

The Story for Women

Leader's Guide

By Carol Stine

THE STORY, a condensed chronological account based on the Bible, follows the story of God and man from creation to the promised return of Our Savior. In *The Story for Women* we will learn from the lives and choices of Bible women from the portion of scripture that each of the 31 chapters covers.

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HOW CAN I USE THE STORY FOR WOMEN?

This study guide is designed to complement the whole-church curriculum for The Story by examining the lives of significant women who have played a part in history, or by exploring themes that are relevant to women. These lessons are suitable for a devotional study for individuals, for small groups, or for a Sunday School class.

HOW DO THE LESSONS FIT WITH THE STORY?

Each chapter of The Story covers a specific span of history; not every chapter specifically mentions a woman from the Bible. But there are women who play a part in each period of history that is covered, or there are themes that relate to women. The women or themes for The Story for Women are chosen to amplify the study of God's story.

HOW ARE THE LESSONS STRUCTURED?

Each lesson includes:

- Study questions to examine passages of scripture that tell each story with answers and additional information to clarify or augment the learning.
- Application questions to provide a bridge from the culture and context of the Bible story to our own personal culture and context.
- A 'key question' to challenge us to act upon the lessons learned from each story.
- Additional material or suggestions to provide an option for deeper study of the theme of the lesson.

HOW DO I LEAD A STUDY USING THE STORY FOR WOMEN?

The study for women should coincide with the schedule the church is following. It's advisable to provide each participant with the handout a week in advance to allow time to answer the questions and prepare for discussion. The lessons can be downloaded one a time, or provided as a lesson book that includes as many lessons as desired. In my experience a book for the Old Testament and another for the New Testament provides the students with two study guides that are easy to use.

Answers for the questions in the study come from God's Word, and scripture references are provided for most questions. Application questions will ask the student to analyze and draw conclusions from the study as well as from biblical teaching about faithful Christian living. Since these questions are personal, usually there are no correct or incorrect answers.

This Leader's Guide provides help in preparing the lesson but is not a substitute for study and lesson preparation by the teacher.



Eve is mentioned in the Bible only four times by name. But she is obviously one of the most important figures in the Bible. To understand the story adequately we must first understand who Eve is. As far as humanity goes we can't separate Adam and Eve. While it is right to consider Adam and Eve as two individuals, "they" are humanity. Remember that "man" was created (Gen. 1:27), as a single being. All of humanity was—Adam. God pronounced his creation "good" and we find further explanation about human creation in chapter two. The fact that Adam was the solitary being of his kind (human) was not good (Gen. 2:20-25). When God created Eve she was no less human than Adam, and she was no less *of a human* than Adam was. Adam was also not diminished through the creation of Eve. Man alone was limited. Man and woman (a suitable helper) together would be able to carry out God's work and purpose. The synergy of the intimate relationship between them, combined with their intimacy with God resulted in rich, full life that God pronounced *very good*.

We also need to keep Adam in the picture when we study Eve's sin. In fact, Adam was with Eve when she made the choices we will discuss in this lesson (5:6-7). God is all-powerful, all-knowing, and everywhere present. He is the creator and God made everything good. Yet with this one choice, 100% of humanity (Adam and Eve), sinned. Has this statistic changed (Ro. 3:23)? We should remember this fact when we feel like failures ourselves. We should especially remember this when we are tempted to criticize or judge the shortcomings of others.

I. Eve had life at her fingertips. She knew God face to face. She had walked with God. She never knew fear, or worry, or stress. She was innocent of the things that we think of as worldly. All she knew of the world was perfection—*she knew God*.

1. Discuss what you think it would be like to know God face to face.
2. What would Eve's 'worldly' experience have been before she sinned?
3. From the following scriptures, describe some of the benefits of 'knowing God' that Eve had. Jeremiah 22:15b-16.

'Just think about your father. He was content that he had food and drink. He did what was just and right. So things went well with him. He defended the cause of the poor and needy, and so all went well. Is that not what it means to know me?' declares the LORD.'

God gave Jeremiah messages for the kings of Judah. Here he is pronouncing a judgment on Jehoiakim, a son of David because men should realize that with God, "things go well".

1 John 4:8

“Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.”

Eve knew and benefitted from perfect love because she knew God.

II. Temptation: Genesis 3:1-6; 1 Peter 5:8; 1 John 2:16.

In his book *The Book of Genesis Made Easy*, Mark Water makes these simple observations about Eve’s sin:

“She Saw—She desired—She Took”(18). In Genesis 3:1 the serpent is described as shrewd (crafty or sly). In fact the serpent is used as a symbol for treachery (Psalm 58:3-4). The tempter tried the same tactics on Jesus when he was in the wilderness. (See Matt 4:1-11). Paul explains that Eve *was deceived* (2 Cor. 11:3). Adam simply took the fruit when she gave it to him, but Eve is *not* described in scripture as having seduced Adam; the serpent is the tempter. In fact, in Romans 5:12-14, Paul attributes the fall of humanity to Adam. Eve was sinful but she was not the deceiver; she was the deceived.

The first sin is the perfect parallel to John’s warning.

“For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world” 1 John 2:16.

We don’t know how long it took Satan to seduce Eve. Remember that the tempter deceived Eve, and we are warned of Satan’s cunning. It seems that Eve was familiar with the serpent and had no cause to fear him. Much like a child, she was innocent of the harm that could come to her.

However, Eve was an adult, and she had the ability to reason. It’s clear from the scripture that she knew God and she knew God’s instructions. She also knew that the serpent was asking her to disobey God. In fact the crafty deceiver forced her to admit exactly what God’s will was in the matter. The fruit represented more than just a tasty snack. It offered Adam and Eve a way to show loyalty to God. The serpent led Eve to admit that God was the authority and then proceeded to repudiate that authority. Eve’s choice was to stand with God or to agree with the serpent.

Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. 1 Peter 5:8

We should see a warning in the account of Eve’s sin. Our enemy is dangerous and we should not take this lightly.

1. Read Genesis 2:16-17, note what the actual command from God was.

...then the LORD God commanded the man, “You may freely eat fruit from every tree of the orchard, but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will surely die. Genesis 2:16-17

Was there any doubt or vagueness about God's instructions?

To whom was this command originally given?

From Genesis 3:1-6, note what Eve knew was the will of God.

The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit from the trees of the orchard; but concerning the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the orchard God said, 'You must not eat from it, and you must not touch it, or else you will die.'" Genesis 3:2-3

We don't know if Eve added the further caution "and you must not touch it" or if Adam gave her this understanding. It's clear that Eve knew God's will in the matter.

2. Follow the reasoning that Eve used to choose disobedience over obedience:
 - a. (Using 1 John 2:16, list the process as Eve fell into sin, described in 3:6)

When the woman saw (lust of the eyes) that the tree produced fruit that was good for food, was attractive to the eye, and was desirable (cravings) for making one wise, she took (boasting of what he has done) some of its fruit and ate it. She also gave some of it to her husband who was with her, and he ate it. Genesis 3:6

3. How is the enemy tempting you to reject God's authority in your life? Discuss what you know in your heart about the choices that are before you.

III. Disappointment: Genesis 3: 7-13, 2 Cor. 11:3.

Disobedience always results in disappointment. Even our secret sins eat away at our insides. The exhilaration that comes at the moment we give in is just that—momentary. The consequences and guilt sometimes last a lifetime...an eternity. We know that 'the wages of sin is death' (Genesis 2:17). It may be a physical death but not always. It may be the death of a friendship, a marriage, a profitable venture, a worthy endeavor. Sin always interrupts our relationship with God. Eve's sin cut short all that God had planned for his creation. Adam and Eve were not the only ones disappointed. *God was disappointed.*

At Christmas time a billboard in New York state boasted that the story of Jesus is a myth and urged a celebration of "reason during the season". Satan had been able to plant a false hope in Eve's heart. When she finally succumbed to human reasoning; she expected something better than she had. A lie is always about a false hope...that reality will be changed into something else. Much of what is wrong

about the world results from hopes and dreams built on an age old lie: You can have something better if you turn away from God. But rejecting God never makes life better.

1. What was false about the hope that the serpent used to attract Eve?
2. Why did Eve think it was reasonable to reject God?
3. What was the reality that Eve forgot about?
4. Is there any reason that Eve could not have sought God's help in her search for knowledge? Why didn't she turn to God about this?
5. Was there any good thing that came to Eve as a result of her sin?
6. Read descriptions of God's punishment in Job 24:1-5 and 2 Cor. 11:3. These are the things that Adam and Eve did not know. In the garden, before the fall, did they have any need to know these things?

In Job 24:1-5, Job describes the drudgery one experiences in a world where men are unjust and life is reduced to a hand-to-mouth existence. This is not what God planned, and he didn't want his creation to know this kind of misery. It is the result of sin.

In 2 Corinthians 11:3, Paul expresses the fact that we are no match for the deceiver. He was let loose by the fall and God did not want his creation to experience Satan's power.

IV. Hope: Genesis 3:8-24.

Genesis 3:15 is the "first verse in the Bible to point to a future Savior. Satan will receive a knock-out blow to the head" (3:19). Eve's story points out another truth about mankind: we are helpless to fix our sin problem. Dr. Kenneth Beckman often reminds his students that "Sin is a problem fit for God." On our own, our human weaknesses leave us defenseless against the enemy. Our sinfulness puts us in a hopeless situation. Even though we suffer terrible shame and fear, no matter how horrible the consequences, *our suffering* offers no solution. But there is One who took on the suffering and shame, who took our death. There is hope. We, as sinners, cannot reconcile with God so He participates with us in a wonderful 'gift exchange'. We exchange our sinful life for a new life from God.

For by grace you are saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God. Ephesians 2:8

The new reality that Adam and Eve faced was shame, fear, and suffering. It was nothing they had seen before. They hid from God, something that had never occurred to them before. He understood their despair because it mirrored his own despair. The intimacy between them had been destroyed. There would be no more leisurely walks in the garden; no more open conversations, face to face—the Creator and His creation in complete harmony. No longer would there be harmony in relationships. The earth would now know death.

Adam and Eve had no idea how to solve the problem. Their only recourse was to hide. God had compassion on Adam and Eve despite the fact that they had rejected him. He understood their

embarrassment and provided clothing for them. But our great love story is that God offered more than a wardrobe. He offered a solution. There was hope. Sinners, cannot reconcile with God so He participates with us in a wonderful 'gift exchange' (Ephesians 2:8). We exchange our sinful life for a new life from God. Satan would be cursed. But the relationship between God and man would be restored...at a cost.

1. What word describes the tempter's punishment? (v. 15)

*And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will **crush your head**, and you will strike his heel.* Genesis 3:15

2. What part would the woman play in the tempter's ultimate demise? (v. 15)
3. What word describes what would happen to the woman's seed?
4. What is the hope that God would provide for all mankind? (Colossians 1:25-27)

..but is now disclosed to the saints To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.
Colossians 1:25-27

Because of God's infinite love and mercy, Eve carried *the treasure* in her physical body. As we follow THE STORY, we will become acquainted with 31 women of the Bible. We'll track how God guards the treasure until the time is right to reveal Him. But he will come, *through a woman*.

Key Question: What is at least one thing that you already know about God that should be enough to help you resist Satan's temptations?

Additional Reflection

From John 8:34-35 and James 1:12-18 think about how what God offers compares with what Satan offers.

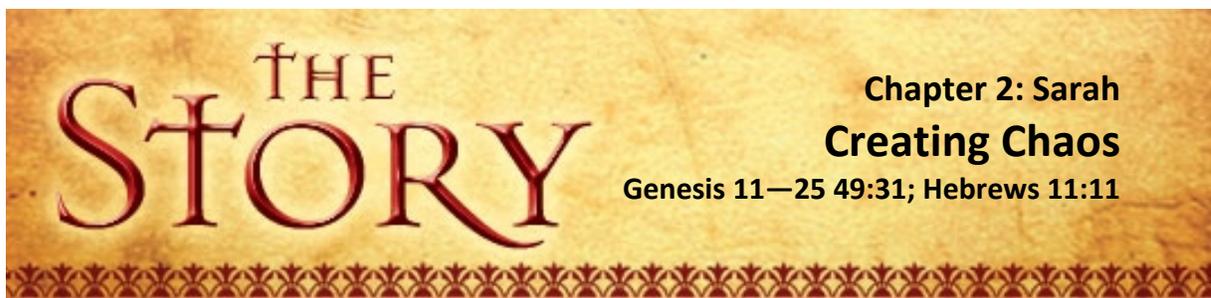
From I Cor. 10:11-13 think about what we have in common with Adam and Eve.

What information do we have that Eve did not have? (v.11)

What is the protection that God offers?

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Chapter One of THE STORY takes us from the creation to the story of Noah. We know that mankind so rejected God that He regretted creating man...except for Noah. Then we are introduced to Abraham. Today's lesson further explains the story of God's desire for mankind. From his Word we know that he continually looks for those men and women who will be faithful. Let's meet Sarah.

I will bless her and will give you a son through her. I will bless her and she will become a mother of nations. Kings of countries will come from her! Gen. 17:16

I. Sarah's faithfulness is human.

Her name meant "princess". We know that Abraham and Sarah lived in the important city of Ur. They would have been educated and they were wealthy. We know Sarah as the one who laughed at God's promise and had taken matters into her own hands to bring it about. God is the creator of all good things, but when we take things into our own hands we usually create chaos. Sarah learned this lesson the hard way. Yet, Sarah is one of only two women mentioned in Hebrews 11:11 for her faithfulness. We know that Sarah had faith. Ro. 4:19-22.

F.F. Bruce suggests a better translation for the difficult Hebrews text would be: "By faith Abraham, together with Sarah, received power to beget a child when he was past age"...This commends the faith of both Abraham and Sarah (Lea, T.D. 210).

Note the important events from Sarah's life from Genesis.

(Briefly recount Abraham and Sarah's story with the group.)

12:1-9. Sarah left her home and followed Abraham.

Gen. 12:1-9. She left her family and her comfortable life to follow her husband, Abraham, as he obeyed God's call. Sarah was probably in her 60's when they began this new life. Obviously he had shared his calling from God with her and we have no reason from scripture to believe that Sarah was not in agreement with God's claim on their lives.

12:10-17; 20. She trusted God and followed Abraham.

Gen 12:10-17. Abraham asks her to pose as his sister. She was a beautiful woman so when they were forced to move to Egypt he resorted to this deception to protect himself. (In Genesis 20:12 Abraham

informs Abimelech that Sarah is the daughter of his father but not of his mother. It was also common to refer to a wife as a sister if this would give the husband more esteem.) However, these actions put the mother of God's promised children in an Egyptian Pharaoh's harem! God rescued Sarah and her future children by exposing Abraham's charade. In an outcome only God could have brought about, Abraham was sent on his way with his wife (before she slept with the Pharaoh), and with rich bounty as well.

Genesis 20: Abraham repeated this same ploy again when they were in the Negev region and King Abimelech, attracted by her beauty, sent for Sarah. Once again God intervened to protect 'the mother of nations'. Later in the New Testament, Peter admires Sarah for her submission—for cooperating with her husband even though he was unwise. This implies that she trusted God to see them through.

13—14. Sarah endured unrest and danger with Abram's nephew Lot.

Genesis 13—14: Abraham and Lot eventually separate. Lot's poor choices put him in danger and because of family loyalty Abraham rescued him from a civil war. Sarah's life, sojourning with Abraham and his family, could not have been described as peaceful.

15:4-6. God promised that Abraham would be the father of many nations.

God gave Abraham the vision and the promise of offspring as numerous as the stars in the heavens. We can imagine Sarah's joy when Abraham shared the promise with her. But they learned that God's ways are not man's ways. And over time they learned that there is nothing "simple" about faith (Genesis 15:4-6)

16. Sarah gives Hagar to Abraham so he can have an heir.

Probably the most memorable story from Sarah's life is the story of Hagar and Ishmael. To our minds Sarah's scheme is bizarre, although in recent years surrogate motherhood has become more accepted. Medical innovations have brought the technologies to help women become pregnant, or at least to carry a child and give birth. The desire to have children is not unique to this generation, and the heartbreak of waiting month after month was no easier in Sarah's time than it is now. In fact the law of Sarah's homeland required women to present their husband with a child and if she couldn't, she was to offer one of her servants to provide offspring. Although the Bible does not specify, it seems that Abraham had not seen fit to demand this even before God gave him the promise of offspring. Certainly Sarah went from year to year, hoping.

While we charge Sarah with "taking things into her own hands", we must allow that she was doing nothing wrong in her culture and time. We know that the scheme did produce a son...but it also produced chaos. The delicate balance between a woman and her servant was shifted as Hagar took pride in providing the son that her mistress could not.

Then, as we women sometimes do...Sarah took it out on her husband. "You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering....may the Lord judge between you and me"(Genesis 16:5). In other words..."you fix this mess! Choose one of us and be done with it." Abraham obviously loved Sarah and put the situation back into her hands. However, Sarah mistreated Hagar. Promise or no promise...Sarah could not live with what she had done. And even with all this, in the New Testament we see that both Peter and Paul recognize Sarah as a faithful woman who honored her husband.

17:15-21. God promised that Sarah would **bear** a child, and she would be the mother of nations.

Sarah had her hands full. Abraham's lapses of wisdom, a troublesome extended family, an unsettled life in a foreign land, and her own impatience that led her to "help" God, had taken its toll on Sarah's human faith. After all this, years went by; Sarah and Abraham were now well past the age of childbearing. One afternoon Sarah overheard her husband's visitor repeat the promise that she would bear a child and she laughed to herself. Is it any wonder she laughed? She *knew* this was impossible. *And that is right where God wanted her!*

1. What was the hope that helped Sarah remain faithful despite difficulties? (1 Peter 3:6) Note that we are encouraged to honor and obey God like Sarah honored and obeyed her husband. Peter's advice is that this kind of submission *to God* will always be right. He is not necessarily advising that if we obey our *wives* in all things, even incorrect or sinful things, like Sarah did that we will be blessed.
2. Note some things that show Sarah's faith was human?

II. Our faithfulness.

The struggle with faithfulness in the face of our human circumstances is as grueling for us as it was for Sarah. But, see how kind and gentle the Lord was in his encounter with Sarah, as recorded in Genesis 18:9-15. The Lord asked Abraham where his wife was, and then he repeated the promise so she would hear it. Sarah's laugh has been characterized as a sign of disbelief—lack of faith, or even impertinence. Note that she laughed and kept her thoughts *to herself*. But the Lord heard those private ponderings and he recognized her feelings. He knew that to her knowledge it was a fact that she was no longer physically able to have a child, nor was her husband able to impregnate her.

It wasn't just that she wanted a child. She had wanted to present Abraham with a son all of her married life. She wanted to believe the promise, but now the passing of time, and her own body, denied the possibility. In fact, that was exactly what the Lord seemed to have been waiting for! He wanted her to realize it was impossible! He did not rebuke her, nor ridicule her. For the first time He spoke directly to Sarah. He simply reiterated his promise to Abraham, and then He addressed Sarah in a way that revealed an intimate understanding of her heart..."Yes, you did laugh."

God knows that our knowledge is limited. Our doubts and fears do not prohibit God from working. It is through those very fears and doubts that God works *with* his followers to show his infinite mercy and power. Faith is when despite what we are able to understand from a human perspective—we say, "I'm still standing with you God because You are in control." (Notice that faith is *not* saying, "I know you'll do what I want".)

1. Note some things that show your faith is human.
2. Share a time when, in the face of impossible obstacles, you simply put your hope in God and did the best you could.

III. God's faithfulness.

God handled Sarah's fragile faith with gentleness. He knows our weaknesses, and he knows our faith is human faith. We are confused when we think it is *our faith* that matters. It is God that matters...we don't need to have faith in *our faith*. Believers can go through times of weariness and fear, recognizing this life as a battle ground, *without rejecting God*. We must have faith in *God's faithfulness* because God's sovereignty and God's fulfilled promises prove that He is faithful.

1. What does God's faithfulness mean to you?
2. How does God's authority help us to remain faithful? (Psalm 73:28)

But as for me, God's presence is all I need. I have made the sovereign LORD my shelter, as I declare all the things you have done. Psalm 73:28 (NET Bible)
Adonay- Sovereign, ruler, master, Lord.

It is not prideful to remember and rejoice in the times we have held on to the Lord, no matter what the outcome. This is the testimony that will help others. And these are the memories that will help us through the next struggle.

We have evidence that God is faithful because He has always kept his promises. God is in complete control. With God, nothing is impossible. Like Sarah, we humbly offer him our flawed faithfulness. And then we humbly trust in God's flawless faithfulness to keep his promises.

Key Question: In what issue will you trust God's faithfulness?

For additional reflection:

Consider the following promises.

On God's fulfilled promises write "evidence".

On the promises yet to be fulfilled, write "God is faithful."

Isaiah 7:14-Jesus will be born of a virgin.

Mic. 5:2- His birth will be in Bethlehem.

Ps. 72:10- Great persons will come to worship him.

Jer. 31:15- The children of Bethlehem would be killed.

Isa. 40:3; Mal. 3:1- John the Baptist would precede him.

Isa. 53:2- Jesus would have no earthly riches.

Isa. 35:5, 6- Jesus would work miracles.

Ps. 41:9; 55:12-14-He would be betrayed by a friend.

Zec. 12:12-He would be sold for 30 pieces of silver.

Ps. 22:18- His garments would be divided and gambled for.

Ex 12:46; Ps. 34:20- None of his bones would be broken.

Lk. 24:7- Jesus would be delivered to sinful men, crucified and raised on the 3rd. day.

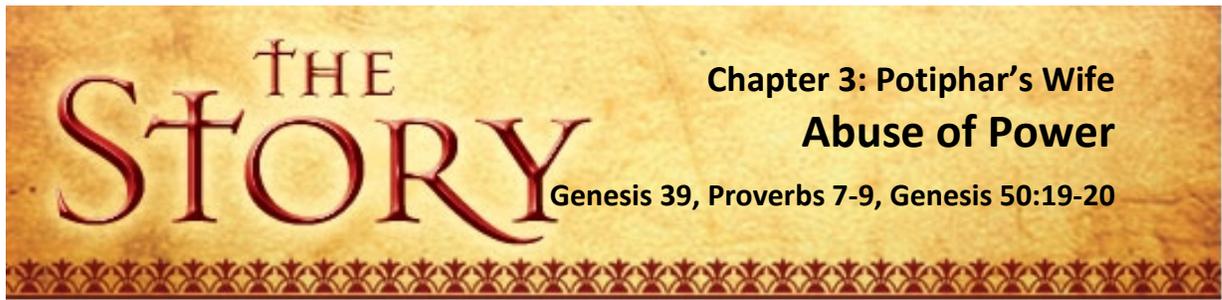
Ps. 16:10; Isa. 26:19-His resurrection

Ps. 68:18-His ascension.

Isa. 11:10; 42:1-Gentiles would be his converted to him.
Is. 9:7; Da. 7:14- His kingdom will last for eternity.
Jn. 8:12- Jesus' followers will have the light of life.
Jn. 13:3- Jesus would go back to God.
Jn. 16:33- Jesus would conquer the world.
Acts 2:35-38- We will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit at baptism.
Isa. 26:3; Phil. 4:6-7- The peace of God will guard our hearts.
1 Cor. 15:51-52; 1 Thes. 4: 15-18- The dead will raise and we will be changed.
Jn. 14:2-3- He will come again and take his followers back with him to a place he has prepared.
Matt.24:30- Jesus will come again in power and glory.
Ro. 14:11- Every knee shall bow and every tongue shall praise.
Rev. 21:4- He will wipe away all the tears from our eyes.

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Chapter 3 of *The Story* tells the life of Abraham's great grandson, Joseph. His life continues the story of how God guided and protected his people *and the treasure*. God's promised people would eventually produce the Promised One who brings salvation to all. Joseph experienced life's ups and downs...literally. In Canaan, his jealous brothers threw him into a cistern to die, only to pull him out again and sell him to merchants who were passing through. He was eventually sold in Egypt to Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh's guard. Joseph rose to new heights as God blessed him and all those around him. Potiphar so trusted Joseph that he only worried about what he ate! In Genesis 39 we find the story of Joseph's fall from Potiphar's highly trusted aide to despised prisoner because Potiphar's wife abused her power. Whether the attacks come from jealous brothers or zealous women, "God sees to it that Joseph ends up in situations in which he will be elevated to a position of leadership" (Kissling 453).

I. Human power abused. Genesis 39:6b-20; I John 2:16; I Peter 5:8

God has endowed humans with a large measure of power, with which we are able to control ourselves, and to a certain extent, others.

- One aspect of human power is the freedom of choice. It *is* within our power to choose good. We simply don't choose good consistently, and one bad choice convicts us.
- Another aspect of human power is in position, and in the influence we have over other humans. Often a simple suggestion will control another's actions. We can exert that power through our example, or teaching. Of course a position of authority can give us a way to control someone else.
- Physical strength is another aspect of human power. However, one person's physical force is limited by the next stronger person that comes along.
- Women also have a great measure of power. Feminine "wiles" and sexuality cannot be underestimated.
- Mothers have great influence over their children.

