career is that of "homemaker" or not, women are particularly gifted by God to establish the warmth of a home—emotional and otherwise. Do you consider your "homemaking" as a ministry and your "home" as a ministry tool? Share a time when God has given you opportunity to use your home to minister to someone else.

8. *Your Life's Journey:* The Shunammite woman and her husband gladly took care of Elisha's needs. What should be our attitude toward our pastors and Bible teachers? Read Galatians 6:9-10; 1 Timothy 5:17-18. How can you better serve those who are dedicating their lives to serving you? Write a prayer of thanks to God for specific ones.

DAY TWO STUDY

About 5 or more years later...

1. Read 2 Kings 4:18-37. Many farmers lived in town and went out to the country daily to work. What crisis happened on this workday, and how did this woman respond to the crisis?

2. What might be the reasons for not telling her husband or Elisha's servant Gehazi that her son had died?

3. ***Your Life's Journey:*** It seems this determined woman only wanted Elisha who represented God to her at this time. While there are times when family and friends can help us, God wants us to bring our deepest needs to Him alone. Read Hebrews 4:14-16 and 10:19-23. Describe the last time when you faced a crisis that only God could handle. Did you confidently bring your need to Him? Were you able to trust Him with the outcome? Why or why not?

4. In what ways did Elisha demonstrate his respect for this woman?

5. Where did Elisha get his ability to raise the boy from the dead? How do you know?

Think About It: God poured out miracles through Elijah and Elisha to Israel during their lifetimes. Perhaps it was to get the attention of His people for His message. There was no other true spiritual leadership in Israel at this time, and Baal worship encroached continually.

6. After reading today's selection, what other adjectives would you add in your description of this woman?

7. *Your Life's Journey:* Though living in the midst of wicked, unfaithful Israel, this woman and her husband chose to remain faithful to God. God honored their faith by giving them opportunity to respond to His word through Elisha whenever he came to their town. We live in a culture that finds Christianity, as well as God's standards of moral law, repulsive - choosing instead its own self-gratification as a substitute for worship of the true God. We are surrounded by idolatry and corrupt teaching. What steps do you need to take to remain faithful to God alone? How are you doing this?

DAY THREE STUDY

At least 7 years later...

1. Read 2 Kings 8:1-6. In verse 1, how did God show His faithfulness to the Shunammite woman and her family?

2. After obeying the words of Elisha for 7 years, she returns to Israel.

- Now, what challenge was she facing (verse 3)?

- How did she respond to the problem?

Historical Insight: *It was possible for Israelites to bypass lower judicial officials and appeal directly to the king. Either someone had illegally occupied the woman's property, or it had fallen to the domain of the king by virtue of its abandonment. And, remember that the king of Israel (possibly Jehu) was not a godly king. He was a newly crowned king who was unfamiliar with Elisha.*

3. What did the king do for her?

4. In what ways has God shown His faithfulness to this woman in her past, in her present and for her future?

DAY FOUR STUDY – THE WALK FROM FEAR TO FAITH

God loved this woman and her family. He knew what was going on in their lives. He was able to do something about it. But, God did not make the woman's husband young again nor did He prevent her from having to endure the stigma of barrenness for a time. He didn't prevent the famine from affecting their family. During her walk, a loving God said no to some things. Yet, she chose to trust Him rather than submit to fear. And, He rewarded her faith with an outpouring of His blessing on her family. Likewise, God may not choose to fix your crisis so you experience no pain. But, in any and all situations, you can count on these truths...

- God loves me.
- God knows what is going on in my life.
- God can do something about it.
- I can trust His goodness in whatever He chooses to do!

1. What situations could have brought fear into this woman's life?

2. How did she respond to God by faith? Give specific instances and verse references.

3. TELL YOUR STORY: God gave this woman a story of His faithfulness to her, and He gave her opportunity to share it with an ungodly king! God has given you a story to tell of His faithfulness to you. Review the various parts of your story that you have already written in the previous lessons. Choose one or two to expand into "Your Story" to share of your faith walk with God, especially your WALK FROM FEAR TO FAITH. We've given you two blank pages at the end to work on it. Think in terms of what you can share in about 5 minutes. Then ask God to give you opportunities to share your story!

Week Eleven

Esther – Woman of Courage

Time Period: Captivity and Restoration approx. 609 - 400 B.C.

“For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father’s family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?” ESTHER 4:14

DAY ONE STUDY

Historical Perspective

With the fall of the Northern Kingdom in 722 BC, Judah remained alone. She had been able to escape an early ruin because the Davidic dynasty remained stable, many of Judah's kings were godly (Asa, Jehoshaphat, Uzziah, Hezekiah, and Josiah), and zealous prophets exhorted Judah to love and obey God. Elijah, Elisha, Amos and Hosea had ministered to Israel. Obadiah, Joel, Jonah, Isaiah, Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah, Habakkuk, and Jeremiah poured out their messages of repentance and faith upon Judah.

Wicked kings, however, like Ahaz and Manasseh damaged the moral fiber of the people. The idolatrous worship of foreign gods (Baal and Molech especially) remained a temptation. Yet Judah remained strong until the reign of Manasseh, whose destructive influence so undermined the nation (Jeremiah 15:2-4) that not even godly Josiah could rescue her from the downward slide. With the death of Josiah in 609 BC, Judah's end came quickly.

Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian king, made three incursions into Judah—the last bringing total destruction. Jerusalem, including the Temple and the palace, lay in total ruin; her people carried off into captivity in Babylon. The exiled Judeans were treated with some measure of respect in Babylon. Some became prosperous businessmen; some rose to political power (Daniel and his friends). The prophets Daniel and Jeremiah held out hope for Israel's return according to God's promise.

In 539 B.C. Babylon fell to the Persian monarch Cyrus the Great. Nearly two centuries before, Isaiah had predicted the rise of Cyrus (Isaiah 45:1). When Cyrus conquered Babylon, he decreed that God's people could return to Judea and rebuild their temple in Jerusalem. Three groups of people returned—the first led by Zerubbabel in 537 BC, the second led by Ezra 80 years later, and the third group came with Nehemiah 15 years after that. The new temple was completed in 516 BC. The events in the book of Esther concerned those who remained in Babylon between the time of Zerubbabel and Ezra.

Malachi's ministry marked the conclusion of the Old Testament direct revelation from God. For 400 years, there was silence until the birth of Jesus. God was not through with His people, though. He still intervened and directed the history of Israel through that 400 years.

1. Read the following accounts of what the people endured during the 70 years between being taken captive and the edict which pronounced their freedom. What information is given in each passage about God's part?

- 2 Chronicles 36:15-23 —

- Ezra 1:1-11 —

2. Read Ezra 4:4-24. What attitude toward the Jews was beginning to creep in among the rest of the Persian empire?

Getting to know Esther...

3. Read Esther 1:1-22 and 2:1-23. Esther had two names. Her Hebrew name, Hadassah, meant "myrtle." Her Persian name, Esther, meant "star." Describe Esther.

4. How do you know that Esther's physical beauty was extremely important to the king?

5. According to 2:15, 20, what is revealed about Esther's character that would have helped her in the palace?

6. Mordecai was Esther's cousin and adoptive father. Notice how Esther presented Mordecai's uncovering of an assassination plot to the king. Why was her handling of this matter so crucial?

7. Your Life's Journey: Notice how Esther's beauty and her character helped her to find favor with Hegai and the king. Has there been a time in your life when you needed to obtain and maintain favor with someone? How did your character help you to do that with integrity?

DAY TWO STUDY

1. Read Esther 3:1-15 and 4:1-17.
 - What crisis occurred that threatened the Jews, including Esther and Mordecai?

 - How did Esther first respond to Mordecai's message (4:11)?

2. In 4:14, Mordecai gives Esther "God's perspective" on her life and current circumstances. What is it?

3. Read Genesis 50:15-21. Compare Joseph's perspective on his life and position with Mordecai's advice to Esther.

4. What does Esther's reply tell you about her as a woman of God?

5. Read Esther 5:1-14. Why do you think Esther put on her "royal robes?"

6. Twice Esther invited the king and Haman to a banquet.

- What was Esther's strategy at this point?

- How successful was it?

7. Read Esther 6:1-14. What insight did Haman's wife, Zeresh, have about the Jews that Haman ignored?

8. *TELL YOUR STORY:* Can you look back at your life and see a “God moment” where you were given an opportunity to make a difference in the lives of others around you? Describe how you recognized the opportunity and what happened.

DAY THREE STUDY

1. Read Esther 7:1-10. Compare 7:2 with 5:3, 6. The king makes the same statement three separate times to Esther. Esther finally takes advantage of his offer. What does she request?
2. What character traits did Esther exhibit in this incident?
3. Read Esther 8:1-10:3. How did God reward Esther for her courage?
4. According to law, a decree written in the king's name and signed with his signet ring may not be revoked. Explain how Esther was able to work around this challenge to save her people.
5. Read 8:16-17 again. Describe what happened and how that glorified God.

Think About It: *The plot once intended to destroy the Jews resulted in a festival which helped to unite and sustain them as a people. And, God used this opportunity to bring nonbelievers to faith in Himself. A win-win for all!*

6. Esther was the creative wife of a nonbeliever. She used her beauty and charm as well as brains to God's advantage. How did she get her husband to become part of her team?

DAY FOUR STUDY – THE WALK FROM FEAR TO FAITH

God loved Esther. He knew what was going on in her life. He was able to do something about it. But, God did not prevent Esther from being taken into a king's harem. He did not make it easy for her to stand up for her people. During her walk, a loving God said "no" to some things. Yet, she chose to trust Him rather than submit to fear. And, God rewarded her faith with an outpouring of His blessing in other ways. Likewise, God may not choose to rescue you from difficult circumstances in which you find yourself. But, in any and all situations, you can count on these truths...

- God loves me.
- God knows what is going on in my life.
- God can do something about it.
- I can trust His goodness in whatever He chooses to do!

1. List all the situations in Esther's life that could have "terrified" her.

2. Considering those opportunities for being terrified, in which ones did Esther, by faith, do what was right and not give way to fear?

3. **Your Life's Story:** We, too, may find ourselves in situations that seem beyond our ability to handle or control. Perhaps you have an enemy (or your husband or closest friend may have one). How can you use Esther's response to this threat to her people and relate it to your life today?