The strength and energy that we possess as humans comes from God to equip us for human existence. Human power is limited however, and our greatest limitation is our inability to make ourselves acceptable to God. We need to put our lives into God's hands. God uses his power to maximize our human strengths to the extent that is needed to fulfill His will in our lives.

1. What power did Potiphar's wife have?

Potiphar's wife possessed considerable power:

- She was the wife of an influential man, the captain of Pharaoh's guard (similar to the president's body guard.)
- She was the head of a household that included servants.
- She was Egyptian, a privileged people who were proud of their status as a world power of the time.
- She was comparatively wealthy.
- She was infatuated with Joseph, which filled her with strong desire that she chose not to deny.

2. List the sins that Potiphar's wife committed throughout the ordeal.

v. 7a She was attracted to Joseph and looked with desire at Joseph. (lust)

v. 7b She propositioned Joseph.

Now Joseph was well-built and handsome, and after a while his masters' wife took notice of Joseph and said "Come to bed with me."

v. 10 She was obsessed about Joseph and harassed him.

And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her.

v. 12 She assaulted him; committed adultery

She caught him by his cloak and said, "Come to bed with me!"

v. 14 She lied to the servants and tried to manipulate them. (Note the "us v. them" language)

She called her household servants. "Look," she said to them, "this Hebrew has been brought to us to make sport of us!" He came in here to sleep with me, but I screamed. When he heard me scream for help he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house."

v. 17 She lied to Potiphar, showed racial bias

v. 19 She made a veiled insult of her husband 3 time: the slave "he" or "you" brought

Then she told him this story: "That Hebrew slave you brought us came to me to make sport of me. But as soon as I screamed for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house."

When his master heard the story his wife told him, saying "This is how your slave treated me", he burned with anger. v. 19

The woman's allegations against Joseph are questionable. How would it happen on a normal day that "no one" was anywhere in or near the house who would have heard her screams for help? When Joseph ran to his own quarters naked, is it feasible that he passed no one? How is it that the "victim" didn't find servants and have Joseph detained in some way? Where in the protest is the actual accusation of rape or an attack? When Potiphar became angry at his wife's comments, with whom was he angry? And finally, why didn't Potiphar have Joseph executed? This would have been the common punishment for a slave or servant who attacked his master's wife.

3. Read James 1:14-15.

But each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

From Genesis 39:6-20, describe how you see Potiphar's wife following the steps of the path of temptation as outlined in James.

- She noticed/admired Joseph- literally she "lifted her eyes to Joseph", which implies flirting or 'making eyes'.
- She desired him...not with a passing desire but "day after day" Joseph was the object of her thoughts and affections.
- She acted on her wrong desire...she forced herself upon him.

In contrast, how did Joseph respond to temptation.

- He refused her and acknowledged that this sin would be against God.
- He tried to avoid her.
- He fled from her evil advances.

Notice that she could have taken action to prevent her wrong actions.

- She could not help noticing Joseph's desirability. But she could have refused to focus on him.
- She could have avoided him.
- She was in charge of the household. She could have arranged the work of the servants and Joseph so as to prevent any contact with him.

There is always a way out of temptation. But that way is not always necessarily simple or easy. When we find ourselves tempted to do evil however, we need to realize what is at risk. Whatever measures that will prevent us from succumbing to the temptation are well worth the effort.

Potiphar's wife demanded, "Lie with me". Joseph refused saying, "How could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" The contrast is startling. What makes it so startling is that Joseph doesn't express repulsion toward the woman, but toward offending God. Our decisions would be a lot clearer if we couched them in these terms. When God is our focus the deciding factor in any choice will be, "Will it offend God?"

Potiphar's wife squandered her power as she roamed about seeking to devour Joseph. The woman's behavior is typical of the adulteress who calls out to her prey as described in Proverbs. Sadly this is still a true picture of some, and God is saddened by the misuse of the power he has given us. But there is another call described in Proverbs that is just as clear and just as compelling. We need a new "women's movement" that is characterized by women who are empowered, not by selfish desires, but moved by the Holy Spirit to seek and serve God. When men and women place their human power in God's hands they are wise.

II. Human power energized.

1. List some of the characteristics of wisdom. Who does the Proverbs writer point to?

Proverbs 8:1

Wisdom calls out. 8:1

- *Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat!* Isaiah 55:1a
- *On the last great day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice 'If a man is thirsty, let him come to me and drink.'* John 7:37

Proverbs 8:6-10

Wisdom has worthy and true things to say. 8:6-10

- *Your word O Lord is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens.* Psalm 119:89
- *Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.* Psalm 119:105
- *For the word of God is living and active...* Hebrews 4:12a

Proverbs 8:22

Wisdom was before creation. 8:22 (*The LORD possessed me at the beginning of His way, Before His works of old.*)

- *'I am the Alpha and the Omega,' says the Lord God, 'who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.'* Revelation 1:8

Proverbs 8:35

Possessors of wisdom have life and favor from the Lord. (8:35)

- *Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the father except through me.'* John 14:6

2. Fill in the blanks.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. Proverbs 9:10 (NIV)

(See: Ephesians 1:15-23; 2 Timothy 3:15; Proverbs 16:16; Proverbs 2:1-12; Isaiah 11:2.)

Two things help us know God better: In Ephesians 1:15-23, Paul explains how the great power of God is available to the church through the Holy Spirit: "that God...may give you the Spirit of wisdom..." Wisdom here is the Greek word **sophia**. It refers to the "deep things of God". (Barclay 90). Wisdom is personified in the Old Testament. Wisdom is what God is...all knowledge combined with the ability to

use that knowledge perfectly. While we won't achieve that perfection, we certainly can desire wisdom for ourselves and others. In fact, we're told to seek wisdom: 2 Timothy 3:15, Proverbs 16:16, Proverbs 2:1-12.

3. Mention the powers **or** abilities that each of these Bible women misused:

Job's wife: Job 2:9-10

Job's wife used words to tear down and ridicule husband. She could have comforted and encouraged him in his dedication to God.

Sapphira: Acts 5:1-10.

Sapphira and her husband Ananias agreed to misrepresent the money they were offering to the church. Peter accused them and they fell down dead because of their dishonesty and hypocrisy. Sapphira could have encouraged her husband to be honest. She could have been honest when she met with Peter. They could have given the whole amount but that was not required. If they had simply been honest they would have been a wonderful example to the church like Barnabas was.

Euodia and Syntyche: Philippians 4:2-3. (Do you think there is any meaning to the fact that Paul added the thoughts in v. 5-8 here?)

One of the most disappointing things about working with women is the fact that good and honorable women occasionally revert to "Junior High". Hurt feelings and pride often get in the way and erupt into disagreements that at the least disappoint their friends and disrupt the harmony of the church. These women could have been commended by Paul for their wonderful example of Christian love and service.

Disharmony is a downer! While we don't know this for certain, Paul could very well be encouraging these women to exchange their bickering for rejoicing. How sad when we turn to anger, harsh words and bitterness. How wonderful if we would immediately turn to rejoicing in God, gentle care for one another, and prayer.

The Proverbs 31 and Titus 2 passages describe the amazing abilities we have as women, and the fruitfulness that can come when we invest our lives in the Lord.

4. Read Genesis 50:19-20. Explain how this is wise.

But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.

We have seen how the Enemy of God has tempted men and women to use their power for evil. But no matter how vicious the battle would become, God's power was always at work to protect the treasure that His people carried in their bloodline. Today, we have the promise and the power living in us, if we've make Him the Lord and Master of our lives.

Key Question: What abuse or misuse of your power do you need to redirect and place under God's wisdom?

For Additional Reflection.

1. Study 1 Corinthians 6:18-20 and 7:23.

What does it mean to you that we no longer belong to ourselves?

2. Study 2 Peter 2:1-3.

What kind of power is found in the false teaching that we are bombarded with in our culture?

What is the power that overcomes false teaching?

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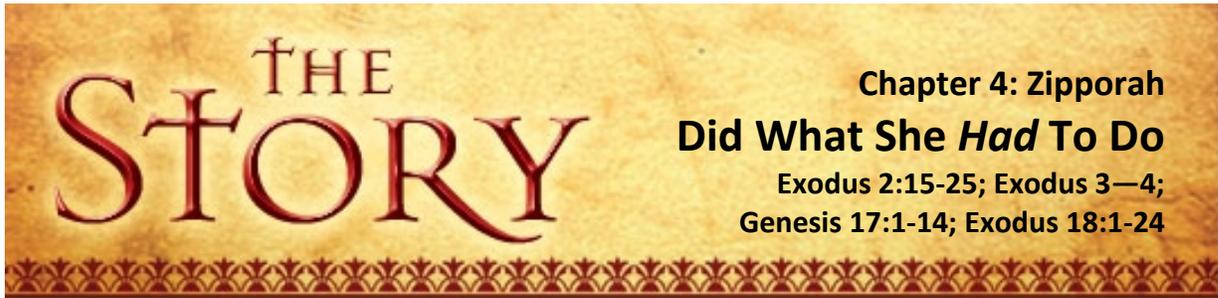
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To understand the story of Zipporah, Moses's wife, we must understand the command of circumcision that God gave to Abraham. Obviously Moses had been circumcised, but he had neglected his obligation to circumcise his sons. This is even more abominable because of the nature of God's command. God intends for his people to lead *their children* into the covenant relationship with Him. If Moses couldn't do that with his own family, how would he succeed as a leader of the nation? God sees Moses' disobedience as a deal breaker. Zipporah finds herself in a life and death situation, and somehow *she knows* that *she* has to act. The heart of God has not changed. We too must be ready to do what we must to make sure every generation carries the message of salvation to the next.

I. Moses Meet's Zipporah. Exodus 2:15-22

Moses had led a charmed life in Egypt, protected by God and raised as a prince by the Pharaoh's daughter. But he made a blunder when he took justice into his own hands to avenge the death of a fellow Hebrew. He ran for his life to the land of Midian where his thirst took him to a well and what seems like the romantic meeting place for the patriarchs, Moses met Zipporah. (Both Isaac and Jacob had each met their brides at a well.) Moses showed his sense of justice again; this time he rescued seven sisters from rowdy shepherds.

1. Who was Zipporah's father? (Genesis 25:1-5, Exodus 2:19)

Zipporah is the daughter of Jethro, "a priest of Midian". Jethro is a descendant of Abraham through Keturah's son Midian. Near his death, Abraham sent his concubines and children away from Isaac to "the land of the east" (Gen. 25:6). We don't know for sure what god Jethro served as a priest, but it is probably a pagan god. It's doubtful that he raised his children in the faith of Abraham. Zipporah's introduction to Moses would make a great Hallmark movie plot...mysterious stranger comes to their rescue. He turns out to be a sophisticated, educated Egyptian...the rest is history.

We know that Moses was cognizant of his heritage as an Israelite. By the grace of God he was raised by his Hebrew mother and would have been taught the ways of the One True God. The names he gave his son indicate his beliefs, and he would have been raising his family in the way of his 'Father Abraham.

2. When was Abraham circumcised? (Genesis 17:26)

3. From Genesis 17:1-14 answer the following questions to analyze what it meant to be a descendant of Abraham.

17:1a- How did God describe himself to Abraham?

17:1b- What were God's first two demands?

17:2- What would God establish between himself and Abraham?

17:4-6- What does God promise to do for Abraham?

17:9-13- What is the covenantal requirement of Abraham?

17:14- What will happen to those who do not participate in this requirement?

Circle the word covenant in these 14 verses.

Underline "descend", "descendants" and "generations"?

Draw a box around the words "everlasting". **(permanent, eternal in other versions)**

¹ When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty^l; walk before me faithfully and be blameless. ² Then I will make my *covenant* between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers."

³ Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, ⁴ "As for me, this is my **covenant** with you: You will be the father of many nations. ⁵ No longer will you be called Abram^l; your name will be Abraham,^l for I have made you a father of many nations. ⁶ I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. ⁷ I will establish my **covenant** as an everlasting **covenant** between me and you and your **descendants** after you for the **generations** to come, to be your God and the God of your **descendants** after you. ⁸ The whole land of Canaan, where you now reside as a foreigner, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your **descendants** after you; and I will be their God."

⁹ Then God said to Abraham, "As for you, you must keep my **covenant**, you and your **descendants** after you for the **generations** to come. ¹⁰ This is my **covenant** with you and your **descendants** after you, the **covenant** you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. ¹¹ You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the **covenant** between me and you. ¹² For the **generations** to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised, including those born in your household or bought with money from a foreigner—those who are not your offspring. ¹³ Whether born in your household or bought with your money, they must be circumcised. My **covenant** in your flesh is to be an everlasting **covenant**. ¹⁴ Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my **covenant**." Genesis 17:1-14 (NET Bible)

The word ‘Covenant’ controls this passage. This is a binding agreement between God and Abraham. Abraham is making the agreement on behalf of his descendants...*which shall come from him because of the covenant*. The idea of ‘covenant’, ‘descendants’, and ‘everlasting’ are the essence of the relationship between God and the people (descendants) he will raise up. This is because the seed of *the woman, Eve*, through Abraham is not just any seed. Among his descendants will be the Messiah, the Savior, the **only begotten Son of God**, who was yet to come. The covenant was eternal, not because the original agreement with Abraham would be eternal, *but because God’s gift of salvation through His Son is eternal*.

Interestingly enough, the Hebrew origin of the word covenant carries with it the sense of cutting. While it does mean agreement, solemn promise, or alliance, it further includes the idea of creating, transforming, “cutting out”, as in to shape or fashion something new. God created something that had never been seen or heard of before: a contract between God and man. God and Abraham “cut an agreement”. It had the force and weight of the Almighty God behind it. But there is more.

For Abraham and his descendants the most important thing to understand was *that God had allowed a man to enter into the contract **voluntarily***. Previous dealings between God and man had been pronouncements by God. Eve’s seed would crush Satan’s head because God said so. Noah was saved in the flood and the rainbow was given as a promise because God said so. The agreement between God and Abraham was *cut from new cloth*...God gave a man the right to join the pact.

This helps us understand why, in Exodus 4, God would force Moses to recognize his noncompliance with the covenant. God wanted his people to keep their part of the covenant **so he could keep his part!** This also sheds light on why God was so patient and merciful to his covenant people throughout their long and sordid history.

II. What Zipporah *had* to do. Exodus 2:25; 4:18-26; 18:2-4.

The literal translation of Exodus 2:25 is “God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob, then God saw the Israelites and God knew” (Bailey 77). This key passage makes the call of Moses clear. God would use this man *to keep the covenant with Abraham and his descendants*. He had promised to be with them and he would rescue them. God also noticed Moses, his wife, and his family. He intended for them to be a part of that covenant relationship as well. After God’s call, Moses gathered his family and headed back to Egypt. The covenant between God and Abraham is the reason Moses was disciplined by God on the way back to Egypt (Exodus 4:18-26). Moses considered himself an Israelite; he acknowledged the God of Abraham. Yet he himself had not complied with the very essence of his part of the covenant because he had not circumcised at least one of his sons. He had not maintained the covenant *from generation to generation*. At this point Zipporah had to take action.

“Now on the way, at a place where they stopped for the night, the LORD met Moses and sought to kill him. But Zipporah took a flint knife, cut off the foreskin of her son and touched it to Moses’ feet, and said, “Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me.” So the LORD let him alone. (At that time she said, “A bridegroom of blood,” referring to the circumcision.)” Exodus 4:24-26.

1. What happened to Moses when they stopped for the night?
2. What action did Zipporah take?
3. Whose responsibility was it to make sure a son was circumcised?
4. Do we know which son was circumcised? (Exodus 18:2-4)

In pagan cultures, it had to do with marriage and fertility traditions or worship, when adult males were circumcised. God ordained that circumcision be done when the infant male was eight days old. Probably due to the high mortality rate of infants, this would ensure the baby would have been strong enough to survive. The ritual was *not* a part of worship but was a part of the covenantal agreement.

The words of Zipporah as related in the passage seem like an insult or indictment against Moses, perhaps because she had opposed the circumcision of her child. However, several commentators suggest that it did not reveal Zipporah's anger or disgust, but her relief instead. Because God was punishing Moses in some way, her husband would have been taken from her. But now, through the blood of her son, Moses had been restored. The mention of the bridegroom might have implied that they would have the chance to begin again.

Understanding the covenant between God and his chosen people helps us understand what was at stake when Moses and Zipporah arrived at that 'stopping place' on the way to Egypt. Whether Zipporah realized it or not, she took an action to appease God's anger at her husband, *and God accepted her action!*

God is faithful. He intended for his people to reflect that faithfulness, but there was a purpose in it. Out of those "descendants" would come the Messiah. Moses would not only lead the Israelites out of Egypt, he would protect the treasure that was in them. It wasn't gold or silver. It was the Savior of the world. If he couldn't be trusted with his own sons, how could he be trusted with God's treasure?

III. What we *have* to do. Philippians 2:12-18

While the passage about Zipporah should not be stretched to give women carte blanche to have authority in any circumstance, it does point to the value of women, and to the blessing a wife can be to her husband. Zipporah's action not only saved Moses, it saved the Israelites in the sense that it kept God's plan to use Moses on track. Moses was 'more' when Zipporah did what she had to do. In any given circumstance, a wife blesses her husband when she stands beside him. But sometimes she is the one God has placed in his life to do what has to be done to bring about God's will in both of their lives. Even in the time of the patriarchs, the presence and the accomplishments of a woman were not incidental.

Desperate times call for desperate action. Zipporah intervened to save her husband's life and in doing so, she played a key role in God's plan. We can look back at her life and see God's providential preparation for Jesus (Bailey 78). We can also look forward with anticipation to Jesus' return. Until then we are called obey, to work out our own salvation, and to be "shining stars" in this world. There are people all around us who need to be rescued from sin. Christians are still in a covenant relationship

with God through faith and the Holy Spirit. He is calling for action to save lives and souls. We may rationalize that it's someone else's responsibility, but like Zipporah, there may be some things we *know we have to do*.

1. Who will lead your children to the Lord if your husband is absent or doesn't take on the responsibility?
2. Who will direct and serve in benevolence and rescue ministries?
3. What crucial needs are you aware of
In your home?

In your neighborhood?

In your church?

In your country?

In the world?

Women are a part of God's plan. The church is 'more' when women do what they have to do. What women *have to do* is follow God's claim and call for their lives—whatever that means. It is still true today that when women do what God calls them to do, the Kingdom is strengthened, and we have a part in keeping God's plan on track.

Writing about sex and gender issues, James Doyle concludes "...women continue to find themselves sitting in the churches' back pews listening to men, who for centuries have enjoyed the privilege of being up-front, nearer the sanctuary" (251). In *The Psychology of Women*, Margaret Matlin writes that the religions of the world "emphasize how women are *different from men*. Once again, men are normal and women are "the second sex" (247-248).

Culture, as well as personal experiences and beliefs, bring men and women to various opinions about the role of women. However, an honest look at God's word will reveal that, yes, women are different, but God has not created them "less than". He has created and equipped women, as well as men, to fit into *His total plan*. No part of God's work is less important than another. All are called to serve; all are called to pray as Jesus instructed in the Lord's Prayer, "thy Kingdom come, they will be done."

Key Question: Is there something that God is calling you to do, even though you may have to do it yourself? What is the first step that you must take?

For additional reflection:

Study these verses and compare them with the God of the Old Covenant:

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age" Matthew 28:19-20.

Compare Jesus' claim in Matthew 28 with God's claim Genesis 17:1a.
Compare Jesus' command in Matthew 28 with God's command in Exodus 3:10 and 4:12.
Compare Jesus' promise in Matthew 28 with God's promise Exodus 3:12.

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In Chapter 5 of THE STORY we read about a new covenant between God and His people. This agreement includes the commandments that will keep the people safe and “set apart” spiritually. The people agree to God’s terms and He instructs them in the building of a Tabernacle for worship and to house the Ark of the Covenant. The Tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant are visual reminders of God’s almighty power and glory, and to remind them of their sacred agreement with Him. As usual, God provides in every way to enable His people to facilitate His commands and through their partnership with Him, He will make them into a powerful nation.

I. God will make a nation.

From Exodus 19 we learn that “In the third month after the Israelites left Egypt—on the very day—they came to the Desert of Sinai....and Israel camped there in the desert in front of the mountain”. There in front of the mountain God revealed his heart to the people.

You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Exodus 19:4-5

He had chosen them above all other nations and would set them apart for his own. He would work **with** them and **through** them, but even then, God desired partnership with mankind. Because of His wisdom, He could maintain that delicate balance of His divine direction, and their individual will and abilities, in order to carry out his part of the covenant. And the Israelites agreed, saying, “We will do everything the Lord has said”.

God’s covenant was intricate and perfectly planned. We have the benefit of hindsight so we can see how the ‘mystery’ unfolded. Moses and the Israelites did not have that benefit. But they should have realized God’s power and benevolence toward them through the experiences they’d already lived through! Their experiences should have given them understanding of God and the wisdom to choose Him.

1. From the following passages, briefly mention what the Israelites should have known about God.

- Exodus 14:13-14, 26-31- They would see deliverance from the Egyptians because the Lord would fight for them...you need only to stand still. The entire army of Pharaoh perished...not one survived. God was more powerful than any natural (the sea) or earthly (the army) power.
- Exodus 15:23-27- God made sweet water for them at Marah: God’s provision and answered prayer.

- Exodus 16:11-16- God sent quail and manna...every day until they came out of their wandering: God's provision and answered prayer.
- Exodus 17:6- God gave them water from a rock: God's provision and answered prayer.
- Exodus 17:8-15- He defeated the Amalekites as Moses held his hands up to God: God's protection.
- Exodus 19:3-8, 16-19; 20:20- God displayed his power at Mt. Sinai and spoke to them. Thunder/lightening/cloud and trumpet blast. God wanted them to fear him so they would not sin.
- Exodus 32:25-35- God called for the people to take sides for or against Him, 3000 people died. He struck them with a plague as punishment for their sin: God's sovereignty.
- Exodus 35:30-35- God filled the craftsmen with ability to construct the Tabernacle to his specifications. God's desire to partner with mankind.

2. Read Psalm 139. What does this passage tell us about God?

God knows us intimately. He has created us for a purpose and our days are planned by him.

II. Skillful Women help construct the Tabernacle. Exodus 35:22, 25

God worked with the Israelites as a nation. But he also knew each one intimately. Just as the Psalmist wrote, He had ordered their days. Through the construction of the Tabernacle we get to see God's heart for his nation and for the individuals in that nation.

There in the shadow of Mt. Sinai God instructed Moses to build a Tabernacle. He told Moses:

...receive offerings. Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them. Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you. (Exodus 25:8-9).

Among the workers who volunteered for this project were "wise of heart women", who brought beautiful hand work for the Tabernacle.

This is the first time women are mentioned specifically as participants in both preparing materials to give and giving their dowry jewels. Their skill was a 'wisdom of heart' that made them willing to give of themselves and to give up their nest egg with abandon. And God added to the skill of each wise volunteer so that they would know how to construct the sanctuary. He would add to their abilities, but he would ***dwell in the Tabernacle***.

Word Study from Exodus 35. (The following information is from Net Bible.com)

35:5-"willing of heart"- In Hebrew "heart", as in 'they had heart'- clarifies in what they were willing- their choices- their will.

35:10-“skilled person”- In Hebrew “wise of heart”- skilled refers to ability or ‘wisdom’, heart wisdom refers to the choices that come out of wisdom, wise choices *about* their work.

35:21-“heart moved him”- In Hebrew, *moved or stirred* is “lift up, bear, carry”. The expression describes one moved from within because his spirit *made him willing...*’up to the job’.

35:22-“men and women alike”- The expression in Hebrew means men with women, to ensure that it was clear that the preceding verse did not mean only men. B. Jacob takes it further, that the implication that women took the initiative and the men came after.

1. What is worth noting about the offerings the people brought for the Tabernacle?

Exodus 25:2- They were voluntary offerings.

Exodus 36:6-7- They gave so much that the giving had to be restrained

2. Write the Bible description of those who helped construct the Tabernacle. Could this description be applied to the members of our congregation today?

Exodus 35:5- Everyone who is willing.

Exodus 35:22-Men and women alike

Exodus 35:10- All who are skilled

Exodus 35:25-26-Skilled women spun ...they brought the work of their hands.

Exodus 35:21-Everyone who was willing whose heart moved him brought offerings

Exodus 35:35- God filled them with the skill to do all kinds of work.

The highs and lows that the Israelites had experienced since God had delivered them from bondage in Egypt had to have prompted their response for the construction of the Tabernacle. That ministries would have to restrain people from giving is unheard of today...unless it is cast off clothing! The Tabernacle was completed one year from the Israelites’ deliverance from Egypt and nine months after God issued His commandments at Mt. Sinai. At this point in time they put their complete trust in God and He partnered with them to accomplish it.

3. What replaced the tabernacle as God’s dwelling place under the Old Covenant?

- 1 Chronicles 22:9-10- David ordered them to begin to build a temple. (Solomon’s temple.)
- 1 Chronicles 23:25-26-The Levites no longer needed to carry the sacred articles of the Tabernacle.

III. Skillful women *are* God’s dwelling place.

God told the Israelites that he would walk among them and be their God. But he has promised us so much more! Paul explained in Acts 17 that God does not live in temples built with hands. When we accept Jesus as our Savior we receive *his indwelling presence* (Acts 2:38). He doesn’t just walk with us, he *lives in us!* Now, women with wise and willing hearts experience a partnership with God in the

construction of His Eternal Kingdom rather than an earthly building. Through His divine work in us we become a part of the Kingdom and we become Kingdom builders as well.

1. In Hebrews 8—12, Paul explains the transition from an earthly Tabernacle to faith in Christ.

- Hebrews 8:5- What does Paul call the tabernacle? **A copy of heaven.**
- Hebrews 8:10- What are the terms of the new covenant? **He will write his laws on our minds & hearts**
- Hebrews 9:22-27- What forgives the sin that separates us from God? **Christ's sacrifice of his own blood.**

2. Ephesians 2:19-22 describes the new holy temple of the Lord.

- Ephesians 2:20- What is the foundation of this temple? **The apostles and Prophets, and Christ Jesus as the chief cornerstone.**
- Ephesians 2:21- How is it held together? **In Christ.**
- Ephesians 2:22- Of what "material" is this dwelling constructed? **"You"-believers.**
- Ephesians 2:22- How does God live there? **By his Spirit**

3. Since Jesus dwells in us by means of the Holy Spirit, what should we who are Christians realize about our earthly bodies? I. Cor. 6:19

That our bodies are the temple of God.

4. Fill in the blanks:

Philippians 1:6- "... he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion."

Philippians 2:13- "...for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

The God who instructed Moses to build the Tabernacle is the same God who dwells in each and every Christian. What would happen if we gave our skills wholeheartedly to the Lord with no thought of self-promotion or reward? God decides what good works are great. We just respond to the needs put before us with the abilities God has given us. May we respond to the Lord with the same generous attitude as the skillful women of Moses' day.

God's plan since the creation has been to have a friendship with man. Could there be any greater treasure than having Him live in our hearts through The Spirit?

Key Question: How will you be 'wise of heart' with a skill that the Lord has given you?

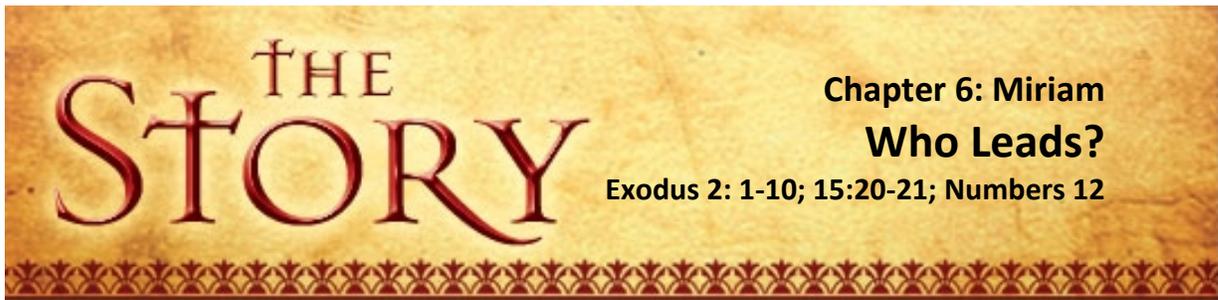
For additional reflection:

Study Ecclesiastes 1:3-8. Glance through the whole book and then read the end—Ecclesiastes 12:9-14

Compare the attitudes toward life in the Book of Ecclesiastes with the kind of life described in the passages from Philippians in the previous question?

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Chapter 6 of THE STORY reveals Miriam as a qualified leader whom God provided, along with Moses and Aaron, to deliver His people from bondage. But God showed Miriam that he was deadly serious when he taught her a most important lesson about *his* leaders. Friends of God do not use worldly standards to measure their value in the Kingdom.

Why is it that Miriam is the stereotypical ‘assertive woman’ that is used to negatively define women who are natural leaders, and who feel led to use their gifts in the church? Would we make the same conclusions about men from Aaron’s actions?

We know she was a capable leader. She had distinguished herself in several different ways. Other than the episode described in Numbers 12 though, the references to Miriam are all positive. Could it be that sometimes a woman might just make a mistake and live to regret it, even though it is minor in comparison to the rest of her fruitful life?

I. Miriam as a leader.

1. What do these events from Miriam’s life reveal about the kind of person she was?

Exodus 2:4- She watched her baby brother in his basket in the Nile. Responsibility, caring

Exodus 2:7- She offered their own mother to Pharaoh’s daughter as a nurse. Perceptive, problem-solver

Exodus 15:20,21- Miriam was called a prophetess. Godly, inspired. She is the only prophetess among the Israelites of Moses’ time.

Exodus 15:20- All the women followed her with tambourines, dancing, and singing. Talented, engaging, leader

Numbers 12:1- Miriam led in speaking out against Moses. (That she spoke first is implied because her name is listed first and the verb “spoke” is in the feminine form.) She was either outspoken and courageous, or conniving and self-seeking. The negative element to her skills as a leader *may be* the tendency to be controlling.

Numbers 12:15-16- The entire Israelite camp waited for seven days while Miriam was confined outside of camp. Implies that she is important and respected.

Numbers 20:1- Her death is specifically recorded. She was respected and influential.

Micah 6:4- Miriam is named with Moses and Aaron as leaders that God sent to the Israelites. Her role was God-given.

It is important to realize that Miriam was used by God as a leader. She did not take up the mantle of leadership outside of the will of God. The Micah passage is very clear. God sent Miriam to lead the Israelites, just as he sent Moses and Aaron. Although they had different roles, there is no distinction in the fact that God sent Miriam as a leader.

2. Word Study:

Exodus 2:4- The term “*stood at a distance*” implies *taking a stand, or positioning oneself*. What would that imply about how the young girl, Miriam, watched her brother. She was vigilant. She took what she was doing seriously and maintained a position conscientiously.

Exodus 15:20- The word *prophetess* in ancient literature refers to a woman. It can mean *a poetess, or an inspired woman*. How do we know that both things apply to Miriam? We know she sang and led in singing. The song in Exodus 15 is believed to have come from Moses and Miriam.

Numbers 8- Levite refers to the descendants of Levi. This tribe was assigned by God with the task of caring for all the duties of the Tabernacle. As a descendant of Levi, what duties might Miriam have performed that might correspond to the Tabernacle worship? Although the women of the Levite tribe had no official, God-given role as Levites, we know Miriam was talented. She might have been a leader of songs of worship for women, and she might have performed other duties that Moses or Aaron assigned to her.

II. Miriam and Aaron criticize Moses. Numbers 12

The opposition of Miriam and Aaron to Moses came at a difficult time in the life of the Israelite nation. Chapter 6 of THE STORY relates the events from Numbers 11, just preceding the challenge to Moses authority. The constant complaints had angered God so much that he sent fire from heaven and consumed some who were positioned at the edges of the camp. Only Moses prayer on their behalf saved the rest of them. Next they drove Moses to distraction because they were hungry for meat. God sent such a quantity of quail that measured three feet deep around them, and then he served a plague for dessert! The truth is they had replaced the respect and honor that they'd had for God during the building of the tabernacle with disrespect and scorn. Even with these images fresh in mind, Miriam and Aaron added to Moses's burdens with their personal criticism.

An important aspect of God's dealings with the Israelites is the balance of his tolerance and intolerance of their defiance. Punishment by death and plague were often the result. God's tolerance was evident in that he listened to Moses's pleadings and did not annihilate them all. Leprosy was a death sentence in the ancient world. It was not just a physical death but it ended the life of the victim *before* physical death came through the complete exclusion from all social contact. Miriam experienced God's punishment *and* his tolerance, but he left no doubt about how he viewed her actions. Unfounded opposition to his appointed leader was unacceptable. It still is. (Philippians 2:29; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13; 1 Timothy 5:17; Hebrews 13:7)

What did Miriam and Aaron challenge? (v.1) His marriage to a Cushite (Ethiopian) wife. Some see the reference to Moses's wife was a ploy to rally support for their cause through ethnic prejudice that she could engender among the people.

What was the real reason for the opposition? (v. 2) They wanted equality with Moses.

How did Moses react? (v. 3) with humility

What did God do? (v. 4-5) He brought the three of them together and explained his relationship with Moses. Although God separated himself from sin, he did not withdraw from problems. He remained engaged, he worked through the problem with them.

What was the consequence for Miriam? (v.9-13) She was afflicted with leprosy. When Moses and Aaron pled for her life God mercifully healed her. But she received punishment that fit the crime. The comment "if her father had spit in her face" means she that if she had been a child who acted in an insolent manner toward her father 'he would spit in her face' as in public denouncement. Miriam's disrespect of Moses, and of God, deserved at least as severe a punishment. (Proverbs 18:21-...we will eat the fruit of our own lips.)

What was the consequence for the Israelites? (v. 13-16) They were delayed seven days. Miriam and Aaron put more strain on Moses and harmony was disrupted. Disharmony among leaders (men or women), almost always puts the brakes on spiritual growth in the church, and halts numerical growth as well. The burden of dissension weighs down our spirits and takes the focus away from our mission.

The friendship between Moses and God was foreign to Miriam and Aaron. They were uncomfortable with it. Describe this relationship from the following passages.

Exodus 33:17-23- God was very pleased with him and he let Moses see his back.

Exodus 33:11; Numbers 12:6-9- God spoke face to face with Moses, rather than in dreams. This should have made them afraid to speak against Moses.

III. The Leadership Dance

A true friendship with God is not an ordinary thing now, nor was it ordinary then. Miriam and Aaron were threatened because God worked in a different way through Moses than he did through them. This is often the case when there are power struggles in ministry—between *anyone*. When each believer focuses on his or her own friendship with God there is usually acceptance, forgiveness and harmony.

Experienced and qualified women hold responsible positions in the public work place. We're gaining ground in compensation and advancement, yet we receive mixed messages when it comes to our role in the church. However, if we make leadership roles something to be grasped we're dancing around the real issue. Our spiritual qualifications will be revealed through our relationship with God. We need to keep in step with the lover of our soul.

The opposition started with an excuse. But their actual complaint reveals the real problem.

The Complaint: Consider Miriam's grievance in Numbers 12:2:

“Has the Lord spoken only through Moses?’ they asked. ‘Hasn’t he also spoken through us?’”

- What do these words imply about how Miriam and Aaron had been used by God? God had spoken through them. They had a ministry. “The pride of the natural heart was not satisfied with this” (Keil and Delitzsch, 75).
- What do these words reflect about Miriam and Aaron's attitude toward God? They felt resentment and by their actions accused God of unfair treatment, as if He needed to elevate their status.
- What would it mean to you if you knew that God had spoken through you? It would be a great privilege and blessing in itself, and God's work through another person would have no bearing on it.
- To what extent do we have the right to evaluate how God chooses to work with those who serve him as Lord and Master? We have no business evaluating *how God works*. We can evaluate performance or actions of a person according to standards of character and according to the expectations of the job for which someone is hired.

Both Miriam and Aaron had demonstrated great leadership. They had also shown terrible lapses of judgment. Moses too, had led well, and he had made grave mistakes. Each one had an important role in God's plan. To our knowledge, God had not distinguished Miriam's nor Aaron's contribution as less meaningful than Moses's. But there was a difference.

III. Our Leadership Dance

It's a comical scene in sitcoms or movies: the awkward gentleman isn't a good dancer. He steps on her toes; he makes all the wrong moves. She either gives up or takes over. This is not the kind of leadership dance that works in the church. A better picture of leadership in the church is a line dance. God plays the song; his followers line up and work in harmony.

As women we will have experiences with men who are godly, yet seemingly clumsy leaders, or who make what are, *in our judgment*, wrong moves. Although the reality is that someone will have the last word in various areas, and some will submit in various ways; *all* should be keeping in step with God who directs our moves. From a worldly perspective this is preposterous. Rank has certain connotations of power and worth. The one on top is 'fair game' and the rest are seeking to 'work up'. Often, like Miriam and Aaron, we raise criticism and opposition inappropriately and for the wrong reasons.

1. When do we use excuses to justify our opposition of another leader? Real reasons to oppose a leader have to do with character, lack of ability, or sin. Personal attacks come from envy and pride.
 - When there is really no basis for the opposition.
 - When we want to cast doubt in other's minds about another person.
 - When we want to gather people 'to be on our side'.
 - When we have a personal disagreement and we choose not to resolve it in a Godly way.

2. Miriam and Aaron revealed their own character flaws in their attack against Moses. From the following passages, note the things that God's Word warns against?

Proverbs 14:1 foolishness

Proverbs 14:30 envy

Matthew 7:1-5 wrong judging, hypocrisy

Romans 12:16 pride, conceit, divisive spirit

Philippians 2:3 selfishness

James 1:19 anger, thoughtless speech

A worldly value system leads us to evaluate our roles incorrectly. In God's design, all places of service are valuable even though they may be different. We must see our value in the Kingdom through God's eyes.

Key Question: In what areas are you prideful in your position rather than pleased to contribute in God's Kingdom?

For additional reflection during the week:

Read Paul's defense of his ministry 2 Corinthians 10.

What are the worldly weapons?

What are the weapons of divine power?

From what are his opponents drawing their conclusions?

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Rahab is included by Paul in the faithful “Hall of Fame”. He introduced the faithful ones with this thought: *“But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved”* Hebrews 10:30. Rahab did not ‘shrink back’, even though it meant helping the enemy army. But God knew she was a treasure; she is one of Jesus’ ancestors!

I. Rahab’s Vantage Point- Joshua 2

For the second time, God was ready to hand over the land of the Canaanites to the Israelites. Joshua was leading a whole new generation, who had not lived through the miraculous deliverance that their fathers had experienced. But the stories from their history, and their own experiences of the power of the One True God, had given courage to the Israelite soldiers. It had also “melted the hearts” of all the cultures around them. Rahab could see the coming doom. She knew that the God of the Israelites was the *“God of Heaven above and on the earth below”*. She had realized that *before* the Israelite spies appeared on her doorstep.

Rahab lived in Jericho- the world’s oldest city, established 6000 years before Moses. Jericho must have been established shortly after creation! Its ruins are located just a few miles northeast of Jerusalem. Some archeologists suggest their religion revolved around gods of the moon.

Discover Rahab’s vantage point from Joshua 2.

Rahab is called a harlot or prostitute (2:2). The word sometimes refers to ‘innkeeper’. The conclusion is that the inns were the places that a harlot could be found, and what could be more convenient than for a prostitute to own an inn. Her house was also part of the wall and we know there was a window on the outside (2:15). Technically she ‘lived on the fence’....she could see what was going on inside as well as outside the city walls.

1. Why did Rahab have so much information about the Israelites and the attitude of the Canaanites?

The location of her home and her livelihood provided her with an ample and reliable source of information. The guests who stayed there would have been everything from soldiers to salesmen, traders, and members of the caravans of merchants. These would have informed her of the news outside Jericho. She also would have had reliable information about the how the Canaanites viewed the massive encampment of Israelites that had roamed around Palestine for 40 years!

2. What two events particularly persuaded Rahab to believe in God? (2:9-14)

1. How the Lord had dried up the water of the Red Sea (40 years previously...this was a well-known history. (Exodus 13-14)
2. The fate of Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites who opposed the Israelites (Numbers 21).

3. Describe the Canaanites' morale. God knows how to make an impression on hearts. TRUTH is what makes the biggest impression. The Canaanites knew the truth about the Israelites and that their God was powerful. They also knew of their "take no prisoners-style conflict" (Ziese, 87).

2: 10. "I know that the Lord has given this land to you and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are *melting in fear* because of you."

2: 11 "When we heard of it, our hearts melted and everyone's courage failed because of you..."

4. What actions put Rahab on the side of the Israelite invaders?

v. 4-6: She hid them on her roof in the flax *before* the king's men came. She lied to them and sent them in the opposite direction that she would send the spies.

Rahab's lie: Scripture has already dealt with lying in the 10 Commandments. Followers of God are to tell the truth. Rahab's lie is not praised; it is part of the story. Although all lying is condemned by God, not all liars are condemned by God. While it is not God's ideal that we lie "our sin in Adam has created an ethical mess from which we sometimes can't (don't) extricate ourselves" (Howard)

v. 11: She confessed her belief in the God of the Israelites. D.M. Howard in his commentary on Joshua, provides three reasons this confession is remarkable:

1) She acknowledged that Israel's God has dominion over all creation. Since her culture worshipped man-made nature gods, she acknowledged that they were inferior.

2) Her statement that "your God *is God*" shows that now she saw that the Canaanite gods are not true gods.

3) The phrase "in the heavens above and the earth below" are only found three times before this in scripture (Exodus 20:4; Deuteronomy 4:39; Deuteronomy 5:8). Rahab was not just trying to save herself, she was affirming the sovereignty of God "who is worthy of worship and allegiance".

v. 12-13: Rahab's plea to make a deal with the enemy puts her into a covenant relationship...a contract, with the Israelites. She basically says, I was "kind" to you; you be "kind" to me...she is seeking an 'in kind' response from Israel. How does she know to use this language and to seek this salvation? We only know that from her vantage point, faith in the Israelite God was the only option she wanted to consider. She could have brought honor to herself by producing the spies for her king. She chose to protect and help them instead.

(Rahab uses a "technical word *hesed*, "mercy", often reserved for covenant discussions, to couch her request" (Ziese, 88).

v. 15-16: She helped them escape, and for their safety, she gave them necessary tactical information.

5. What was the promise that the spies had made to Rahab

(v. 14) "Our lives for your lives!"

6. What was Rahab's vantage point now? Did she have anything to lose by making an agreement with the spies?

At this point she would be lost either way.

7. Who would ultimately have to guarantee this promise? (v. 12) “Swear to me by the Lord”...she appealed to them but trusted God to fulfill the agreement.

II. Joshua’s Vantage Point- Joshua 1; 3—6

The spies and Joshua were relying on the information of a Canaanite prostitute. Her help was invaluable, not only because she protected them but because of her description of the poor morale among the Canaanites in Jericho. She risked her life *and the lives of her family* on her beliefs. But Rahab was not the only one who made a courageous decision. He was following orders and he was under no obligation to honor the spies’ verbal contract with a prostitute who belonged to ‘the enemy’!

Read God’s instructions in Deuteronomy 7:1-2 and 20:16-18.

1. What had God specifically commanded Joshua to do to the people they would conquer?

“...when the LORD your God has delivered them over to you and you have defeated them, then you must destroy them totally. Make no treaty with them, and show them no mercy. Deuteronomy 7:2”

“However, in the cities of the nations the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, do not leave alive anything that breathes. Completely destroy them.....” “Otherwise, they will teach you to follow all the detestable things they do in worshipping their gods, and you will sin against the LORD your God.” Deuteronomy 20:16-19

2. Were they allowed to make any agreements or contracts with the people of Canaan? No

Review the mission that God had given Joshua from Joshua 1.

1. What state of mind did God want Joshua and the Israelites to have? **Courageous**

“I will give you every place where you set your foot...” v. 3.

“No one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you” v. 5.

“Be strong and courageous...” v. 6

“Be strong and very courageous.” Be careful to obey all the law...that you may be successful wherever you go” v. 7.

“Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night...” v. 8

“...Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go” v. 9

2. What was God’s repeated promise to Joshua? I will be with you wherever you go.

Joshua led the Israelites into battle. Joshua 3—6

1. How did the Israelites cross the Jordan river? (3:16) It was at flood stage. The water stopped flowing. It piled up in a heap a great distance away.
2. How many soldiers approached Jericho? (4:13) 40,000, armed for battle.
3. What was necessary before the Israelites could enter the land? (5:5-8). They had to be circumcised. Once again the covenant with Abraham comes into play. God's people had to be obedient. They had to be "his".

Imagine the lesson God is teaching them. He places them virtually at Jericho's front door and has them circumcised, rendering them weak and defenseless. Joshua's army had to have realized that the Canaanite soldiers were either completely intimidated, or God had his protection around them when they were so vulnerable.

Discover how Joshua viewed Rahab (6:17-19).

1. What were Joshua's instructions about Rahab and her household? (6:17-18, 24-25). She and her household were to be spared.
2. Why could Joshua's order to rescue Rahab and her family be considered courageous? God's instructions were to annihilate them all and not to enter into any treaty with them.
3. What do you think Joshua included in the "devoted things" when he said "*But keep away from the devoted things, so that you will not bring about your own destruction by taking any of them*" (6:18). In context, Rahab and her family were included in the list with the silver, gold, bronze, and iron articles that were put into the treasury. She was valuable to God, in fact, much more valuable than silver or gold. She carried Jesus in her bloodline and He was God's greatest treasure.

When Rahab confessed "*for the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below*", Joshua 2:11, she effectively identified herself with the Israelites. She demonstrated through her actions that she no longer was a Canaanite *at heart*. We have no knowledge of how Joshua came to the conclusion that Rahab should be rescued and saved from destruction. We do know however, that God promised to be with Joshua. *God knew Rahab's heart*. He accepted her as one of the "treasures" that were devoted to Him. In fact, Rahab carried the most precious treasure of all; she is one of Jesus' ancestors! God wanted Rahab to be saved.

III. Our vantage point.

Rahab believed the truth that God had revealed to her. This is faith. God does not keep himself hidden from us. He provides each of us with a vantage point that helps us find Him.

1. What is your unique vantage point in life?
2. Discuss the insights that have helped you see the wisdom of following Christ.

3. What does the salvation of her family tell us about God’s kindness to Rahab?

God respected Rahab’s plea for the lives of her family as well. He knew what was dear to her heart and his kindness is greater than anything she (or we) deserve. God’s ‘cup of kindness’ overflows.

4. Our family is usually what we treasure most. Do you think God cares about your family as much as you do?

5. How can we devote ourselves and our family to God?

Joshua 24:15- At the end of Joshua’s life he challenged the people: “Choose you this day whom you will serve”. Like Rahab, we need to choose well, and we need to realize what is our true treasure.

His word and His blessings are the reality. We can also see the consequences in this life for those who reject Him. We need to point these things out to our children so they will not take for granted all that God has done for them. They need the same point of view. It is our job as wise parents to keep the Lord and his ways visible to them. Point out with thankfulness the blessings that we have. Go to him openly during difficult times. Help them to see that God is the Father of all good gifts and help them to see the wisdom of making the same courageous choices as Rahab and Joshua.

Key Question: How do you need to “change sides” in your life to join forces with others in God’s Kingdom?

For additional reflection:

Read the full account of the Fall of Jericho and the events that followed from Joshua chapters 3—7. Note the various times and ways that Joshua and the Israelites worshipped God:

Was God intimately involved with them, or withdrawn?

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The period of the Judges is the subject of The Story Chapter 8. Commentators described the period as “a time of free, unfettered development, in which the nation was to take root in the land presented to it by God” (Keil & Delitzsch, 239). The fickle Israelites repeated cycles of “doing evil in the sight of the Lord”; bearing the consequences of that evil as God allowed surrounding nations to pummel them; and finally, penitence with a humble return to faithfulness. Each time God provided a judge to rein them in; Deborah was one of the most courageous. Yet, she describes herself as “a mother in Israel” Judges 5:7.

Deborah came on the scene, after Othniel, Ehud and Shamgar, who were all typical of male leaders: real “he-men”, natural warriors. In fact, most of the other judges are military leaders. But sin had made Israel as weak as a kitten. Without God, a *woman* must lead them. The contrast between Deborah’s strength and Barak’s weakness was a lesson for Israel who had lost her strength.

Deborah is everything a godly woman should be. Her strength and spiritual leadership were such that she had a following of people who turned to her for guidance. Where were the established courts, elders, and priests who should be handling disputes? Obviously her judgment was superior.

I. Deborah as a wise judge: Judges 4:1-5; 5:6-7.

Deborah, the fourth Judge, lived approximately 140 years after Joshua’s death. She was probably middle-aged at the time of the events described in the Book of Judges. Yet she had seen and heard enough to be a wise and respected woman whom God used in an extraordinary way.

Deborah is the only judge who was also called a prophet, (prophetess). She was inspired by God and spoke God’s message.

Describe Deborah’s life as a judge:

1. Israel fell into evil after Ehud’s death. From Judges 2:19, what was particularly odious to God? “The idolatry of the native people who remained after Joshua’s death spread like well rooted weeds and choked out the Israelite’s zeal for the Lord” (Spangler and Synswerda 108).

2. God punished them through Jabin, a Canaanite. Why was Jabin’s army, under the command of Sisera, a lethal threat, Judges 4:2-3?

The Israelites were untrained, ill-equipped and out-numbered. The Canaanites were more advanced in that they were ironworkers and had iron-plated chariots...equipment that the Israelites had no way to defend.

3. Describe the severity of this oppression?

“cruelly” (forcibly, cruelly, vehemently) “oppressed”- torment, press, crush

How long had it lasted? 20 years

4. From Deborah’s song, Judges 5:6, describe what life was like for the Israelites.

It’s important to note that as horrible as the wrongs against the Israelites were, the wrongs against women in particular are not that hard to imagine. In *The Song of Deborah*, Judges 5:28-30, she alludes to these offenses through the image of Sisera’s mother. In the scene, she wonders why her son hasn’t arrived home from battle. The mother, in Deborah’s imagination, would have consoled herself with the thought that he was a victor who was “finding and dividing the spoils: *a girl or two for each man...*” What is left unsaid tells the story of how it was, (and is) for vulnerable women who fall prey to evil men. The violent attack on Laura Logan, a CBS reporter, that took place last month in Egypt would be typical of the cruel oppression that the Israelites experienced.

5. To whom did they finally turn for help? “They cried out to God” 4:3.

6. Fill in the words to describe Deborah from Judges 4:4.

“Deborah a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was leading Israel at that time.”

7. How did Deborah serve the Israelites? (4:5)

As a judge, Deborah did not assume the place or role of the normal judicial setting. Instead of sitting at the gates, the normal place for settlements to take place, she went out under a tree. Although she operates outside the norm, the scripture in no way alludes to any wrongful assumption or grasping for power by Deborah.

II. Deborah as a strong military leader: Judges 4-5.

1. What message did God give Deborah for Barak?

Tell Barak to gather the 10,000 men. I will bring Sisera to you. I will “hand him over” to you.

2. Who would actually win the battle for the Israelites (4:7, 14)? God was the victor. It doesn’t matter who received fame, or who is defamed, God gets the victory. That is our attitude as Christians, whether we are men or women.

3. In your opinion, what did Barak’s response to Deborah’s message reveal?

First and foremost, disobedience.

A lack of trust in God. The message Deborah related was *for Barak, from God*. The message promised a victory. Whether Barak hesitated because he felt unworthy or unprepared, or whether he simply lacked faith in God isn’t even the point. He simply refused to accept God’s clear mandate.

4. Should Deborah’s prediction, that a woman would have the honor for the victory, shame Barak? Why or why not?

Note that Deborah never presumed to be a warrior or to take such honor away from a man. According to Julia Staton, she “gave the man the opportunity to take the honor of leading the nation to victory all for himself, but was not afraid or hesitant to help him in the leadership role when asked to do so.”(Camp and Fontaine, quoting Staton p.264).

The prediction was the truth: a woman, instead of a man, would execute the enemy commander. This ended the battle *and* the persecution of the Israelites. Honor for Jael was a consequence from God because Barak’s unwillingness to go into battle without Deborah revealed spiritual weakness. Deborah was not an unknown, meddling woman. She was a well-known, respected leader. Not only that, she was known as a prophetess, one who spoke for God or who was inspired by God. He should have recognized that the message came from God. If Barak respected Deborah to the point that he wanted her as his “good luck charm”, he should have recognized that the source of her message, God, was where the real power came from.

Deborah did not shame Barak; he brought shame upon himself. This is an important distinction. In our own lives, or in the lives of public figures, disobedience or ungodliness inevitably brings shame. But often the finger is pointed at the wrong person as the source of the shame. No one else shames someone *who has sinned*. Their own sin brings shame upon them.

6. In Deborah’s song we have a poetic description of the battle. What does it reveal about the 10,000 man army (5:2)?

“...the people willingly offered themselves—” They knew their nation was being destroyed, they volunteered. It seems logical that God worked in their hearts and drew them to Him. This was an important detail since Israel was in such disarray that there was no standing army or command in place.

7. From Judges 4:15 and 5:4-5, why was Sisera on foot and how did God hinder his army?

God brought a downpour which turned the valley into a mud hole. The battle took place during the dry season, so God brought unseasonable rains to thwart the Canaanites. The finest equipment and weapons will not stand against God. It was miraculous and it was humiliating to Jabin and his army. This victory made other kings in the region take notice of Israel’s God.

8. Who was the woman who received the honor for Sisera’s defeat, and how was she able to accomplish it (4:11, 18-21; 5:24-27)?

Jael was a part of the Kenite tribe that had been cooperating with Jabin. However, from 4:11 we learn that Heber, Jael’s husband is a descendant of Moses! Within the tribe is a family that had reason to be sympathetic to the Israelites. Sisera happened to walk into Jael’s tent. God is orchestrating the lives of men and women long before they are even born.

The Kennite women had responsibility for the tents. Due to the harsh winds and the hard, sunbaked land, “she had to have been swift and accurate in her use of the tent peg” (Robinson).

The literal translation of Deborah’s prediction about Jael is “Into the hand of a woman the Lord will sell Sisera” (Fleenor, Ziese 86). Any reader of Deborah’s story will notice how gender roles play against each other in the account. Even simple words are implicit. We understand “the hand that rocks the cradle...” and the gracefulness of a woman’s hands. A woman’s hands driving a tent peg into a man’s temple just don’t fit the picture. However the stereotypes about women are very different from the reality about women. My grandmother’s hands were strong and rough from hard work on the farm. Yet childhood memories of my hand in hers are sweet. Her cracked, callused hands were beautiful to me.

III Deborah as a strong mother.

Besides a judge and leader, Deborah was a homemaker. There is no record that Deborah bore children other than her own words: “...I, Deborah a mother in Israel, arose, arose a mother in Israel” Judges 5:7. This seems to be the simple answer, yet commentator’s debate about whether Deborah actually had children. It’s possible she was referring to herself figuratively as a mother of Israel because she was a great leader and this is not the usual description of a mother. We might come to a different conclusion as we read this story through a different lens- as women.

Let’s observe Deborah the homemaker: the wife of Lappidoth, a mother in Israel from Judges 4-5. Fill in the chart with characteristics that we can observe about Deborah in her various roles to see if any are different from those needed to be a homemaker and mother. Feel free to add details to the list or add the characteristics you see. Check the boxes where the characteristic would correspond to each role Deborah fulfilled.

| Scripture | Characteristic | Judge | Leader | Homemaker |
|-----------|---------------------------------------|-------|--------|-----------|
| 4:4 | Prophetess (inspired by God, poetess) | | | |
| 4:4 | Leader of Israel | | | |
| 4:5 | Settled disputes | | | |
| 4:6 | Messenger, used by God | | | |
| 4:6 | Tactical advisor | | | |
| 4:8 | Mentor | | | |
| 4:9 | Discerning | | | |
| 4:10 | Courageous | | | |
| 4:14 | Encourager | | | |
| 5:1-3 | Worshipper of God | | | |
| 5:7 | Rescuer | | | |
| 5:9 | Compassionate | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |

The fact is, most women have extraordinary strength. Anyone had a baby recently? There are obvious, God-given differences between males and females. But leading a company, a platoon or a country may actually be easier in some ways than raising a family. Needless to say, whatever role a godly woman fulfills, she will be a woman of strength and a leader wherever God has placed her.

IV. Deborah as an example:

Consider your own life and the challenges you face in light of Deborah's example.

1. Circle the descriptions that fit you as well as Deborah, as described in Judges 4 and 5:
a woman, one who spoke for God, a wife, a leader, a judge, and a mother.
2. What would it mean to any woman to realize that life in your village, or town, "*had ceased*"? Deborah and Jael knew that war is horrible. But they also knew that people (women and children especially) living in subjection to an evil, ungodly nation suffered unspeakable horrors. Killing a man "who raped and pillaged God's people" (Smith) brought a quick end to other violent acts. Routing an evil enemy is a 'necessary evil' for a society to return to 'life'.
3. Do we face an enemy as formidable as Jabin and his army?

4. Consider 1 Peter 5:8-11 and 1 Thessalonians 5:16-21

- What forces are against us today and what kind of equipment are they outfitted with?

Peter describes our enemy with the words "prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour."

A lion is strong, courageous, stealthy, 'hungry', ferocious. The devil is like that and as the enemy of God, he is hungry for souls, in a never-ending quest to usurp the Lord of the Universe. His roaring might be the cries of unhappiness and anguish from those he deceives.

What kind of strategies must we use, as women, to protect ourselves and our homes?

Peter suggests that we resist the devil and stand firm in faith. We need to remember that we are called by God, and by His grace we are rescued from the fate of those whom Satan claims. We're told to stand "firm and steadfast" because God is able to make us strong.

Paul encouraged the Thessalonians, who were persecuted, that joyfulness and thankfulness bless God and turn the enemy away. These attitudes are part of a Christian's protection because Satan cannot endure this evidence of the Spirit. He also warned us to be true to the Apostle's teaching, to "test everything" ...in other words, we should be wise. Remember that the devil is the deceiver and we need to remain alert to protect ourselves from deception. As we hold on to everything that is good, we are resisting evil.

This kind of living is an example in our homes and in our communities. Godly living results in blessings, even when things are not comfortable, even when there are problems or even tragedies. Those who rely on God are able to withstand the trials with grace, something that the world does not offer.

Key Question: What is happening in your community, your church, or your family that demand your courageous leadership? Will you step up to the challenge?

For additional reflection

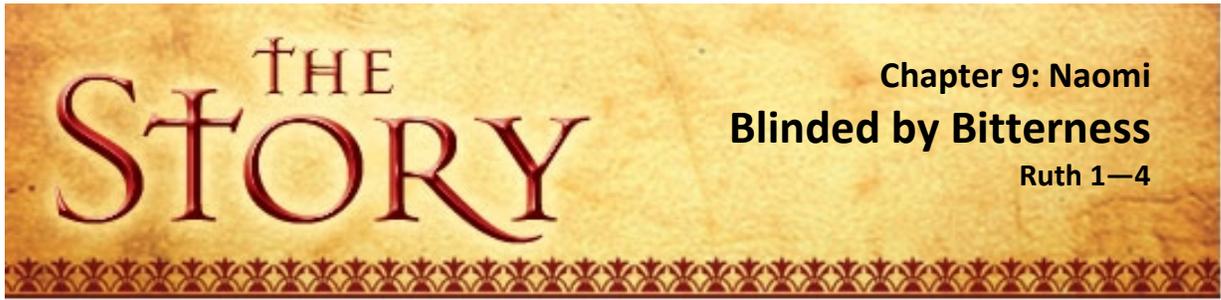
We, or our loved ones, may face a lethal threat. It may come through an accident, an illness, or even an attack by an enemy. But the same God who supported Deborah as a homemaker and a leader in Israel is the God who delivers us through any peril.

Note the comfort or advice found in these passages from God's word:

- In the beginning remember: **Jeremiah 10:23-**
- When you face evil remember: **Psalm 23:4-**
- In the midst of the battle, remember: **2 Corinthians 4:16-18-**
- As you endure to the end remember: **James 1:12-**

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Naomi lived during the period of the Judges, probably in the time of Gideon. Her story is told in the Book of Ruth. Here in the middle of the history of God’s chosen people, we find a narrative that spotlights the real life struggles of a family in the tribe of Judah. The bitter trials Naomi and Ruth endured were tempered by God’s kindnesses. But Naomi had to get past the bitterness to see them.

When a famine made life unbearable in Bethlehem, Elimelech took his family about 30 miles away to Moab. During the 10 years they lived there, Elimelech died and left his wife, Naomi, with their two sons. They married Moabite women, Orpha and Ruth, they also died. Naomi was in “triple jeopardy—a woman, without a family, and in a foreign land” (Koop). To be sure, Naomi had suffered affliction. But the biggest affliction may have been that in her state of disappointment and sorrow, she blamed God.

I. Naomi’s hard life. Ruth 1

1. On the left side, list the trials and sorrows that Naomi experienced from Ruth 1.

On the right side, list any blessings that might have been overlooked during the ordeal.

- v. 1 A famine in the land drove them to Moab.
- v. 3 Elimelech died.
- v. 5 Mahlon and Kilion died
- v. 7 She had to make the return trip to Bethlehem
- v. 8-12 She had to part with her daughters-in-law. She felt there was no hope; she was too old to remarry and provide them with husbands
- v. 13-16 She felt that God was against her.
- v. 19-20 Humiliation, she stirred up the town with her return
- v. 21 “I went away full but came back empty”

Life: They were able to live there.

Orpha and Ruth remained. Naomi was not alone
The famine had ended.

They loved her and wanted to stay with her.
Companionship: was not alone in her grief: they shared her grief.

Ruth was determined to stay with her.

She had the companionship of the women.

God was with her. She was not empty; Ruth was with her even though Naomi didn’t realize what that meant. (It was the beginning of the barley season.)

2. What overwhelming emotion does Naomi express from v. 13 and v. 20-21?

Bitterness. She felt God's hand was against her. Her name meant "Pleasant" or "Delightful". But to her, life was the opposite of that, so much that she wanted to change her name to "Mara" which means harsh, piercing, virulent bitterness.

4. Naomi and her family lived in Moab "about 10 years". From what you know of the living conditions during the time of the judges, how would the losses that Naomi experienced compare to the losses her peers might well have been suffering?

The time of the judges was violent and hard. Because of their cycles of disobedience and return to God, all the Israelites suffered. Many Israelite women had suffered great losses.

5. Would the fact that Naomi still had Orpha and Ruth in her life make up for her losses?

Any woman who has lost her husband and children knows that nothing can make up for such a loss. However, a wise woman will allow God to minister to her during the time of intense grief and mourning. We aren't given an exact time frame to know the duration of Naomi's mourning. But going home to the land of Judah soon changed her circumstances.

The reader of Ruth has the pleasure of knowing but not experiencing Naomi's trials. One can read and know that God has been with Naomi all along and that He is her hope. We can read the love story between Boaz and Ruth and enjoy the happy ending. But the question is, how do we go through the tough times in our lives. Can we keep the hope we have in God at the forefront? Or will we be like Naomi?

II. Naomi heads for home. Ruth 1:6-19

The Moabite gods were Chemosh, to whom they offered human sacrifices; and Baal-Peor, for whom they practiced sexual rites of worship. In her despondence, Naomi was willing to send Orpha and Ruth back to their own people to find husbands, even though those people worshipped idols.

This action of Naomi offends the sensibilities of evangelistic Christians. How could Naomi so reject her God that she would be willing to send them off to idol worship and all that went with it? (Salvation was not a concept that the Israelite nation understood in the same way we do. As yet, they had no knowledge of the Savior, nor did they understand redemption from sin.) Several things may be in the back of Naomi's mind:

1. Jews and Moabites were not to mix. Maybe Naomi felt that God was punishing her because of their relationship.
2. She felt burdened for them. According to her customs, she would need to provide husbands for them. She had no way to do that, nor could she provide for their care.
3. Mothers are accustomed to the role of caretakers for most of their lives. It is a difficult adjustment when aging or a situation in life leaves them unable to fulfill that role any longer and it's even worse when the *children need to take care of Mom*. Often it is not seen as a relief, and some want to hang onto to that control. Emotionally, it is easier to break the relationship off than it is to allow the roles to switch.
4. During deep despair and depression, our thinking becomes muddled and decision making abilities are impaired. Who sees a benevolent God when one is sinking into a black hole?

1. What reveals the kind of relationship that Naomi had with Orpha and Ruth? (1:8-13)

In his book OPENING UP RUTH, Jonathan Prime suggests three things about Naomi that would have been attractive to Ruth and Orpha:

- a. **She was a woman of prayer:** Verses 8 & 9 reveals two prayers “May the Lord...” Although she was desperate, *she was not faithless.*
- b. **She believed that any good thing is a gift of the Lord’s kindness.** She recognized that if they were to find husbands it would be a kindness from the Lord.
- c. **She acted unselfishly (in her own mind).** She knew she couldn’t provide for them and she didn’t want them to sacrifice their future. She felt they would have better chances with their own people. The only thing she could give was her blessing because that was all she had left.
- d. **She had a balanced view of God.** She knew the Lord is Sovereign and that he disciplines his people. (This may imply that she knew the move to Moab had been a bad move.)
- e. **She had an attractive faith.** Ruth and Orpha clung to her and had to be convinced to leave.

2. What words made Naomi realize that Ruth was determined to accompany her? (1:16-18)

Your journey-my journey

Your home-my home

Your people-my people

Your God-my God

Your future-my future

This is an excellent picture of the attitude we should have when accept Christ as our Savior.

Ruth was ready to *change her whole identity*. She was leaving everything about her old life behind and was *converting* to a completely new life. We should have this same mind of conversion.

3. Why would Ruth prefer to stay with Naomi rather than return to her own people?

Ruth’s faithfulness is a picture of God’s faithfulness. Ruth’s kindness is a picture of God’s kindness. She is not only a representative of those things, she *was* Naomi’s security. She as a devoted companion to Naomi, even after life changed for the better. Her kindness was demonstrated by how she willingly worked to provide for herself and was in no way a burden, and she also provided for Naomi through her labor.

III. Naomi discovers a new life. Ruth 1:19—4.

Wearing bitterness on her sleeve, Naomi arrived at Bethlehem and with Ruth, started to find a way to live. She must have had a dwelling she could return to, or she was given shelter. But here at least, she was among family, and God soon brought new blessings to the women. Ruth, determined to help her mother-in-law, went to glean in the fields of Boaz. Boaz was impressed with Ruth and in a just a few days life dramatically changed for the two women.

1. What was Naomi’s response when Ruth reported Boaz’s kindness to them, 2:17-20; 3:1-4?

When Naomi saw the grain that Ruth brought, she inquired about it. An *ephah* is almost a bushel-enough grain for two people for about a week. This was probably a generous amount for a gleaner to collect.

“The Lord bless him! He has not stopped showing his kindness.” This could have been a ‘light bulb moment’ for Naomi. I can imagine she said this as a cheer...possibly a shout of joy. God HAD NOT FORGOTTEN HER AFTER ALL...

“...to the living and the dead....That man is our close relative; he is one of our kinsman-redeemers” Immediately Naomi realizes that this is God’s work. God is honoring her dead husband as well as showing kindness to Naomi and Ruth.

Note that Naomi said “he is one of OUR kinsman-redeemers”. She clearly claimed Ruth as her own.

Naomi used the word *hesed*, translated as kindness in the NIV. *Hesed* is much more than kindness. It is a rich and full term describing “God’s love, mercy, grace, kindness, goodness, benevolence, loyalty and covenant faithfulness” (Block).

This is a direct answer to Naomi’s prayer for Ruth in 1:8.

The “kinsman redeemer” (*goel* or *gaal*) term referred to God’s instructions about care for the widows and destitute relatives. The duties of the kinsman, according to Daniel Block in his commentary on Judges and Ruth, are:

1. to ensure that the hereditary property of the clan never passes out of the clan.
2. to maintain the freedom of individuals within the clan by *buying back* those who have sold themselves into slavery because of poverty.
3. to track down and execute murderers of near relatives
4. to receive restitution money on behalf of a deceased victim of a crime.
5. to ensure that justice is served in a lawsuit involving a relative.

The Israelite provision for *goel* is based upon an assumption of corporate solidarity and the sanctity of the family/clan. The custom of redemption was designed to maintain the wholeness and health of family relationships, even after the person has died.

Once again we see a template for our saving relationship in Christ—an explicit picture of the work of redemption in Jesus Christ. The kinsman redeemer assumes a person or property, that “belongs to the family”, has been *lost* or taken. So he must be *bought* back in order to be restored to the rightful place or owner. God is our rightful owner and Jesus bought us back with his life.

Because the redeemer literally saves lives, as much as it has to do with continuing the bloodline, he represents the Savior. However, there can be no heirs when the people capable of bearing children have all died. This was, and still is, very important to the Jews. At this point in time, though, God used the kinsman redeemer to protect the Jewish bloodlines that carried His Treasure.

2. What did Boaz do to accept his responsibility for Naomi, 4:9-13?

He began a relationship with Ruth and then went through the legal steps necessary to make her his wife. Note that Ruth was a Moabite. This was a lesson to the Jews that the kindness of God reaches the whole world.

4. According to the women, how was Naomi blessed 4:14-16? The women proclaim that God has blessed Naomi with Ruth, who is better than seven sons! Naomi receives the child of Boaz and Ruth and cared for him as her own.

Naomi's old life, with her husband and sons, was gone. But she discovered that God simply made her a new life—complete with family, rich in love. Her daughter-in-law, Ruth, was proclaimed to be better than seven sons—not better than her own two beloved sons—but better than seven *more* sons. God had provided for Naomi through Ruth, better than she could have imagined, at such a time and place in her life.

IV. Nuggets of gold from Naomi's experiences.

➤ **A kind and loving Father, understands human expressions of grief and sorrow.**

We've looked at Naomi's complaints to her daughters-in-law and to her friends in Bethlehem. Job and the Psalmist said it this way:

I loathe my very life; therefore I will give free rein to my complaint and speak out in the bitterness of my soul. Job 10:1

Listen, O God, to my prayer! Do not ignore my appeal for mercy! Pay attention to me and answer me! I am so upset and distressed, I am beside myself... Psalm 55:1,2 (NET Bible)

Naomi came to some false conclusions during her time of mourning.

1. What was Naomi's false conclusion about God, 1:13, 21?

v. 13 "The Lord's hand has gone out against me!" The Hebrew *yawd* is translated 'hand'. It means power or strength. Naomi accuses; 'God's power is against me'.

v. 21 "The Lord has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me." Once again she maintains that God is using His power against her. She even states that He brought the misfortune. But the term "Almighty" shows her resentment. She feels God has used his power against her *when He could have just as easily used His power to make her life good.*

2. What was her false conclusion about herself, 1:20?

She was so dejected that this bitterness was now her *persona*. It's not just that life was bad, she was defining herself by the disappointments in life. Our circumstances don't define who we are. God defines us as His creation, beloved and valued by Him, despite the circumstances we find ourselves in.

There are times when God was reviled by the complaints of his followers.

Now the people complained about their hardships in the hearing of the LORD, and when he heard them his anger was aroused. Then fire from the LORD burned among them and consumed some of the outskirts of the camp. Numbers 11:1

3. What is the difference between an acceptable complaint and one that angers God? God sees the heart. Naomi's words reveal that she has not rejected God, even though she feels rejected. A child

who is angry at her parent may shout and cry and complain. But this will not anger the parent *unless* the language is offensive, or the actions are rebellious.

➤ **Treasures from God are often hidden in the depths of sorrow. In His time, God will reveal a new life and unimagined kindness.**

1. Ruth was a treasure that Naomi didn't recognize. What treasure have you discovered through suffering?

2. Noemi had no knowledge of it, but what was the treasure from Noemi's life that blessed all mankind? Ruth 4:22; Luke 3

The child, Obed, is the grandfather of David. Boaz carried Jesus in his bloodline and Ruth bore an ancestor.

3. What treasure do we carry that can bless others, even while we are in the midst of our own suffering?

Jesus, our Hope and our Savior. Don't think that God is any less interested in your life just because you live today. He is MORE interested in you: He dwells *in you*. Grieving is natural and reparative but bitterness is not. Larry Crabb writes: "The demand to walk a path with a predictable outcome is an urge of the flesh. It needs to die." A root of bitterness threatened to take over Naomi's life. But God changed her circumstances in a most unpredictable way. In our grief we need to turn to God not bitterness.

Key Question: How will you walk toward blessing instead of bitterness when great tragedy or sorrow comes into your life?

For additional reflection:

Read and meditate on these passages that refer to our redemption in Jesus Christ:

Job 19:23-27

Isaiah 52:3

Galatians 4:4-6

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Hannah's story is one of the most well-known and beloved accounts in the Bible. Chapter 10 of *The Story* introduces us to the first king of Israel, and to Samuel, who held him accountable to God. But long before Samuel did his great, godly work, Hannah, his mother did a equally great and godly work— she learned to delight in the Lord.

The story of Hannah took place just a few years before God finally allowed Israel to have a king. God's people had not just wandered away from him, they had turned their back on him and the result was a "period which is recorded as one of the darkest hours of Israel's history" (DeMoss). *"Everyone did what was right in their own eyes"* Judges 21:25.

She was the only woman in the Old Testament who is recorded as praying. While Hannah's situation and faithfulness were similar to Sarah's, prayers by Sarah are never mentioned. It must have delighted God that Hannah sought Him.

I. Hannah's Plight. 1 Samuel 1:1-8.

From our study of the women of the Bible we already know how important it was to bear children. It was a woman's desire, as well as her duty, to provide her husband with children, preferably sons. An Israelite woman also dreamed of birthing the Messiah. Hannah's plight prevented her from any of these pleasures.

Like Sarah, Hannah longed for the fulfillment of having children and leading her own home. For a Jewish family, children were a symbol of God's blessing. She was missing out on one of life's greatest blessings.

1. Describe Hannah's family life. (v. 2-7)

Elkanah and Hannah were not like other Israelites, they truly followed their God. Elkanah had two wives. Peninnah was jealous because he favored Hannah, so Peninnah provoked Hannah by ridiculing her because she had no children.

They lived in Ramah which was 15 miles from Shiloh. They must have been fairly well off to make the yearly journey to Shiloh and from the offerings they gave when they presented Samuel to Eli.

2. How did Elkanah demonstrate his faithfulness to God? (v. 3) . He was a Levite from the tribe of Kohath, whose ministry was to care for the furniture of the tabernacle, including the ark of the covenant (Numbers 3:30-31). The various families in the clan would take turns fulfilling their duties.

“Year after year” Elkanah faithfully participated in the annual feasts. He worshipped God, obeyed His laws, and made the prescribed offerings and sacrifices.

3. How did Elkanah demonstrate his love for Hannah? (v. 5,8)

Elkanah loved Hannah more than Peninnah and gave her double portions of meat on the feast days. He tried to comfort her in a clumsy way when he asked, “Aren’t I better than ten sons?” (Seven is a number to represent perfection or completeness. Ten is said to mean ‘the entirety, nothing else is needed’. He was basically saying, “Don’t I complete you?”

4. Why had Hannah remained childless? (v. 5) “...the Lord had closed her womb.”

“...he closed her womb, but opened to us the doors on the values the woman possessed and for us to see the riches of her faith” (Chrysostom, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Vol. IV. 195)

5. How did it affect her? (v. 7) “She wept and would not eat.”

The emotional pain of barrenness, combined with the provocation of Peninnah had become unbearable for Hannah. One year, during the annual feast in Shiloh, Hannah took advantage of her proximity to the Lord’s temple. Her choice was to take her plight to the Lord. This choice alone makes Hannah a worthy example for anyone who carries a burden of pain. Our pain should point us to the One who will provide perfect healing, *if we will let Him*.

II. Hannah’s Petition. 1 Samuel 1:9-18.

1. At what point in the festivities did Hannah decide to take her sorrow to the Lord? (v. 9)

When they had finished eating. She was not enjoying the festivities, and she couldn’t eat. She had had enough. The meal was a celebration of God’s blessings of fruitfulness to the family. This would have rewarded Peninnah and further humiliated Hannah.

2. What was Hannah’s emotional state as she prayed? (v. 10)

“In bitterness of soul”, with much weeping. This is the same term that has been used upon the death of a child. (Ruth 1:13,20; 2 Kings 4:27; Zechariah 12:10). God is the only one who can lift this kind of sorrow.

3. Besides prayer, what else did she do before God? (v. 11)

Hannah made a vow (promise or pledge) to the “Lord Almighty”. She recognizes God’s authority over her circumstances. She has the courage to ask for a son but she also has the courage to promise that the son will be returned to God if he “remembers”. “Remembers” means to ‘take notice’, ‘consider’ or ‘pay attention to’. Unlike other women, Bergen says, she chooses to rely on God rather than on crafty schemes (cf. Genesis 16:2).

Hannah understood something we should all understand: she realized, or considered, her own position. She referred to herself as “your handmaiden” or “your servant” three times. As she acknowledged her own helplessness, in effect she lifted up God as she humbled herself. Especially in her situation supplication to God was her only recourse because only God has power over life, and Hannah had no right or power to force God to do anything. Nor do we.

Recognizing God’s place then, Hannah reveals her heart. The vow was *not* a bargain. With the promise she makes to God she says, in effect, that she was giving up the “desired son” that she might not have, *and she was also giving up* a living child that God might give her. Her vow was an act of surrender of her own desires to God.

4. As Hannah prayed, what did Eli observe and what did he think she was doing? (12, 13)
He saw her lips moving and thought she was drunk. Eli was elderly and nearly blind. He was also nearly spiritually blind. He did not recognize true seeking and surrender to God. (Later he was also unable to recognize that God was calling Samuel.) Eli was not necessarily in tune with God, even though he was God’s servant.

This may also imply that because of the moral decay of Israel, drunkenness at these festivals might have been common. Eli would have been fulfilling his duties to guard the temple from the ‘partiers’.

Hannah however was not disrespectful to Eli in any way and fully recognized him as the priest who was for her a representative of God.

5. Fill in the blanks and note three things about Hannah’s prayer:

Hannah was praying in her heart and her lips were moving but her voice was not heard. 1:12

....I was pouring out my soul to the Lord. 1:15b

...I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief. 1:16b

True worship begins inwardly as a matter of the heart rather than for show. Such passionate prayer might have been extraordinary in a time of such ungodliness among the Israelites.

6. What was Eli’s answer to Hannah? (v. 17) *Go in peace and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him.*

The words of Eli are not necessarily taken to be a promise or prophecy that Hannah would have a child, rather that he acknowledges his mistake and hopes God will bless the faithful, yet contrite, woman.

7. How was Hannah changed after the time of prayer? (v. 18)

Once again, humbly responding to Eli as his servant, she went on her way. While she may not have been rejoicing, we’re told that she *ate something and was no longer downcast*. Through her time of prayer she had resolved her deep anguish and grief, and left her burdens in God’s hands.

“A woman was not so unimportant in Israel as to be considered incapable of communicating with God. Significantly, Yahweh was also portrayed as a deity who listened to a woman and answered her prayer” (Bergen).

Eli saw Hannah’s lips; God saw her heart. The result of this outpouring in prayer was a change of her very being. *Before* Eli pronounced his blessing upon her, God had already worked in Hannah’s heart. When she took her pain and anguish to the Lord, He helped her realize what her true need was. She needed to be content with God *Himself*. Her vow to God revealed that she was no longer seeking her own selfish desire; instead she was offering an unselfish sacrifice. The son, whether a desire in her heart, or a baby in her arms, would belong to God.

III. Hannah’s Praise. 1 Samuel 1:19—2:11.

What would this narrative about God’s ability to close a womb and open a womb be important for Israel to know? Beside the fact that it would verify Samuel’s place as a prophet and leader, it also carried a message to God’s broken people. *For those who cared to notice* God was proving that He was in control. The miraculous way God placed mighty men in their midst should have been for them a proof of His power and faithfulness to His people. These things should have helped them desire to be men and women who pleased God and to honor the leaders he placed among them. Their hearts should have been moved, as Hannah’s was, with his Almighty Power. Sadly, they took Him for granted, as they did the prophets He lent them.

Soon Hannah gave birth to a son they named Samuel. Elkanah and Hannah, with great delight, fulfilled the vow Hannah had made. The generous offering and the joyous prayer of praise gives testimony to the condition of Hannah’s heart. Before she gave Samuel to the Lord, she had given her heart to the Lord.

Hannah’s prayer expresses her complete delight in the Lord. The prayer is one of the longest in the Old Testament and lifts up God’s name, Yahweh, 18 times. Although Hannah was not an ancestor of Jesus, the prayer, or praise song, contains the first reference to the Messiah:

He will give strength to his King and exalt the horn of his annointed. 1 Samuel 2:10b
(*mashiach* is translated ‘his annointed’, NIV, and is ‘the Messiah’)

Hannah’s prayer of praise was also a model for Mary’s praise song in Luke 2. Both women understood that their first-born sons belonged to God.

In *The Remarkable Women of the Bible*, Elizabeth George outlines the content of Hannah’s praise song.

1. From 1 Samuel 2:1-10, note the attributes of God that Hannah extols:

2:1 I rejoice in Your salvation.

2:2 No one is holy like the Lord.

2:2 There (is no) rock like our God.

2:3 The Lord is the God of knowledge.

2:4 Only the Lord has the power to make the mighty weak....and the humble exalted.

2:9-10 The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken in pieces.

2. How old was Samuel when Hannah took him to Eli? (v. 1:24-29)

Three years old. She waited until he was weaned. The Israelite women nursed their children approximately three years, in part because of the lack of clean water supply.

Hannah made her vow for life. Most vows were temporary, including the Nazarite vows that were made by the Israelites to show devotion to God (Numbers 6:2-20). Although Old Testament vows were voluntary and were not made to obligate other people, between Hannah's prayers and influence over her young son, and God's work in his heart, Samuel served God his entire life as a prophet and a leader of Israel.

Hannah had gone "before the Lord" with her request. Samuel was presented *to the Lord* (1:24) and he remained "before the Lord" always (2:11,18,21).

3. What shows Hannah's steadfast love and care for her son, even from a distance? (2:18-19)

She made robes for him and brought them to him each year *when she went up with her husband to offer the annual sacrifice*.

4. How did God further bless Elkanah and Hannah? (2:21)

She had three sons and two daughters.

Everything about Hannah's life provides inspiration and example for women today. The fact that she had deep, unmet longings was not wrong. Her story has shown us a way to handle our deepest unmet desires.

IV. Our Path from Petition to Praise.

1. Read Psalm 17:1-3.

What do you think are the deeper longings of mankind that only God can see?

Think about your deepest longings. Have you asked God about them?

Hannah called God her "rock" several times, which brings to mind strength and refuge. Only God can meet the deepest needs. Other people- friends and family- may love us and care. But some needs require God, our Rock and our Helper.

2. Read James 4:2b-3 and Matthew 6:18-21.

Why doesn't God give us what we ask for sometimes?

3. Jesus reminds us in Matthew 6:25-34 not to worry about earthly things because the Father knows what we need to sustain earthly life. Is it wrong to ask God about earthly things? Why or why not? (cf. Matthew 6:11)

4. Read Matthew 7:7-11.

What kind of gifts does God give?

Are the things we ask good for us?

In this scripture Jesus says to “ask”. What requests would God be delighted to answer?

God answered Hannah’s heartfelt prayer by providing for her deepest need, the need to *delight in the Lord*. If God were to personally ask you to trade in your deepest longings for a deeper relationship with Him, would you accept?

5. Hannah’s story ends with a song of praise. Create your own expression of praise, or write down words from a praise song that are meaningful to you.

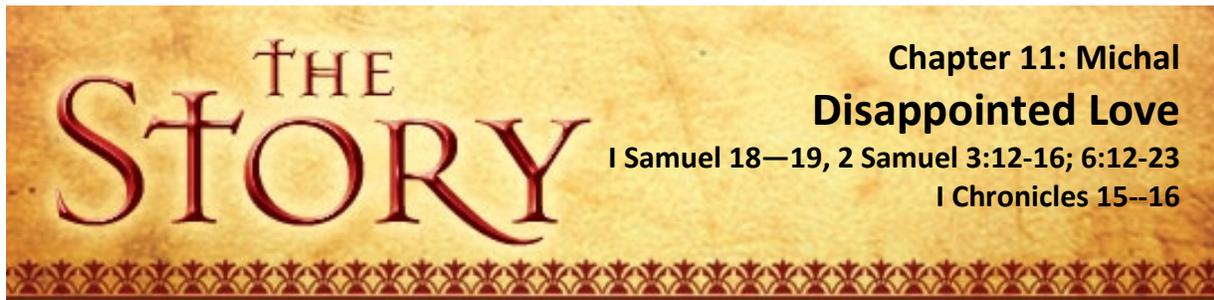
Key Question: What area of worry and want in your life will you exchange for delight in the Lord

For additional reflection:

Read Matthew the first four beatitudes from Matthew 5:7-6. Compare them to Hannah’s praise song in I Samuel 2:1-11. What are the common truths.

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Samuel, a righteous man of God, anointed and mentored two kings of Israel, Saul and David. During his lifetime he saw both of them disappoint their families, their people and their God. In chapter 11 of The Story, we read about Saul, Michal, and David; all sought the wrong things through intrigue, passion and selfishness. A father should have loved his daughter; a husband should have loved his wife. As His representatives, the two kings should have loved God and each other. Instead, they were at war. Perhaps Michal was the biggest loser; she was their pawn, the cast-off and the trophy. But broken hearts don't have to stay broken.

David was king of Israel about 1000 years before Jesus appeared on earth. If Jesus had come during David's time, what message might he have had for Michal? He might have told the teenaged girl who fell in love with the handsome warrior to guard her heart. He might have told the 20-something Michal not to hang on to the brokenness of life, but to find healing in the One whose love is true.

To understand Michal's situation we must look at the two men who most impacted her life.

I. Saul and David.

Saul and David began as friends. David was a confidant of Saul, a musician whose music soothed him in stressful times, and he was also a friend of Jonathan, Saul's son. As Saul disobeyed God, the relationship changed.

1. What can we understand about Saul's mind and spirit from the following verses?

- 1 Samuel 15:10-11, 27

God took the kingdom of Israel away from him because of his disobedience

- 1 Samuel 16:14

The Spirit of the Lord had departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord tormented him.

Evil- *ra* (Hebrew) (adjective)

1) bad, evil, disagreeable, malignant, unpleasant, (giving pain, unhappiness, misery), displeasing, worse than, worst (comparison), sad, unhappy

Or "an injurious spirit"; cf. NLT "a tormenting spirit." The phrase need not refer to an evil, demonic spirit. The Hebrew word translated "evil" may refer to the character of the spirit or to its effect upon Saul. If the latter, another translation option might be "a mischief-making spirit." (Net Bible.com) "It was from the Lord in the sense that God permitted this spirit to enter Saul when he took his Holy Spirit away from him" (Smith 216). When Saul rejected God, God withdrew from him.

- 1 Samuel 16:23

Whenever the spirit from God came upon Saul, David would take his harp and play. Then relief would come to Saul: he would feel better, and the evil spirit would leave him.

- 1 Samuel 18:7-9

Saul was angry and jealous when David received praise for his courage and victories. He started to ‘keep a jealous eye’ on David.

- 1 Samuel 18:10-11

Saul attacked David with his spear, intending to ‘pin him to the wall’.

2. Describe David from the following passages:

- 1 Samuel 16:12

David was ‘ruddy’ and handsome.

- 1 Samuel 16:13

The Spirit of the Lord came on him in power.

- 1 Samuel 16:18

He knew how to play the harp, he is brave, a warrior, he speaks well and was a fine-looking man.

- 1 Samuel 17:34-37

David had killed a lion, and a bear to rescue his sheep.

- 1 Samuel 18:12

David was able to get away from Saul’s attacks.

The more Saul’s jealousy consumed him, the more the Lord led David through one victory after another. From 1 Samuel 18:16 we know the people of Israel were captivated by David—none more than Michal, Saul’s youngest daughter.

Saul had offered his older daughter, Merab, to David as a reward for slaying Goliath. David humbly declined, saying that he was not worthy to be a king’s son-in-law (1 Samuel 18:17-18).

But Michal ‘was in love with David’ (1 Samuel 18:20). The account does not relate that *David loved Michal*, but since it seems that they told Saul together, he did not deny it. David also performed courageous deeds to fulfill Saul’s eccentric demands to gain her hand in marriage. The duration of their short time together as man and wife was troubled by the hostility between father and husband.

I. Michal in the Middle.

1. From the following passages in 1 Samuel note how the actions of each man affected Michal.

(Time may not permit such a thorough study of the interplay between the relationships but briefly review the events that put Michal in such a tenuous position.)

| | Saul and Michal | David and Michal |
|-------------|--|--|
| 14:49 | She was Saul's youngest daughter. She had 3 brothers and one sister. | |
| 18:20 | Saul was pleased that Michal loved David | Michal loved David. We only know that David did not protest the marriage, he might have seen it as a political benefit. |
| 18:21 | Saul wanted to use Michal to "snare David into the hand of the Philistines". | |
| 18:22-23 | Saul ordered his attendants to convince David that it was important to become the king's son-in-law. | David appeared to need convincing. He maintained that he was too poor to be the king's son-in-law. |
| 18:24-27a | Saul wanted the payment of 100 foreskins of the Philistines. (He hoped the man his daughter loved would be killed. Note the violence and savagery of the request. Such a bride price does nothing to honor the bride or the marriage. It was demented. | David agreed to the request but showed even more savage tendencies by bringing home 200 foreskins. This could imply a great love for Michal, but more likely it implied contempt for Saul's request. |
| 18:27b-29 | Saul gave Michal to David in marriage but was more afraid of him as he realized the Lord was with David. They remained enemies the rest of their lives. | David married Saul's daughter but became even more the object of Saul's fear and wrath. Michal's love for either man unavoidably put her in danger. |
| 18: 29-19:1 | Saul's military reputation declined and David's increased. He openly planned to kill or have his son-in-law killed, including asking his son Jonathan to kill him. | David was now in danger of Saul's family and attendants. This put anyone who loved him, including his wife Michal (and friend Jonathan) in danger. |
| 19:9-10 | In a fit of depression Saul hurled a spear at David. His hatred had grown to the point that he would personally seek to kill his son-in-law. | David escaped but was now a fugitive from his father-in-law. |
| 19:11 | Saul sent men to David's home to kill him, involving his daughter in the plot. | Michal warned David that Saul's men were on orders to kill him. |
| 19:12-17 | Saul challenged his daughter by asking why she deceived him. In effect he expected her to betray the man she loved and married. | Michal devised a scheme to protect David from her father's men. When her father confronted her she lied rather than boldly stand up to her father. She was torn between the two. |
| 25:42-44 | Saul gave Michal to Paltiel | David had married two other women and there is no record of any efforts to have Michal with him. |

2. From the details above, what kind of disappointments did Michal experience?

The scriptures say that Michal loved David. Her time as his wife would have been filled with strife and disappointment instead of joy in the love of her new husband.

Michal's father used her as his pawn in a most inhumane way. He had no regard for her life or her feelings as the wife of David. She had to have been fearful and angry.

She was given to another man. This is stated as a fact in scripture and there seems to have been no consideration of Michal's wishes.

There is no record of any effort by David to keep or rescue his wife. It is logical that she would have been grieved by this since she had loved him.

David would have been anointed by Samuel around the age of 15-20. He was probably 18-20 when he slew Goliath. *The war between the house of Saul and the house of David lasted a long time* (1 Samuel 3:1). David and Michal were probably apart for around 8 years. When David gained more power his rule as king of all Israel was imminent; he sent for Michal.

Psalms 18 was written to celebrate David's victory over Saul and his armies. It is a personal expression that celebrates God's faithfulness to the faithful. But David's spiritual reality was not completely consistent with the reality of his relationships with women.

3. Read 2 Samuel 3:12-15. Why did David demand that Michal return to be his wife?

James E. Smith in his commentary on I and II Samuel suggest these reasons:

- 1) affection for the wife of his youth
- 2) to force Saul's son, Ish-Bosheth, to reverse the humiliation which had been inflicted on him by Saul.
- 3) to solidify his claims to the throne by reestablishing his ties with the house of Saul, (through Michal)
- 4) the recognition that a son by Michal would unite the two royal houses, (thereby strengthening David's reign)

What does Paltiel's reaction imply? He loved Michal and during their time she had endeared herself to him, in spite of her previous feelings for David.

4. What other relationships did David have with women? (2 Sam. 5:13-16.)

He took more concubines and wives in Jerusalem, and had several children by them.

III. Broken Hearts. 2 Samuel 6.

Although David was powerful, there were still more battles to be fought before he actually became king of all Israel. Saul's death and David's lament open the book of 2 Samuel. We learn that he was 30 years old (cf. 2 Samuel 5:4). When he finally defeated the Philistines as king of Israel, his great desire was to return the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. Although God had brought David to victory, He taught him an important heart lesson.

1. Read 2 Samuel 6:1-11; I Chronicles 15:1-2

- Why was David celebrating?

He expected to have the power of the Lord in his camp. He understood what the power of God meant to his reign, and for Israel, because they would be invincible with God on their side. But David was more interested in having God on his side than he was interested in *being on God's side*.

- What cut the celebration short?

During the celebration the ark shifted and Uzzah put up his hand to steady it. This was precisely against God's instructions on handling the ark. Uzzah died immediately, and David was so upset that he left the ark at Obed-Edom. It represented a lack of knowledge of God's laws and a lack of attention to *what God wanted* on David's part. He was not just their 'talisman' for power and protection, he was their God.

- How was David's heart broken through Uzzah's death?

His ego was affected. He was angry that this happened and that his plans did not work out as he wanted. Then he was afraid. In the process of realizing what had taken place he realized who God was and that he had trifled with God. "He wasn't free to do what he liked with the ark (Carson). He had *used* God and wanted to serve himself rather than God. But God would not (and will not) be manipulated.

We know that David wrote Psalms that chronicled his adventures and his struggles. Could Psalm 20 have been written when God disciplined Israel for the mishandling of the Ark of the Covenant?

May the Lord answer you when you are in distress; may the name of the God of Jacob protect you" Psalm 20:1.

Now I know that the Lord saves his anointed; ...O Lord, save the King! Answer us when we call" Psalm 20: 6, 9.

2. Read 2 Samuel 6:12-19; I Chronicles 15—16

- Why was David celebrating?

David's heart was right before God. He had realized the mistakes he had made the first time he tried to bring the ark to Jerusalem. He was excited and joyful in the Lord. This was probably one of his highest days as a leader in Israel. "For all his flaws, he sensed God's presence. As the ark was carried into Jerusalem, David's heart was filled with joy" (Richards 141).

David might have composed Psalm 24 for the celebration. David's Psalm of thanks and praise for the return of the ark is recorded in I Chronicles 16:7-36.

Who is he, this King of glory? The Lord Almighty—he is the king of glory. Psalm 24:10

Verses 5 and verse 12 of I Samuel 6 describe the two times David celebrated. What had David learned since the ark was at the home of Obed-Edom? (1 Chronicles 15:12-15)

He had learned that Obed-Edom had been blessed because of the presence of the Lord. He discovered that they had disregarded God's instructions for handling the ark. Only the Levites should have been carrying the ark. He also realized his presumptuousness and

selfishness. God was not given the highest honor. But the second celebration was God-honoring and acceptable worship.

3. Read 2 Samuel 6:20-23; 1 Chronicles 15:28-29

- What was Michal's response to David's unrestrained worship?

The extreme difference between the responses of David and Israel, and the response of Michal is a sad truth: *So all Israel brought up the ark of the covenant of the Lord with shouts, with the sounding of rams' horns and trumpets, and of cymbals, and the playing of lyres and harps.* I Chronicles 16:28

...Michal daughter of Saul watched from a window. And when she saw King David dancing and celebrating, she despised him in her heart. I Chronicles 15:29

Once again all Israel expressed love for God and his servant David, but this time Michal saw David through her suffering and rejection. The David she loved as a teenaged girl was "a young stag. Now she saw to a romping goat". She had started as a princess, then a queen but she was still a slave." (Spangler 153,155). What David expressed to God as praise and worship must have been the height of hypocrisy to Michal. Her love for him had been immature (*eros*), and it could not handle the twists and turns her life had taken.

"... David returned home to bless his family" (I Chronicles 16:43). But when David's foot crossed the threshold Michal attacked him in the way that a wife who wants to inflict pain often resorts to. Michal insulted David's pride, worse yet—his dignity, and his worship of God. "...when all is said for her, and all allowance made, she should not have spoken to David (as she did). Michal with her heart full of war, met David with a blow in the face (Whyte).

- What was the condition of her heart?

She was broken hearted but with bitterness and self-pity. Anger, pride and self-righteousness come with victimization. But these emotions don't bring healing, instead they prolong the agony and add more negativity.

In Women: The Misunderstood Majority, Dr. Gay Hubbard cites research indicating "that women's reality centers around experiences of attachment and affiliation..." (171). If this is a reliable view even for women during Old Testament times, Michal's reality would have been distorted and chaotic. Only a deep trust in the God David loved and served would have given her some hope. Sadly, the one person she could have learned from about such a relationship with God is also one who caused of much of that chaos.

However we have seen how other women during the era endured extremely difficult and disappointing trials in life. Sarah did trust her husband's God. Deborah took the lead in her time and showed a nation how to trust God. Naomi worked through bitterness and loss by realizing God's hand was *with her* and not against her. Hannah's desperation led her to seek God in prayer. "Even victims have choices" (Spangler 155).

- How did David react?

Here Michal is called “Saul’s daughter”. At this point David may have been intolerant of any disrespect from a member of Saul’s House, no matter who it was. David’s response *“It was before the Lord, **who chose me rather than your father or anyone from his house when he appointed me ruler...**”* 2 Samuel 6:21. The fact that he did not have any relations with her guaranteed that there would never be an heir from the house of Saul who could rise to the throne.

Michal’s need for a relationship that was loving and secure clashed with David’s need to be exalted as “king”, especially in his own home.

During David’s years in exile he experienced many hardships at the hands of his enemies. David was a warrior, and he was a flawed man. He wrote many of the Psalms during these years. Michal was mistreated and disappointed; she was also a flawed person. We have no record of Michal making peace with David or with God. The record does not indicate that she and David ever shared a common relationship with God. But we know something of David’s relationship with God.

IV. Love makes the difference.

1. From the following verses note David’s attitudes and actions that would be wise for us to imitate.

Psalm 57- *Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me, for in you my soul takes refuge...*

This Psalm is said to have been written when he had fled from Saul into a cave.

Acts 13:22- *“He (God) testified concerning him: I have found David son of Jesse a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do”*

2. What truths from the following passages in John might help the broken-hearted?

1 John 3:1-2a The love that the Father has lavished on us. We are his children.

1 John 3:16-19 We know what love is...that Jesus laid down his life for us.

3. Is there any brokenness that God cannot heal? No. But healing is not an easy process.

4. Sorrow and brokenness come through many different circumstances. Sickness, death, and financial ruin are hard to face. Abuse and betrayal from people who should protect and support us are hard to face for different reasons. Which is worse and why?

Key Question: Who do you need to forgive with God’s help? Will you lay the injury at the feet of Jesus and allow Him to live your life free of the burden of bitterness?

For additional reflection:

Note the betrayal and abuse that occurs in the following verses:

Luke 22:47-48

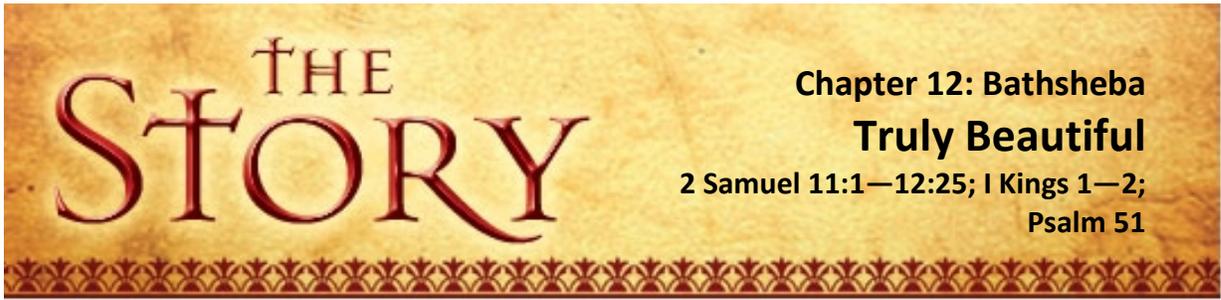
Luke 22:54-62

Luke 23:20-21

How much does Jesus really understand about betrayal and disappointment in the love of another person?

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The story of Bathsheba is as perplexing for women as Michal’s story is. Here we have another woman who is treated as an object, victimized because of David’s self-indulgence. The debate goes on: did Bathsheba seduce David by bathing on her roof, or was she innocent of any wrongdoing in the story? What we do know is that David did not flee temptation; he murdered her husband Uriah, and God struck an innocent baby with a fatal illness because of sin. These issues raise questions in our minds about how we will be dealt with for our sins, and what kind of hope we followers have in our failures.

Chapter 12 of THE STORY is devoted to the story of David and Bathsheba. David’s actions set the course of the rest of his reign as king of Israel. David saw Bathsheba, and he wanted her because she was truly beautiful. In Bathsheba’s case, physical beauty was not a blessing. But as David and Bathsheba allowed God to reclaim their lives, he turned a bad mistake into something *truly beautiful*. What God did 3000 years ago in David and Bathsheba’s lives brings us this assurance today: God can turn a bad start into something beautiful.

I. A Bad Mistake Times Two. 2 Samuel 11:1—12:25

1. In the spring time what usually occupied the kings? (11:1)

The kings go off to war. But David sent Joab out with the king’s men and the Israelite army (1 Chron. 20:18). No reason is given for David’s absentsing himself from battle.

2. In the space before the arrow briefly note the events that are related in 2 Samuel 11:2—5. After the arrow with each of the actions, note what choice Bathsheba had in the matter.

- | | |
|--|---|
| V.2 David walked along his roof and saw Bathsheba bathing. | → Bathsheba could have been inside; she was following custom. |
| V.3 David investigated to find out who she was. | → Bathsheba knew nothing about it. |
| V.4 David sent for her and slept with her. | → Bathsheba apparently had no choice. |
| V.5 Bathsheba discovered she was pregnant | → She notified David. |

3. In your opinion, was Bathsheba a victim or a party to the sin that was committed?

No mention of culpability on Bathsheba's part is ever mentioned in scripture. The following analysis comes from The Bible Reader's Companion by Larry Richards; "But the text affirms the innocence of Bathsheba. Note:

David as king should have been at war.

Bathsheba was bathing after David was in bed.

Bathsheba was in her own courtyard, visible only from the palace roof.

David took the initiative to find out who she was.

Bathsheba was forced to come to David's bed, in what was essentially rape."

One of the tallest buildings, David's palace would have been constructed with a railing or battlement around a flat roof with openings to view the area and for protection. In fact the Israelites were to build a wall around their roofs to avoid liability for a fall (Deuteronomy 22:8).

Uriah's home was located in close proximity to the palace for David to be able to see Bathsheba, bathing on her roof. Women were commanded by God's law to cleanse themselves after a period. It was common practice for a woman to bath after the day's work, at night, in the privacy of the roof top.

4. What additional atrocity did David commit after learning of Bathsheba's pregnancy? (11:14)

He tried to arrange for Uriah to sleep with Bathsheba in order to hide the pregnancy. When Uriah wouldn't cooperate, he ordered Joab to make sure he was killed on the front lines. (This evil act set a pattern in the life of Joab and he became a killer even though he was one of David's generals. Solomon eventually killed Joab to rid David's house of the guilt of innocent blood (1 Kings 2:30-33).

5. What happened to Bathsheba? (11:26-27). After the time of mourning for Uriah's death (usually seven days), David brought Bathsheba into the palace and married her. She bore a son.

6. What displeased God? (11:27b) "The thing that David did displeased God."

"David manages to disobey three of the Ten Commandments: 'You shall not covet your neighbor's wife'; 'You shall not commit adultery'; and 'You shall not murder' (Exodus 20:17, 14, 13). It is a parade example of the truths expressed in James 1:14-15: *Each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.*" (R.F. Youngblood). It causes one to wonder if James was thinking of David's sin as he wrote this passage.

Not only that, God had specifically instructed that kings *should not* have many wives (cf. Deuteronomy 17:17), and the punishment for adultery is death (Leviticus 20:10; Deuteronomy 22:22). The story of David and Bathsheba is more than anything a story about God's mercy.

II. Truth and Consequences. 2 Samuel 12:1—23; Psalm 51

God allowed almost a year to pass before he sent the prophet Nathan to confront David. One may reject God and walk in the path of sin for a time, but in His own time, God will reveal the error. With the realization of the sin comes another opportunity to make things right with God, or to continue on the path to destruction.

1. What did Nathan use to convict David of the truth of his sin? (12:1—10)

He used a parable that correctly paralleled David's actions. David thought it was true and was incensed by the exploitation of the poor man and by the self-indulgence of devouring the poor man's lamb- his only asset. David declared the thief to be worthy of death and he ordered that restitution be made.

He had pronounced the debt that was owed on **his own** account of sin, and Nathan immediately leveled the gavel on the verdict by announcing, "You, David, are the man."

2. What is the meaning behind the heartfelt words from God that Nathan related? (12:7—9)

God shows his own disappointment and heartbreak over David's sin. David had rebelled against God, who had done nothing but bless David constantly. In fact, David could have asked God to meet the needs that drove him to Bathsheba and God would have given him whatever he needed.

These words should be an encouragement and a reminder to those who profess Christ. He encourages us to pray about everything. He knows when we are in need and He is willing to hold us up and support us. These words remind us that there *is* a better choice than sin. God, nor circumstances, force a person to sin; it is simply a choice.

3. What consequences did the Lord declare? (12:11—15, 18)

Peace would not be accomplished under David's reign; he would not be able to rest from war. Sin and chaos, open to the public, would plague his own household. The son would die.

Both of these consequences were also the consequence that the people of Israel had to suffer because of David's sin.

This meant that the nation of Israel would continue to fight for existence, and they would have to endure the constant disruption from the struggles within David's own family for the throne.

David's sin would ultimately cause more sons of Israel to die. God would take David's son because he had "*made the enemies of the Lord show utter contempt*". What David did defiled the honorable work of God in eradicating cultures that were God's enemies precisely because they were permeated with these kinds of evil acts. (At the news of Uriah's death, David callously remarked: "*the sword devours one as well as another*" (11:25). Now David would understand the pain of those who loved Uriah.

Sadly, David could kill the giant Goliath, but he could not conquer the giant hunger for women that seemed to plague his personal life.

4. How did David react to God's truth and consequences? (12:13)

"I have sinned against the Lord." He admitted his sin and accepted his responsibility. Psalm 51 is said to be David's confession of sin with Bathsheba. The expression "*against you, you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight*" (v.4) shows his understanding of his accountability.

5. What losses did Bathsheba endure because of her encounter with David?

Bathsheba bore the same consequences that David did, but also, she lost her way of life. She was worthy of respect as the faithful wife of Uriah, one of David's fighting men; but she was brought into the palace through dishonorable circumstances. Her reputation was tainted whether she was innocent or not. Her role as David's wife was probably more difficult and dangerous. The son born from this union was taken by an illness that God sent. Bathsheba bore the same consequences as David. She had to take on the dysfunction of his family as well, and she suffered as all Israel did from the dangers of war.

6. Describe David's anguish and his reaction to the death of the son. (12:18—22)

His distress was heavy enough that his servants were afraid to tell him of the child's death. For seven days he fasted, prayed, wept, and took a position of complete humility and helplessness by lying on the ground. The elders were worried about him.

After the death, David cleaned himself up and went to worship God. He had reasoned that as long as the child was alive, he could plead with God for life. God had in effect said, "No." and David accepted God's will.

David's conclusion; "*Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me*" (12:23), showed that David held no resentment against God and looked forward to eternity where he would someday fellowship with this son.

III. A new life for Bathsheba. (2 Samuel 12:24-25; 1 Kings 1; 2:1—25)

Bathsheba's attributes go beyond beauty. David's remaining years were plagued by family turmoil and war, as God promised. But the rest of Bathsheba's story reveals a woman with strength and character. She was honored by David and Solomon. She was respected by Nathan the prophet, as well as others in the kingdom. God gave a new life to Bathsheba, and she helped bring his treasure to the world.

1. How did God Bless Bathsheba. (2 Samuel 12:24)

David lived with her as her husband and they had another son, Solomon.

2. Who did God love? What does this mean to you? (2 Samuel 12:25)

God loved Solomon. This seems to be an assurance that God would be with Solomon. This would have been a comfort to Bathsheba who had lost her child because of an illness God had sent. Now, He was assuring her that this child would live in His care and protection.

God chose to include Bathsheba, with David, in the lineage of Jesus through their son Solomon. God loved Solomon, as one of those through whom would come His greatest treasure and gift to mankind.

3. Why did Nathan consult with Bathsheba about Adonija? (1 Kings 1:9—13)

He recognized that Adonija's actions represented rebellion against David and against Solomon as the chosen successor.

4. What shows David and Bathsheba's relationship at this point? (1 Kings 1:16—21, 31)

She showed him great honor and respect by her actions: "*Bathsheba bowed low and knelt before the king*" (v.15).

She deferred by saying "*My Lord*" to David, and "*your servant*" when referring to herself.

David did not hesitate to recognize her or to allow her to speak.

She reminded him of His promise that her son, Solomon, would be king. And she reasoned that if Adonija were not prohibited from organizing opposition to the throne, both of them would be in danger for their lives. [Bathsheba was well aware of the battles that had occurred and that were still brewing within the family as David's various sons tried to assert what they believed were their rights. (cf. 2 Samuel 15- Absalom's conspiracy against David)]

At the end of the interview Bathsheba *bowed low with her face to the ground*. Her words, "*May my lord King David live forever!*" (v. 31) express her respect, if not love, for David. In effect she is saying that she does not want his reign, or his life, to end.

David immediately took action to install Solomon as king and to set Adonija straight. (v. 32-40)

Adonija was determined that as the oldest living heir of David, he should have the throne, despite David's proclamation. Knowing the Queen Mother's influence on Solomon, Adonija involved her in a plot which could actually have resulted in their deaths.

5. Describe what actions of Solomon show respect toward his mother. (1 Kings 2:19-20)

When Bathsheba approached him Solomon stood up to meet her and bowed down to her. The action of bowing down explicitly shows regard for another *as a superior*. This would normally be unheard of for a king. It could be understood as a sign of respect for a mother but the next action emphasizes the honor to Bathsheba: "*He had a throne brought*" ...and she sat down *at his right hand*." (v. 19) All three are expressions or terms of honor and could imply that she is powerful enough to be queen (Elwell and Beitzel, Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible).

Solomon was gracious to her and affirmed "*I will not refuse you*." (v. 20) Solomon gave her a hearing and with these words encouraged her to feel free to bring her request. Although, upon hearing the request he knew that he could not grant the request. (v. 22)

In Proverbs Solomon also included references to his mother who provided him with a tender and loving upbringing (cf. 4:3)

6. Was Bathsheba naïve or wise in her approach to Solomon with the request from Adonija? (1 Kings 1:21—27)

One view of this action describes Bathsheba as being carried away with the love Absalom expresses for Abishag. She might have been moved by "excitement for this love affair" to act as matchmaker (Walvoord and Zuck, The Bible Knowledge Commentary; An Exposition of Scripture).

Women in the public realm were often in danger which "required careful, creative and quick action" (E.F. Roop, Believer's Church Bible Commentary). Bathsheba would have not have been ignorant of the Adonija's nature, considering his earlier actions. Another viewpoint then, is that Bathsheba knew

the danger in presuming to advise King Solomon, whether she was his mother or not. She took a calculated risk by bringing Adonija's plans to Solomon cloaked as an innocent request. In this way she was not implicated; Solomon maintained his dignity as king, and Adonija was prevented once and for all as a threat to her son.

One has to wonder how David, described as someone God loves (cf. Acts 13:22,) could stray so far off the path of godliness. He let his desires take over, hurting innocent people in his wake. Yet we know that God loves all of us as well. This is still the same struggle for followers of God today. Praise God, the perpetrator and the victim alike can find help and healing.

IV. A New Life for You and Me (Psalm 51)

1. Read Psalm 51:1-2. David confessed and asked God to deal with three kinds of sin. Note them:

Blot out my transgressions. (Hebrew: *pasha*, peh'-shaw. Rebellion, insurrection, wickedness).

Wash away my iniquity. (Hebrew: *avon*, aw-vone'. Guilt, evil deeds, perversity, depravity).

Cleanse me from my sins . (Hebrew: *chatta'ah*, khat-taw-aw'. Fall short, offend).

David disobeyed three of the ten commandments: "*You shall not covet our neighbor's wife*"; "*You shall not commit adultery*"; "*You shall not murder*" (Exodus 20:17, 14, 13).

2. David pled with God: "*...create a new heart within me*" (Psalm 51:10). How does this happen for you and me? We understand God's love and believe what God has done. We are born again when we give our lives to Christ through confession, repentance, and by receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit at baptism. (cf. 1 John 4:16; Acts 2:38, Ro. 6:1-14)

3. Why then, do Christians struggle with sin? (Romans 7:21—24)

Our human spirit battles with the Holy Spirit in us. Our minds and hearts want to obey and overcome, but we sometimes give in and choose to follow the human nature. David never *hated God*; even though he loved God, he chose to commit acts that dishonored him. In doing so, however, he dishonored himself.

4. In Romans 7:7—8:37 we read how Christians who love God and follow Christ can be victorious over sin. How does the writer describe those who remain faithful, despite the difficulties? (Romans 8:37-39) "*We are more than conquerors, through him who loved us.*"

5. Share how God has helped you make something truly beautiful of your life, even after a bad start.

Key Question: What do you need to let God do in your life to make it more beautiful to Him?

For additional reflection:

A chiastic outline is a way of analyzing Old Testament writings, especially Psalms. The name comes from the shape Greek letter X, *chi*, and refers to lines that go from left to right, then right to left.

Consider this interesting outline chiastic outline of 2 Samuel 11:1—12:31 that includes this interlude in David's life. We have seen how God used Bathsheba as his instrument in history. David was God's instrument before and after his affair, despite this grievous sin.

- A. David sends Joab to besiege Rabbah (11:1).
 - B. David sleeps with Bathsheba, who becomes pregnant (11:2—5).
 - C. David has Uriah killed (11:6—17).
 - D. Joab sends David a message (11:18—27a).
 - E. The Lord is displeased with David (11:27b).
 - D'. The Lord sends David a messenger (12:1—14).
 - C'. The Lord strikes David's infant son, who dies (12:15—23).
 - B'. David sleeps with Bathsheba, who becomes pregnant (12:24—25).
 - A'. Joab sends for David to besiege and capture Rabbah (12:26—31).

(from *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 3*, by F. E. Gaebelin .Ed.)

(Note how David gets off track at point A and returns to God's work at point A'. We should beware when we are drawn away from our calling.)

Meditate on Romans 7:7—8:37 and explain the process of living out our lives in Christ, even though we still battle with our sinful nature. Read and meditate on this teaching. Make note of the various aspects God's work on our behalf from chapter 8.

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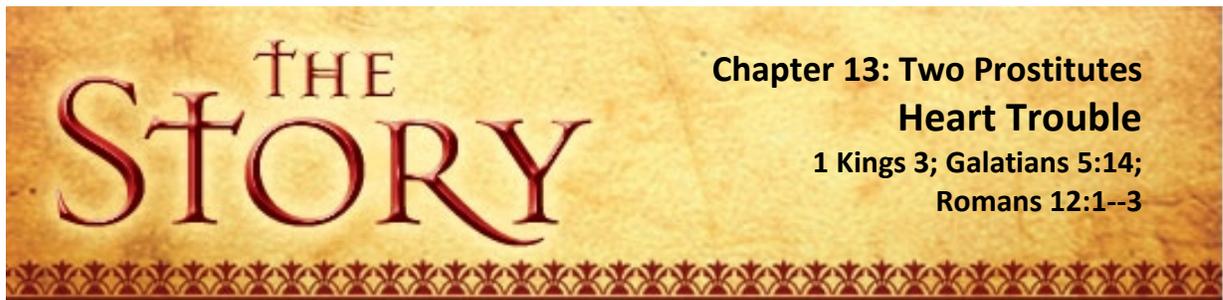
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The Wisdom of Solomon is the subject in chapter 13 of THE STORY. Two mothers needed wisdom to solve a grim problem. The dilemma and the decision give us insights into real-life issues. Beside marriage, the most basic human relationship is between mother and child. Women influence the world from little up. What is it that can make or break a society? Solomon knew what it was.

1 Kings and 2 Chronicles cover Solomon's reign. 1 Kings focuses on secular details of the story and 2 Chronicles focuses on aspects of the temple and worship during his reign. Both stories show the greatness of Solomon *as long as he followed his own advice—and walked with God*. According to biblical scholars the record of this case comes from court records, whether official or unofficial, they are generally accepted as a true account.

I. Solomon's Wisdom. 1 Kings 3:1-15

1. Why were the people worshipping at the high places? (3:2)

Setting and context for the case of the two prostitutes is provided in 1 Kings 3:1-15. "The kingdom was now firmly established in Solomon's hands" (1 Kings 2:46b), and the spiritual condition of the kingdom and its new leader is addressed. Even though worship in "high places" was technically forbidden by God, it had been accepted historically at times when there was no tabernacle or temple in which to worship (Deuteronomy 12:4). It seems that Solomon and his people were not condemned for this practice, yet the caution is clearly seen. The account of the construction of Solomon's temple starts in 1 Kings 5.

2. How did Solomon show his love for God? (3:3)

"Solomon showed his love for the Lord by walking according to statutes of his father David..."

Gibeon is located 9 km. north of Jerusalem and at one point during the time of David the Tabernacle was located here. *"Solomon offered 1000 burnt offerings on that altar"* (3:5)

3. What did God offer to Solomon in a dream? (3:5)

"Ask for whatever you want me to give you."

4. Why was God pleased at Solomon's choice? (3:10-11)

Solomon chose wisdom to rule with justice in order to govern God's people rightly. He showed that he understood the enormous responsibility that was on his shoulders. This showed uncommon restraint and selflessness.

5. How did God bless Solomon? (3:11-14)

God blessed him with wisdom *as well as* riches, honor, and long life.

II. God's Wisdom. I Kings 3:15-28; 1 Samuel 16:7

The Israelites witnessed the establishment of Solomon's kingdom by the military victory over Shimei (1 Kings 2:13-46). Now Solomon's reign would be characterized by wisdom as the Israelites marveled at his handling of a difficult situation. But his reign would only be characterized by wisdom *from God*, as long as he obeyed God's commands.

David, Solomon's father, recognized Solomon's wisdom (1 Kings 2:6). But a better understanding of the word is "shrewd". Solomon "knew his way around"; he was wise *in the world*. Now he would have wisdom from God.

1. What dilemma did the two mothers put before him?

Both women had newborns. One had died in the night and the mother switched her baby with the live baby while the other mother slept. When the true mother awoke, she recognized that it was not her baby.

(While these women are called 'prostitutes' in the account, the word is actually *harlot*. They may have been unwed or extremely poor women who lived together. They weren't necessarily professional prostitutes.)

2. Solomon had no evidence with which to decide the case, but he did have God-given insight into human nature. How does God judge a person? (1 Samuel 16:7)

God looks at the heart.

Matthew Henry explains in his commentary: "(Solomon) could not try which (mother) the child loved best, and therefore tried which (mother) loved the child best..."

3. What actions gave Solomon a clue about the character of the woman whose child had died? (I Kings 3:19-20)

She had switched the babies, in effect, stealing a live baby.

4. What kind of heart did those actions reveal?

Although deep grief at her loss would be understandable, to actually steal a live baby from another mother shows mental illness, or great callousness and self-centeredness.

5. What did Solomon know about the heart of the true mother?

He knew the true mother of the live baby would want to protect him. He gave the baby to the real mother (Proverbs 3:27).

6. How does he reveal which woman had a mother's heart?

He offered to cut the child in half to give each one a part- destroying the child to settle the case.

III. Heart Trouble that only God can heal. Matthew 15:1-20

God's standard of judgment is different than man's standard because only God can see the heart. However, Solomon knew that the heart would be revealed by forcing the women to see what they were doing to the child. A mother who truly loved her child would never harm him. The one who was completely controlled by selfish desires would demand her rights. Selfishness is the most dangerous kind of heart trouble.

1. The Pharisees judged Jesus by his actions without knowing his heart. What did Jesus say about their hearts? (15:8)

“Their hearts are far from me.”

2. According to Jesus, what reveals a man’s (or a woman’s) heart? (15:18)

What comes out of their mouths.

3. When selfishness reigns in the heart, what actions result? (15:19)

Evil thoughts and actions – murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.

Solomon used the bizarre to reveal the guilty woman. He brought out a sword and offered to split the child in two. The thought offends our sensibilities, especially as women. The quality of a society or culture is also revealed by the actions of its members. Similar deeds, that have become common in our culture, surely must cut God’s heart to pieces. Sadly, we can see broken lives that result from exactly the same self-centeredness that Solomon exposed are all around us.

4. What selfish actions disturb you as you consider the direction our own culture is headed?

Extreme selfishness that is almost suffocating. The most alarming trend is to destroy and devour the weakest among us, rather than to protect the helpless.

(In Solomon’s time, according to Elwell and Beitzel in the Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible: Kings, who had all the power necessary to enforce their decisions, were expected to use it to help the weak members of society…)”)

God repeatedly instructs his followers to care for the weak and unfortunate among us. (cf. Psalm 79:12-13, Matthew 8:17)

5. What are some things that parallel the dilemma of the two prostitutes and put children at risk in our culture?

Divorce and custody battles that result in everything from traumatizing the innocent children to murder.

“In a selfish society, too many people see motherhood as a barrier and children as a burden. In fact, some people consider children such a burden that they destroy them before they have an opportunity to become a blessing” (Wiersbe, 70)

6. What kind of heart trouble is causing this heartbreak? Mothers and fathers who put their own desires and plans ahead of the needs of their children.

“The timeless story of Solomon from the First Book of Kings continues to send powerful messages for divorced parents and their children. The basic plot is reenacted hundreds and thousands of times in every city: it is the story of two adults disputing their right to a child; the dilemma of the judge attempting to determine which adult is truly more worthy to take the child; and the baby who is being destroyed in the process. Another motif is the woman—

presumably the true mother—who was trying to balance her own right to the baby with the baby’s right to stay in one piece and survive the custody dispute” (Bernet and Ash, 6).

7. Think about the pressure our culture puts on women (and men) to achieve personal goals. What often makes this effort an ungodly, self-seeking pursuit? Anytime one disregards the responsibilities he or she has for another person.

The priorities are out of order when a parent or care-giver is neglecting the needs of a dependent to pursue personal goals, and this does not please God (cf. Philippians 2:3-4)

When neglecting to meet the needs of a spouse becomes the norm rather than a mutually understood occasional occurrence, the priorities are out of order and it is not of God (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:3-5).

When one resorts to any dishonesty or immorality to achieve personal goals it is an ungodly effort.

8. How can we balance whole-hearted surrender to God’s calling with the demands of family? Adjust priorities and make sure the *first things* are the *first things*. Include your spouse and children in your ministry in ways that let them use their gifts and experience the joys and blessings, as well as the sacrifice, of service.

Communicate and make sure to pay attention to your loved ones in order to read signals of distress. Ministries have an ebb and flow. Sometimes the family is willing and able to make sacrifices, at other times family responsibilities demand our attention. God understands this and will guide us.

9. Jesus mentioned a sword in Matthew 10:32-39 to explain that self-denial can be painful. Explain how we can follow this teaching and still put our children’s needs first.

Jesus does not tell us to sacrifice our families. The teaching here is that family and earthly relationships cannot be the *excuse* for neglecting the Lord and our calling. God is our priority.

10. Hebrews 4:12 explains that the Word of God is like a sword, “*able to judge the thoughts and desires of the heart*”. What kinds of thoughts and desires on the part of parents will bless our children? The Word of God gives the guidance we need to find correct priorities and balance in life. The desire to lead our children to lead godly lives will come from our study and meditation of the Word. Another benefit of Bible study is wisdom to know when ungodly influences are affecting our own decisions or our children’s. Knowing God, through his word helps us to know when our children are in danger of evil.

Key Question: What personal desires and pursuits might put your children at risk?

For additional reflection:

The natural characteristics of mothering are nurturing and compassionate. The Bible emphasizes that God also has this 'mothering' nature. Study the following passages where God reveals his nurturing and compassionate nature.

Psalm 145:8-9

Isaiah 49:15-

Isaiah 66:13-

Lamentations 3:22-

Mark 8:2-

Luke 13:34-

While the idea of splitting a child into two pieces to settle the dispute is repulsive, the manner in which children are sometimes treated as a result of the divorce of their parents sometimes rivals this barbarity. Parents must do everything in their power to ensure that the children aren't 'split up' even if they do.

William Bernet and Don R. Ash, authors of Children of Divorce, suggest that to help children remain intact emotionally, parents must help the child carry on with his own life in a way that is predictable, consistent, and minimally disrupted by the needs of the parents" (6)

They suggest the following:

Both parents must put aside animosity concerning children in order to participate and communicate. Stick to a parenting schedule that is least stressful *for the child*, and keep it predictable.

The nonprimary residential parent should take the child 'in sickness and in health' unless it is critical or an emergency, to assure the children that both parents are involved in their lives as much as possible.

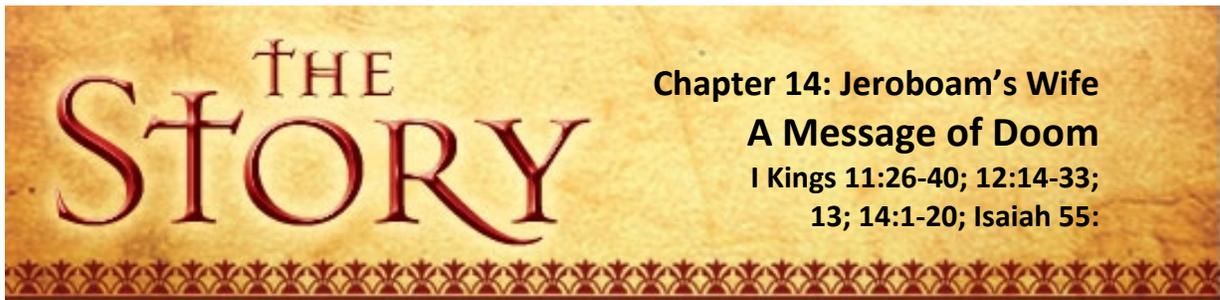
To avoid suspicions about abuse, talk directly with the other parent about any illnesses or accidents while in your care; explain Dr. appointments and diagnosis.

If the child is to be shuffled between two homes, do whatever it takes to make the transition seamless *for the child*.

Have two sets of clothing, sports equipment, materials needed to do homework etc. so the child doesn't have to constantly live out of suitcases or carry these items back and forth.

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Solomon was the last king of the undivided nation of Israel. His successors walked in his footsteps and took the nation down the path of destruction. THE STORY, chapter 14, relates how Jeroboam, who was not one of Solomon's sons, came into power and took all but one tribe as his kingdom. Rehoboam, Solomon's son, led the tribe of Judah. God's people would forever be divided, known as Israel *and* Judah from then on. Jeroboam's actions were despicable; not only his family, but all Israel were doomed to suffer the consequences.

Solomon reigned over Israel for 40 years. But the Lord became angry with him because his heart had turned to other gods. God promised to 'tear the kingdom away and give it to one of his subordinates' (1 Kings 11:11). Because of His love for David, God promised to wait until Solomon's death, and to leave one tribe in the hand of David's descendants. Solomon had seen Jeroboam's abilities and had placed him in leadership positions in his kingdom (11:28).

Ahijah the priest, gave Jeroboam a prediction. He could have everything his heart desired if he remained true to the Lord (even a dynasty that would stay in his family), but that God would only give him ten tribes and then rip Solomon's kingdom from his hands if he rebelled (1 Kings 11:26-40). God's Word and the history we have seen make it clear that leaders who disobey God's instructions will be punished. (cf. Numbers 20:9-13; Joshua 7). Those who walk in evil paths will also bring destruction upon their followers. Sadly the evil leaders are not the only ones to suffer. Yet, each individual will account for his own life. Eternity with God is the hope that holds *His followers to His paths*.

I. Jeroboam sinned in word and deed. I Kings 12:19-33.

1. What did Jeroboam want to prevent the people of Israel from doing? (12:26-27)

He wanted to prevent the ten tribes who followed him from going down to Jerusalem to worship at the temple (as God had instructed) because he was afraid they would be convinced to join their brothers and follow Rehoboam. But this "sin of Jeroboam, and of the men of his generation determined the destiny of the ten tribes for all time" (C. Hodge).

2. What did he say to the Israelite people? (12:28-29)

"It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt." Imagine God's disgust when Jeroboam boldly proclaimed that these golden calves had brought them out of Egypt and were worthy of worship. This same idolatry had provoked God. But for the pleading of Moses, God would have obliterated Israel right there at the edge of the sea! (cf. Exodus 32; Deuteronomy 9:7)

3. Outline the five changes that he made in worship:

12:29- He moved the location of worship from Jerusalem to Dan and Bethel.

12:28- He added the symbols of golden calves to worship and claimed they brought them out of Egypt.

12:31a-He changed from worship of God in the temple to symbolic worship in shrines and high places.

12:31b-He appointed new priests who were not Levites.

This act was specifically called “the sin of Jeroboam” (1 Kings 13:33-34; cf. 15:26)

12:32- He established new festivals of his own choosing.

Jeroboam set out to unify the Israelites by disguising his sinful plan as change for the better. However, when man tries to do God’s things *according to his own ways*, the plan is doomed.

As he strengthened his hold on the priests and religious practices, he reigned in the nation to himself. Jeroboam *and* the Israelites (including his own family) who followed him, knew God’s law. Their history had taught them not to disobey God’s instructions, and there could have been no doubt in their hearts that idolatry was forbidden. Yet, out of rebelliousness or personal gain many chose to disregard their own heritage. However there were godly people who did not accept Jeroboam’s idolatrous practices. The Levites refused to follow Jeroboam and left their lands (2 Chronicles 11:14-16).

II. God used word and deed to give Jeroboam a chance to repent. 1 Kings 13

A man, sent from Judah by God, confronted Jeroboam in Bethel as he was ready to make an offering.

1. What did God say through the man? (13:2-3)

He cried out against the altar and said *another would remove the false places of worship. He predicted that the altar would split apart and the ashes would be poured out.

*Jeroboam ruled from 930-909, Josiah ruled from 640-609. The prophecy was almost 300 years previous.

2. When Jeroboam tried to attack the man, what did God do to him? (13:4, 5)

He caused Jeroboam’s hand to shrivel up so that he could not pull it back. Jeroboam pled with the man to intercede with God on his behalf, and his hand was restored.

3. Fill in the blanks from 13:5: “Also, the altar was split apart and its ashes poured out according to the

sign given by the man of God by the word of the Lord.

4. Why would Jeroboam have already known God’s will against changes that he had made in worship. Because he was an Israelite, Jeroboam should have known God’s will. He had worked with Solomon and knew his own history. He was acquainted with the prophet Ahijah and would have had to have known God’s teachings.

The word and deed of God that the man delivered should have been enough. But God further proved his point in 13:7-31. Disobeying the direct instruction *not* to tarry for any reason in that place, the man of God chose to stop for food and drink—to his own peril.

5. What was God's response to this man's disobedience? (13:20-24)

He declared that he would not live. A lion killed him on the road.

6. How did Jeroboam react to these two extraordinary occurrences? (13:33)

"Even in this, Jeroboam did not change his evil ways." He continued in his sin of perverting the worship of God.

III. Jeroboam's wife receives a message of doom. I Kings 14:1-19

When Jeroboam's son became ill Jeroboam sent his wife to speak with Ahijah, the prophet. He should have faced Ahijah himself, but after the preceding events, he had reason to avoid the prophet. This was the one who had told him he would be king. This was a prophet of the same God whose ways he had rejected.

1. Why did Jeroboam suggest his wife use a disguise?

Although the passage does not address the reason, it implies that Jeroboam knows he has done wrong and wants to hide the fact that he is asking help from God's prophet.

2. What did Ahijah's greeting to the woman show? (14:6)

God had revealed who the woman was.

3. What was the key point of Ahijah's message to Jeroboam? Whose doom was predicted? (14:9-10)

"You have done more evil than all who lived before you. You have made for yourself other gods, idols made of metal; you have provoked me to anger and thrust me behind your back." He predicts the fate of the house of Jeroboam will be destruction in violent ways.

4. What information would be a staggering blow to Jeroboam's wife? (14:12,13)

Her son would die when her foot touched the threshold of her home. How she must have abhorred all that she heard.

5. What happened as Jeroboam's wife stepped over her threshold? (14:17)

"As soon as she stepped over the threshold of the house, the boy died."

6. How did the child's death show God's grace? (14:13b)

"...he is the only one in the house of Jeroboam in whom the Lord, the God of Israel, has found anything good." God didn't allow the boy to experience the violent death that was predicted for the other males in the family.

Jeroboam's evil choices caused his family to suffer, caused his child to die, and brought doom to Israel. The effects of sin cause the innocent to suffer alongside the guilty. This fact has caused men and women to doubt God as nothing else has. Yet, as mankind looks up to God with human understanding, God looks down with perfect understanding and sovereign ways.

God's message of hope. Isaiah 55

The prophet Isaiah taught God's people approximately 100 years after Jeroboam. Israel was well on its way down the path of destruction that Jeroboam travelled. Isaiah warned them of their doom, just as Ahijah had done. Yet he reminded them of hope. Some principles about God's ways are revealed in Isaiah 55.

1. According to 55:1-2, who is invited to "Come"?

All who are thirsty, you who have no money.

2. What is the general condition of those who are invited to come to the Lord?

They are penniless, in need, and disappointed because they spend on what isn't bread and labor on what does not satisfy

3. What will it cost them?

What they need cannot be purchased with money. They can partake 'without money and without cost'.

4. How can this be explained? (55:6-9)

Paul reflects Isaiah's words in verse 8 when he talks about the 'foolishness of the cross', 1 Corinthians 1:18-25. "The...plan of God for the redemption of the world is beyond the experience of man....that God Himself could become incarnate and live a perfect life... "(Butler).

But we must seek him; we must choose him because God himself is the only one who can truly satisfy. Jesus claims to be the fulfillment of this promise in John 6:35. Yet, this is impossible for man to understand because we cannot fathom the mind of God. We cannot imagine receiving what God offers simply by faith. Yet come to him in faith we must.

While water, wine and milk represent basic physical needs, they also represent basic spiritual needs. Water is figurative for salvation (John 4:7-26). Wine is figurative for joy and celebration (Isaiah 26:6-9). Milk is figurative for nourishment (Hebrews 5:12). Only the help and hope that the Lord offers will meet the needs of those who have suffered great loss.

5. What is the power of God's word, as described in verses 10-11?

God's word is alive and it brings life. God is faithful to his word and has demonstrated his faithfulness.

"The personification (of the word) presupposes that it is not a mere sound or letter...it acquires shape, and in this shape is hidden a divine life, because of its divine origin; so it runs, with life from God, endowed with divine power, supplied with divine commissions, like a swift messenger through nature and the world of man. The will of God, which becomes concrete and audible in the word, is the utterance of His nature...." (Keil & Delitzsch).

The New Testament metaphor is Jesus' parable of the sower in Matthew 13.

6. What is the result when we allow God's word to accomplish what He desires? (55:12-13)
"You shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills will burst into song before you". The salvation that God offers through grace gives life worth living and hope for the future.

7. How would these words comfort a mother who had lost her son? Human explanations cannot bring peace and healing. Only one who is bigger than the anguish and loss can take it away. Only the truth that Jesus came, just as God promised, can fill up the hurting and empty places. Only the truth of the resurrection give us the promise of eternal life with Him, and *that* is what changes Satan's message of doom into Good News.

"It was not astonishing to the Jews that Jehovah would be gracious to them. What was astonishing to many was that He would grant them mercy without their having earned it. Isaiah has extended an invitation for participation in redemption through covenant relationship. Now the bond and bounds of that covenant relationship is declared to be in the word of Jehovah which is faithful and powerful" (Butler, 53-54). The message Christians have been commanded to share is one of "good tidings and joy", a message of hope instead of doom.

Key Question: With whom will you share this message of salvation?

For additional reflection.

Hope for the nations. Isaiah 55:3-5, John 6:25-40

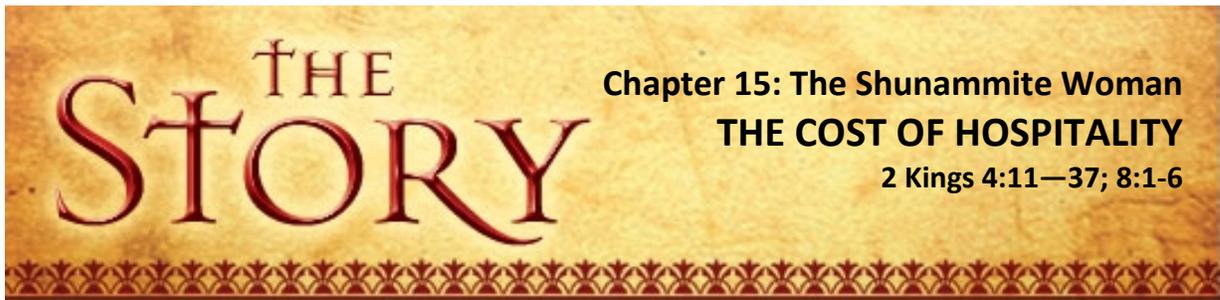
God understood the anguish Jeroboam's wife experienced at the loss of her son. Another son would be given for Israel, and for all people: His own son.

1. What hope does God offer his people? (Isaiah 55:3)
2. Who does He extend this promise to? (Isaiah 55:5)
3. What claim of Jesus reminds us of Isaiah's promise? (John 6:35)

Another son, who pleases God, would come. Another son would die, but that son would live *again*. While women of all time have mourned the death of children, there is one *real hope*. That is the hope that God offers through *his son*. That son will come again, and if we follow him, we will see our innocent ones again.

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Elijah and Elisha, “God’s Messengers” are introduced in chapter 15 of THE STORY. Their efforts to warn the kings, and to herd the people toward God, were a struggle. Many miracles and acts of kindness are attributed to the prophet Elisha as he walked among the people. Whatever hospitality was shown to him must have blessed and refreshed him. Hospitality has always been an attribute of God’s followers. Before going to Shunem, where he met the gracious Shunammite woman, Elisha had experienced some stressful events.

I. Elisha experiences hospitality. 2 Kings 2:23; 3— 4:1-10

Hospitality is a “biblical concept often used with the terms “guest,” “stranger,” and “sojourner.” It is useful to limit the meaning ...to benevolence done to those outside one’s normal circle of friends, as is implied in the literal meaning of the Greek word (“love of strangers”). Although the concept is thoroughly endorsed in the Bible, it is clearly found in nonbiblical cultures as well, especially in the nomadic, where definite obligations to provide food, shelter, and protection are recognized. (W.A. Elwell & B.J. Beitzel)

Travelers were at risk because of the lack of water and places of lodging. Societies understood the need and their responsibilities. However this was not without caution: 1. An invitation was for the purpose of keeping peace. The honorable intentions of the invitation would prevent attacks from strangers who would simply take what they wanted. 2. Screening was done as the ‘invitees’ would wait in an open place so the inhabitants could assess their intentions. 3. If the strangers were found acceptable the host would provide provision and protection. They would also provide for the animals. A proper host indicated the honor to serve his guests by the social customs, including washing of feet and sometimes offering entertainment. 4. A prolonged stay would be rude and usually was no longer than two days. They would leave with provisions of food and water, provided by the host.

Israelite hospitality went beyond the merely customary and took it’s impetus from something other than fear of the stranger. It arose from the heart of a people whose identity and home rested in the God who had made them no longer strangers. (cf. Ex. 23:9) Proper treatment of the stranger, then, was a just and grateful act in response to God’s loving provision (Deuteronomy 24:17—19) and revealed the character of God’s people. (L. Ryken)

1. What kind of treatment did he receive as he went up to Bethel? (2:23-25)

A gang of youths jeered at him, using disrespectful language. (The term “you baldhead” could have a sexual connotation, making it vulgar. He cursed them and a bear mauled 42 of them. There must have been more individuals from the wording.

2. Who did he have to contend with next? (3:9-13)

The kings of Israel, of Judah and of Edom were marching against Moab. Elisha had no respect for Joram, Ahab's son who was the king of Israel. He did respect Jehoshaphat, king of Judah and he sought the Lord on their behalf.

3. How did he help the widow of one of the prophets? (4:1-7)

The widow's creditors were demanding payment but all she had was a little oil and they were claiming her sons as his slaves. She cried out to Elisha for help and he told her to gather as many containers as she could find. She found as many jars as she could. Elisha instructed her to start pouring oil. When there was not another jar left the oil stopped so she was able to sell the oil and live on the rest.

Elisha was a servant of God who handled disrespectful young men, powerful kings, and suffering individuals. But the Shunammite woman was not asking for anything, she was offering something.

4. How is the Shunammite woman described? (4:8a)

She was well-to-do.

5. Why did Elisha stop there when he was traveling through the area? (4:8b)

She would urge him to eat with them when he came through.

6. What did she offer Elisha? (4:9-10)

She made a room on her roof for him so that he would always have a place to stay on his journeys. She went to the trouble to make sure there was a bed, a table, a chair, and a lamp for his use.

7. What would have been the cost of this hospitality to the Shunammite woman?

The construction and furnishing of the room would have been a cost. She went to the trouble of preparing food and a place for him- using her time, energy and funds.

8. What did her attitude seem to be toward any burden her hospitality might have been?

She seemed to have had an open hearted attitude of respect and care for the man of God. She saw a need and wanted to meet it.

II. Hospitality in the Bible.

The Old Testament examples of hospitality are plentiful; the New Testament includes examples as well as commands to be hospitable. From the following examples what kind of care and cost was required to extend hospitality? What kinds of blessings result from godly hospitality?

Genesis 18:2—8, 16.

"The Lord appeared to Abraham" and welcomed three men. He gave them shelter from the hot sun and prepared a feast of the best he could offer. "The Lord" promised both Abraham and Sarah that they would have a son.

When they departed, Abraham accompanied them for some distance.

Genesis 19:1—8.

Lot saw two angels coming toward Sodom. He greeted them with utmost respect by bowing to the ground before them. He offered to wash their feet and gave them food and lodging. When violence broke out in the streets he offered to sacrifice his own daughters in order to protect them. In return, the Angels warned Lot to gather his family because God would destroy Sodom and Gomorrah by fire.

Luke 10:7.

Joseph looked for lodging for himself and Mary who would soon give birth. There was no room for them in the inn but they were given space where the animals were kept. (While not the most ideal of circumstances, it would have been a warm place at least, where they would be protected from the elements and from danger.

Hebrews 13:2.

“Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.”

We must obey God in the matter of hospitality, and He will work in ways we don't even know or understand.

III. The Shunammite woman experiences blessing. 2 Kings 4:11-37; 8:1-6

Of course the cost and the risk of hospitality can sometimes be burdensome. Imagine, however, what it would have cost the Shunammite woman if she *hadn't* offered hospitality to the prophet Elisha.

1. What caused Elisha offer a blessing to the woman? (4:11-13a)

He said to his servant Gehazi, "Call the Shunammite." So he called her, and she stood before him. Elisha said to him, "Tell her, 'You have gone to all this trouble for us. Now what can be done for you? Can we speak on your behalf to the king or the commander of the army?'"

Elisha was appreciative for what she had done.

2. With what kind of attitude did the woman respond? (4:13)

She replied, "I have a home among my own people."
She did not want anything in return. She was not doing it for selfish gain.

3. What surprising gift did Elisha give her? ((4:14-17)

When Elisha found out that she didn't have children, he promised that she would have a son.

4. What was the *ultimate* gift that followed? (4:18-37)

When the son became ill and died, Elisha brought him back to life.

5. What warning and help did Elisha later give to the Shunammite and her family? (8:1-6) He warned them to go away for a while because a famine would break out. When they returned someone else had taken their land. Elisha spoke for her before the king and her land and house was restored, including all the income from the time they had left the country.

IV. Hospitality as a picture of God.

Significant blessings come to the one who offers hospitality and to the one who receives hospitality. Hospitality is about relationship. Christians receive the gracious hospitality of God as he invites us into relationship with him. In turn, we bless God by opening our lives as the gracious invitation of a spiritual home to others who have not yet experienced God as their Father.

1. Jesus said “*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest*” (Matthew 11:28). How is this a picture of hospitality?

The lost are like travelers on a hard journey in a foreign land. He understands their weariness and their needs. He invites them to come in and receive what He offers—the ultimate protection and provision—salvation and hope.

2. Analyze these instructions about hospitality:

Matthew 25:41-46.

Jesus commands his followers to care for people’s basic needs. While this is benevolence, it is also an attitude of hospitality- meeting the needs of strangers. He says that when we do this it is the same as serving him. When we neglect those who are in need, it is the same as neglecting Jesus himself, and we will be cast away because of it. This makes hospitality an eternal matter.

1 Peter 4:9.

We are commanded to be hospitable *without grumbling*. Hospitality requires us to put others before ourselves and to have a loving attitude while we do it.

3 John 5—8

We are to be diligent to help fellow believers, especially those who are obeying God and serving him. We must “show hospitality to such men so that we may work together for the truth” (v.8). While their part is to go out, our part is to provide for them as they go; we are working *together* in this way.

The Shunammite woman went out of her way to show hospitality to Elisha when he needed it. Because of the friendship that developed between them, Elisha went out of his way to bless her when she needed it. This kind of godly hospitality is almost a lost art, but those who conform to the biblical model of hospitality experience much of the same kind of blessing.

3. What has happened to the custom of hospitality in our culture?

In some ways Christians have been content to let the government agencies meet the needs of the poor. We often give money for support but do little to develop relationships. Traveling ministers are

often housed at the local Holiday Inn, and many prefer it that way. The basic physical need is met but relationships are not built; consequently, the ties that build unity and long-term support are not there. We hold our distance from one another and rob ourselves of the blessing of developing kindred spirits.

4. What are the hindrances to practicing this act of grace?

We are prideful about our homes and abilities. False ideas of what is needed to be hospitable cause us to think we can't invite others into our homes.

Selfishness is a hindrance because hospitality requires that we give others our time and attention- two commodities that seem to be in short supply in our culture.

Being overcommitted or simple laziness will hinder our obedience regarding hospitality.

5. Share how showing hospitality has been a blessing to you or to others?

6. Whom should we consider as our guest each time we open our homes to others? (Matthew 25:45)

When we practice godly hospitality, we should always consider that we are entertaining Jesus as well.

Key Question: How will you show Christian hospitality to a servant of God who would be blessed by your kindness?

For additional reflection:

Meditate on the following passages about the kinds of hospitality Jesus and the Apostles received. What can we learn from each of these occasions?

Matthew 10:8-15- Jesus sent out the twelve with instructions to shake the dust off their feet of those who refused to host them.

Luke 7:36-35- A Pharisee invited Jesus to his home but did not treat him with the common courtesy an invited guest would receive.

Luke 10:25-37-

Jesus teaching that meeting the needs of the poor is how we show him love.

Luke 14:23- The invited guests did not come to a banquet so the host invited strangers in.

Luke 19:5- Jesus was invited to Zachaeus' home.

Acts 10: 23, 24-48- Paul hosted the men from Cornelius, and then he was Cornelius' guest.

Acts 16:13-15- Lydia hosted Paul and his fellow workers. Later she housed the church in Philippi.

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The judgment of Israel is the theme of chapter 16 in THE STORY. God had had his fill of their defiant disobedience, so much so that he advised *“Stop trusting in man, who has but a breath in his nostrils. Of what account is he?”* (Isaiah 2:22). The Israelite women could not escape the judgment either. God described their masquerade, from head to toe, in fearful detail; what He saw behind the mask was even more chilling. The evil that controlled the hearts of individual men and women ultimately brought about their destruction as a nation.

The people were on a path of destruction from spiritual decay—decay on the inside. In approximately 60 years God had sent three prophets to Israel: Jonah, Amos, and Hosea. All had reminded them of God’s will and the consequences of disobedience. God pleaded with the people through these messengers to leave their wicked ways and return to Him. But God had to protect His treasure from the very people who carried the bloodline. *“The enemy would respect neither men, women, nor children but would savagely abuse and slaughter them”* (Cabal etc.). We will see that God allowed Israel and Judah to experience a pruning. The dead, diseased hearts would be done away with so that a faithful heart could eventually come out of them to bring salvation.

I. Israel’s weakness. 2 Kings 17—19

For approximately 200 years God’s people had been separated into two kingdoms: the northern kingdom of Israel, which included most of the tribes; and the southern kingdom of Judah, which consisted of the tribe of Judah, the Levites, and those who had originally wanted to observe God’s laws and worship in Jerusalem. By the time Isaiah came on the scene both Ahaz King of Judah, and Hoshea, King of Israel, were weakened to the point that they had to placate a formidable enemy- Assyria. Both were headed for destruction but Israel went down first.

1. What kind of king was Hoshea? (17:2)

“He did evil in the eyes of the Lord but not like the kings of Israel who preceded him.” Although not as evil as his predecessors, this is hardly a compliment. He continued the worship of idols and the corruption went unchecked.

2. What happened to him? (17:3-4)

“Shalmaneser king of Assyria came up to attack” him and put him in prison because he was making alliances against Assyria with Egypt.

3. What happened to the people of Israel? (17:5-6,23)

After Assyria laid siege for three years, they captured Israel and deported the survivors to Assyria.

4. Note some specific reasons why this came to pass from chapter 17:

v. 7- They sinned by worshipping other Gods. The Israelites invented practices of worship God that concealed who He truly was; they distorted the worship of Jehovah. These things demean God.

v. 12- They worshiped Idols. This gave God the same treatment as an adulterer treats his or her spouse. While pretending to be in the marriage, the heart is with another. God reacted accordingly. *“So the Lord was very angry with Israel and removed them from his presence”* (17:18).

v. 15-They rejected God’s decrees and the covenant and substituted their own ‘decrees’ and words in place of God’s commandments. They imitated the nations around them.

v. 16-17- They worshipped evil. The gods referred to in vs. 16-17 are darkness and demons. They were on a first-name-basis with evil through the despicable cultic practices that they imitated from godless nations around them. They stooped so low as to sacrifice their children to Moloch.

God had “rent the Israelites from the house of David”, (17:21) during the reign of their first king. Remember the horrible prophesy that Ahijah related to Jeroboam’s wife (cf. 1 Kings 14). God was patient, offering chance after chance for the people to repent. They did not; they brought about their own destruction.

5. What was the status of The Kingdom of Judah at this point? (18b-19)
Only the tribe of Judah remained but they were also disobedient.

II. What Isaiah saw in Judah. Isaiah 3—4:1

God also reached out to Judah through his prophets. We can relate to these actions in some ways; many parents have pled with pastors or youth leaders to talk to their wayward children and try to bring them back to right-living. Isaiah related his own personal call (request) from God in Isaiah 6. God pled, *“Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?”* And I said, *“Here am I. Send me!”* (Isaiah 6:8). But Isaiah’s burden was not easy. He was given the vision of the destruction of Judah and he did everything in his power to turn them away from that path.

1. What is the Lord about to do to Judah? (3:1)

“...the Lord Almighty is about to take from Jerusalem and Judah both supply and support: all supplies of food and all supplies of water...”. God is about to prune Judah.

2. Why is Judah falling? (3:8-9)

*“...their words and deeds are against the Lord, defying his glorious presence. **The look on their faces testifies against them; they parade their sin like Sodom; they do not hide it”***. Their sinful state is bad enough but they are proud of rebelling against God. “It’s written all over their faces.”

3. What is the thing that has brought God to the point of judging Judah? (3:14-15)

They are “crushing” his people and “grinding” the faces of the poor.

Crushing: to break to pieces, to beat to pieces.

Grinding: as in grinding with a millstone

The question of vs. 15 expresses God's outrage at their treatment of the poor. Their society has made the poor something *other* to be used and consumed as merchandise. This is the opposite of the society God had in mind for His people, where standards were set for the care of the people, rich and poor alike.

4. What is God's 'vineyard'? (3:14-15)

The poor who are helpless to resist the elders and leaders.

5. Isaiah puts a moving picture into our minds by way of four verbs that describe the haughty women of Zion. List them from verse 16.

Walking

Flirting

Tripping

Jingling

6. What is the startling decree of verse 17?

"The Lord will bring sores on the heads of the women of Zion; the Lord will make their scalps bald."

"The precise meaning of this line is unclear because of the presence of the rare word (pot). Since the verb in the line means "lay bare, make naked," some take (it) as a reference to the genitals" (Net Bible). This is a scathing prediction considering the importance and societal mores regarding a woman's hair. (See 4:4)

7. From 3:18-23, list the items that you have in your jewelry chest or closet at this moment.

8. Note the predictions from verse 24:

Fragrance to stench, putrid stench (Net Bible).

Sash to rope.

Well-dressed hair to baldness.

Fine clothing to sackcloth

Beauty to branding.

What the proud women thought made them pretty actually made them repulsive to God because it represented their selfish exploitation of others. He would strip away this worldly costume to reveal the true ugliness of their souls.

9. What would the prospects be for unmarried women from Isaiah 4:1?

The population of men will be decimated due to wars. Childlessness will be the result which was considered a curse.

10. What is troubling about this picture of the destruction and destitution of women for us?

The description could easily be of present day society. Women who should be the first to stand up for the weak and the innocent, are participating and encouraging the outrageous actions that God detests. These women are preoccupied with beauty, possessions and self-gratification.

Isaiah's metaphor is powerful but this depiction of the judgment of the proud women was also a true prophesy of what awaited them when foreign powers conquered Judah. These things would come to pass, their powerful position and their possessions would be stripped from them. "Jerusalem's women would not be excused from punishment, for they participated with their husbands in the corruption of the culture. God will humble the proud and He alone will be exalted (Is. 2:12,17). (Cabal etc.).

III. Behind the masquerade.

Isaiah's condemnation of the women of Zion has two aspects. Women are used as a metaphor for Judah through this picture of pride, injustice toward the poor, and self-indulgence. Eventually "she" will be struck down to the ground (v.26). But the aspect that must penetrate our hearts as women is a real-life depiction that mirrors what God may see in women today. Isaiah could be describing the women who walk the streets of our towns, and many who walk the corridors of our church buildings. Isaiah laments that "*there is no end to their treasures*" (Isaiah 2:7). We as well are rich beyond imagination, but too often we lack things that delight God.

1. What deadly beliefs are buried beneath our hair-dos? What belief leads to life? (John 12:44-50)
The only way to salvation and eternal life is through Jesus. We cannot reject His teachings and delude ourselves into thinking that God will accept us, or even worse—that there is no God. We will be stripped of our earthly existence, and without Jesus' covering, we will be naked before God.

2. If our eyes recorded our thoughts, what would the world see? What would Jesus like to see? (Philippians 4:8-9)

Things that are good and holy should be occupying our thoughts. If these are the things that we think about, our behavior and outward appearance will reflect godliness.

3. What makes our hands dirty in God's eyes? What work of our hands would be a beautiful adornment in God's eyes? (2 Corinthians 6:4—7)

"...in purity, understanding, patience, and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left..." (6,7)

4. What steps lead us away from God? When would our feet be beautiful to God? (Romans 10:15; Isaiah 52:7) We are beautiful when we spread the good news. Just like the sins of the individuals condemned Israel in Isaiah's day, the work of sharing the Gospel by individuals, who are empowered by the Holy Spirit, will bless the world today because they carry the salvation message. Each life has the potential for good or evil. God has a purpose for each of us that relates to the work of evangelism.

IV. A beautiful day. Isaiah 4:2-6

1. What will appear in "that day"? (4:2) The Branch of the Lord.

2. What is the branch metaphor used to describe? (4:2b-3) (cf. Isaiah 11:11; Jeremiah 23:5; Zechariah 3:8) The Church of Jesus Christ.

3. What will God do in that day? (4:4)

He will cleanse "Zion's women" and the blood stains that are on their hands from evil deeds.

4. Fill in the blanks from verse 6.

The branch will be a shelter and a shade and a refuge and a hiding place.

The church of Jesus Christ is what God planned from the beginning. The beautiful picture of the church from Isaiah 4:6 is just the opposite of what the Israelites turned out to be because they had not given their hearts to God. In The Emotionally Destructive Relationship, Leslie Vernick explains that we cannot overcome pride, and a myriad of other destructive attitudes, until we change the “internal heart themes of entitlement and self-centeredness” (86). But when His indwelling spirit controls our hearts, we can be Jesus’ eyes of love, hands of service, and feet that carry the good news to all people.

Key Question: What are you doing to change the proud feelings of entitlement and self-centeredness that threaten to control your heart?

For additional reflection:

God has clearly told in what He is pleased to see in His followers.

From Galatians 3:25-27, how are we to be clothed?

From Galatians 5:16, what are we supposed to live by?

From Galatian 5:23-26, note the results of living like this?

How is this polar opposite of the description of the proud women in Isaiah 3?

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The Story, chapter 17 covers the last one-hundred years of the Kingdom of Judah. During that time period only one king pleased God consistently. Josiah followed two of the most destructive and bloodthirsty reigns imaginable and he became king at eight years of age! Jeremiah was his contemporary. Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah probably prophesied at various times during his reign. Yet when he began to restore the temple in Jerusalem, Huldah, wife of Shallum, advised him about his discovery.

Huldah is the third prophetess we have studied. Like Miriam, and Deborah, who was also a judge, Huldah gave instructions and warnings from God during difficult times. It is important to remember that prophets and prophetesses do not speak for themselves. They speak God's word.

I. Josiah's surprising discovery. 2 Kings 22:1-13; 2 Chronicles 34:1-22)

Josiah's grandfather, Manasseh, shed so much *innocent* blood that it filled Jerusalem from "end to end" (cf. 2 Kings 21:16). His father, Amon "walked in all the ways of his father..." (2 Kings 21:2). It is surprising that Josiah grew into a man of character. We know that there were a faithful few when Jeroboam started the desertion (cf. 2 Chronicles 11:14-16). These unknown, but important individuals still had an influence. This is the same value that godly men and women provide to the young people today. We need to be aware of our responsibilities toward young people that we know personally, especially those who come from dysfunctional families.

In the year 628BC, Josiah began his reforms when he was 20 years old. In 627BC Jeremiah was called as a prophet at age 20. It is not inconceivable that Josiah and Jeremiah knew each other and they could have been friends.

1. What kind of king was Josiah? (2 Kings 22:2; 2 Chronicles 34:1-3)

"Josiah did what was right in the eyes of the Lord and walked in all the ways of his father David, not turning aside to the right or to the left" (2 Kings 22:2)

"In the eighth year of his reign, while he was still young, he began to seek the God of his father David" (2 Chronicles 34:3). Josiah would have been sixteen years old. We often underestimate the spiritual understanding of young men and women. While they may not have the experience of their elders, they do have the ability to read, discern, and act in a godly manner. Like Josiah, many young people come to obedience simply because they do not close their hearts to God.

2. How old was he when he decided to repair the temple? (2 Kings 22:3)

He was 26 years old.

3. How do we know Josiah had been preparing to do this work for some time? (2 Chronicles 34:3-7, 9)

Before he began the temple reform, Josiah began to purge the idols from the land. He travelled to the centers of idol worship and destroyed altars, idols, and Asherah poles, as well as other paraphernalia of idol worship and cultic practices. Then he went back to Jerusalem and received money that had already been collected by the Levites. Workers had already been organized for the project. This was not a spur of the moment thought. Perhaps Josiah felt he needed to cleanse the land to give God more honor by setting the scene for the temple to have center stage in the land.

4. What did the priest, Hilkiah, find? (2 Kings 22:8; 2 Chronicles 34:24)

“Hilkiah the priest found the Book of the Law of the Lord that had been given through Moses” (2 Chronicles 34:14). This discovery was either the Book of Deuteronomy or the entire Pentateuch, (the first five books of the Bible). Discoveries of ancient copies of God’s word always shock the religious world as well as the secular world. God’s Word is powerful in every way. The land of Israel may be a treasure chest of hidden scriptures that the Evil One would love to conceal.

5. What did the king’s secretary, Shaphan, do in King Josiah’s presence? (2 Kings 22:10, 2 Chronicles 34:18)

Shaphan read the entire book in the king’s presence. Public reading of scripture is uncommon in our day. We read and study *about* God’s word. It would be good to simply let God speak more often.

6. What was the King’s response? (1 Kings 22:11, 2 Chronicles 34:19)

He tore his robes and wept in distress because he realized how far the people were from God. (Many feel this same kind of distress today. It’s not a new thing for godly people to be concerned for the direction their country or culture is heading.)

7. What did he assume about God at this point? (2 Kings 22:13; 2 Chronicles 34:20)

He knew God was angry at Judah. “Josiah feared the anger of the Lord and wanted to turn it away from all the people of Judah. The shock expressed by the king at the content of the Law reveals that Judah had not consulted the Law for a long time” (Elwell).

8. Josiah not only feared for himself; who else occupied his concerns? (2 Kings 22:13)

He feared for his people, the tribe of Judah. He was one of the few kings who weren’t consumed by self-gratification and who refrained from exploiting the kingdom for selfish purposes. From the numbers of soldiers, A conservative estimate of the population of Judah at this time is 75,000. It could have been as many as 100,000; this was not an insignificant number of people.

II. Huldah’s observations. 2 Kings 22:14-20; 2 Chronicles 34:22-28a

The reconstruction of the temple revealed that Josiah already had a heart for the things of God. His ability to hear, discern, and act on the Word of God shows a maturity beyond his years. Josiah asked his advisors to ‘inquire of God’ and they went to a woman.

1. Who was Huldah? (2 Kings 22:14; 2 Chronicles 34:22)

She was a prophetess, the wife of Shallum. She must have been highly respected as a prophetess. Larry and Sue Richards reminds that marriage and ministry are not in conflict for women. William Elwell, in The Baker Bible Encyclopedia, comments that “It is a minimizing of woman to think of her

only in terms of home, babies, and the upbringing of children. The woman is a person in every respect as the man; she shares in the image of God and has the potential of varied ranges of response to culture, community, and life about her. Huldah's reception and transmission of the word of Yahweh is the more remarkable because she was contemporary with Jeremiah and Zephaniah. In this case God chose to speak through a woman".

2. Where does Huldah get the information she shares with Josiah's men? (2 Kings 22:15; 2 Chronicles 34:23) Her message was from the Lord. *"She said to them, "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says..."* (2 Kings 22:25)

3. What does Huldah reveal about the future of Judah? (2 Kings 22:16-17; 2 Chronicles 34:23-25) God is going to do exactly as he said in the book Hilkiah found. God's people had produced an anger that *would not be quenched* because they had forsaken Him.

4. What does Huldah reveal about Josiah's future? (2 Kings 22:19-20; 2 Chronicles 34: 26-28) God would shield Josiah from seeing the destruction of his people and he would be buried in peace. A power vacuum was created when the Assyrians were imploding and Babylon had not yet risen to power. Egypt was recovering from military losses as well so the threats around Judah had been neutralized. This was not an accident and this protection would have continued had the people of Judah remained faithful.

5. What words show that this is a personal revelation from God to Josiah? "you" and "your".

6. Point out Josiah's attitudes and actions in the following passage. Circle the words that indicate his heart attitude, underline the words that indicate his action.

"Because your heart was responsive and you humbled yourself before the Lord when you heard what I have spoken against this place and its people, that they would become accursed, and laid waste, and because you tore your robes and wept in my presence, I have heard you, declares the Lord."
2 Kings 22:19

III. Josiah cleans house. 2 Kings 23:1-30; 2 Chronicles 34:29—35:19

Huldah's words would have brought fear and comfort to the young King. His fears for his people were grounded in reality. The personal assurances from God validated Josiah's desire to reclaim Judah's religious heritage. He went about the work with such a passion that they celebrated a Passover, the likes of which that had not been seen since the days of Samuel.

1. What did Josiah do in front of all the people? (2 Kings 23:1-2; 2 Chronicles 34:29-30) He called together the priests and people and *"he read all the words of the Book of the Covenant."*

2. Fill in the blanks from 2 Chronicles 34:32:

"Then he had everyone in Jerusalem and Benjamin pledge themselves to it: the people of Jerusalem did this in accordance with the covenant of God, the God of their fathers."

Did this pledge cause the people of Judah to change their hearts? (cf. 2 Chronicles 36:14-16) No. But Josiah's actions protected the people during his reign. God would also have protected a dedicated people, despite a bad king.

3. What did Josiah do about the worship of Baal, Asherah and the pagan priests? (2 Kings 23:4-5)
He ordered that the article made for Baal and Asherah be burned, and did away with the pagan priests. In the NIV, "did away" is used but actually Josiah *destroyed, or executed* the pagan priests.

4. What did he do to Jeroboam's altar? (2 Kings 23:15)

"He demolished it and ground it to a powder".

5. What did he do about mediums, spiritists, and household gods and idols? (2 Kings 23:24)

He *"got rid of"* them. (The term is uncommon and possibly means *devastate, sweep away, or remove.*)

6. How is Josiah described after all this? (2 Kings 23:25)

"Neither before nor after Josiah was there a king like him who turned to the Lord as he did—with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his strength, in accordance with the Law of Moses."

Although David was "beloved of God", his reign was plagued with violence, bloodshed, and lapses regarding women. Josiah followed the commandments for all of his short life.

7. What is God's verdict regarding the people of Judah after all this? (2 Kings 23:26-27)

"Nevertheless, the Lord did not turn away from the heat of his fierce anger, which burned against Judah because of all that Manasseh had done to provoke him to anger." God still determined to remove them from his presence as he did Israel.

IV. Wise women impart God's Word.

As friends and daughters, wives and mothers, we have unique opportunities to share God's word. Not only that, we have a responsibility to share the story. While we can't see into hearts, priorities and allegiances are revealed by lifestyle. Like Huldah we must share the truth from God, even if the truth is convicting.

A friend and co-worker often reminds me, "The truth will set you free; but first it will make you miserable." To confront our own sin is a miserable experience, however our message must not stop there. Our message includes hope and victory in Jesus.

1. Note our responsibilities regarding others from the following passages:

When we speak the truth from God, in love- at an appropriate time and in an appropriate manner, we are doing the same thing Huldah did. WE are giving a message from God. It would be good to remember this as we speak to others. Our warnings and encouragements, which are led by God's word, are *not* our idea, nor do we have the authority to advise. But God does, and we obey Him.

1 Thessalonians 5:14- **We must warn each other.** *“And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone. Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else.”*

2 Thessalonians 3:13-15- **We must note and warn one who does not obey the word.** *“And as for you, brothers, never tire of doing what is right. If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed. Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.”*

Hebrews 3:12-14- **We must take the initiative to help each other believe and to encourage each other.** *“See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.”*

Hebrews 10:23-25- **We must consider (contemplate, reflect) how to spur (incite or motivate) each other to do good deeds.** *“Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”*

Many godly women are burdened with concern for loved ones and friends. Yet, when the Holy Spirit convicts our hearts through His word, we are afraid to warn, confront, or admonish. We know that some make take offense, we may be repudiated or misunderstood. Honestly, sometimes it is simple pride that stops us from acting on the Lord’s promptings. Huldah knew what the Lord’s verdict for her own people was. She was obliged to tell the truth. So are we.

Key Question: How will you speak God’s word into the heart of another when He asks you to?

For additional reflection.

There is a fine line between speaking God’s word into someone’s heart and *meddling* in someone’s life. Consider the following passages from scripture to mark the boundaries of appropriate involvement in someone else’s life:

Proverbs 20:19-

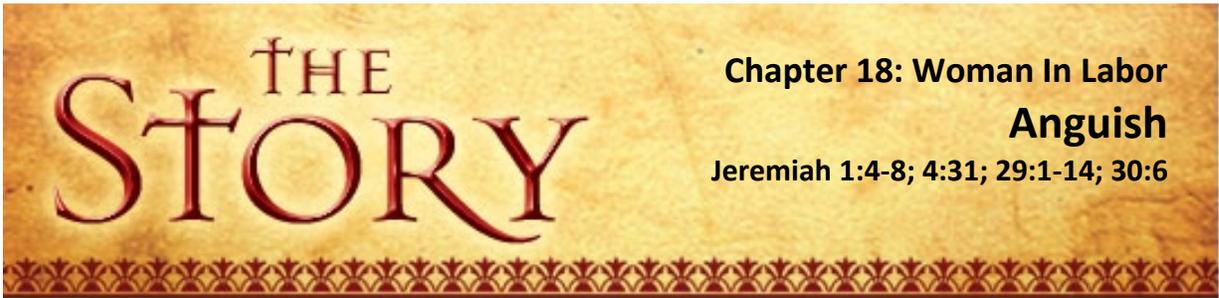
2 Thessalonians 3:11-

Titus 2:1-5

Matthew 7:3-5

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Having children is a blessing according to God. But childbirth, from conception to delivery, is used as a metaphor in Scripture, and childbearing is a major theme throughout the Bible. The prophet Jeremiah, who warned of the coming exile that is discussed in chapter 18 of THE STORY, compared the anguish that Israel would suffer to labor pains. In the book of Matthew, Jesus expressed his concern for women who would be pregnant or nursing during the destruction of the temple which occurred in 70AD. Nevertheless, the anguish associated with childbirth is powerful whether we are speaking in real terms or metaphorically.

Our own sin brings anguish upon us. Our sin brings anguish to God as well. Through the Psalmist, God reveals his own heart: *“Streams of tears flow from my eyes, for your law is not obeyed”* (Psalm 119:236, NIV), and *“Trouble and anguish come upon me, yet your commands bring me delight”* (119:143, NASB). We cannot think about Jesus’ death on the cross without realizing that this anguish was brought upon Him by our sins. God uses graphic terms to help us understand the seriousness of sin. There is no such thing as ‘victimless sin’. We are victimized by sin, *and* God is victimized by sin.

I. The anguish of labor. Jeremiah 4:31

Normal childbirth includes - Labor and Delivery. Labor comes in three phases. Early labor (latent) is usually gradual and the mother is often unaware that the process has begun since it can take several days. Mild contractions begin and even seem to come and go. At the end of the first phase of labor and mom will notice the contractions start to occur closer together and last longer as the labor moves into the second phase. This is active labor and if everything is occurring naturally active labor does not stop but the pains intensify in strength and duration. At the end of active labor the pains seem to come on top of each other. The mother is truly ‘working’ to move the baby down the birth canal as the contractions take control of her body. Transitional labor begins with the uncontrollable urge to push the baby through the birth canal. As the contractions bear down on the baby, mom adds to the pressure by pushing through each contraction. This phase is extremely demanding, the pain and pressure are at a peak. Many women feel nausea, dizziness, chills or sweats.

Delivery takes place when the baby actually moves out of the birth canal as the head ‘crowns’ or appears through the cervix. With each contraction and continued pushing the baby’s head comes through the cervix, with one or two more contractions the baby slides through the birth canal into the waiting arms of the attendant. The effort exerted during these last moments can put so much strain on the mother that it can leave mom with bloodshot eyes or even bruises on the face. Some women would say the word ‘anguish’ doesn’t even begin to describe what she endures. This is the process to which the prophets, Jesus, and the New Testament writers refer to explain the results of sin.

The scriptural references and comparisons to childbearing are interesting, but they are also important for our understanding God’s will and God’s ways.

1. From the following passages note what the comparison or the teaching is:

Genesis 3:16

The term “anguish” denotes extreme anxiety, pressure, or distress. Scripture consistently uses the pain of childbirth to explain the kind of pain that sin causes. “Greatly increased pain” in childbirth is a direct result of Eve’s sin. Childbirth is dear to our hearts when we think of the children we bear, but thinking about the process of *giving birth* often strikes fear into our hearts. Most women are blessed with the ability to immediately dismiss the pain and anguish when the baby is placed in our arms. There is no sin in childbirth. Although birth brings with it one of the greatest joys a woman can know, the anguish that accompanies the birth process is a reminder of what sin also brings to our lives.

Isaiah 13:6-9

Isaiah predicts the eventual punishment for Babylon in the same terms as that of Judah (whom Babylon conquered). God may use a person or a nation but their evil ways will also be punished. Their destruction will “grip” them the same way a woman in labor is gripped with extreme pain and pressure during childbirth. There is no way to ignore or resist the force of the labor in childbirth. But for evildoers there is no rejoicing after.

Jeremiah 4:31

Here Jeremiah is warning Judah of their destruction as a nation. Crying-groaning-gasping for breath-stretching out hands- even fear of death are common during childbirth. At this time in history, childbirth was not hidden away in hospitals and clinics. The whole family, maybe the whole neighborhood, knew when a woman was giving birth. The cries and groans of the woman would be heard by all. This explicit reference would have been easy for Jeremiah’s listeners to understand.

Jeremiah 6:22-24

Jeremiah’s warnings continue as he explains the disaster that is drawing near in vivid terms of anguish (cf. Jeremiah 4:19). “*Anguish has gripped us*”...(men) “*pain like that of a woman*”. A woman understands the pain of labor and delivery on some levels and steels herself to it. To most men however, the pain of childbirth is unimaginable, in fact most men can’t bear to think about it. Husbands often faint during the birth of their children when they are present at the delivery. My husband had to be sent ‘to the corner’ to sit in a chair so he wouldn’t distract the delivery team. One of my son-in-laws became physically ill during the delivery of his first child. My other son-in-law has become overcome with emotion and tears just before the births of his children have taken place. Men are not made to have children, and Jeremiah is forcing his listeners to hear his message by using these terms. The destruction that is coming to Judah is just as real as the hard contractions that come in the final part of childbirth. The end of Judah is coming nearer, just as the pains of childbirth begin slowly but grow in strength and intensity.

Matthew 24:3-7

Jerusalem was again destroyed in 70AD. Here, Jesus predicts the destruction of the temple by referring to the same metaphor that Jeremiah used. (He may also have been alluding to the final destruction of this earth which is yet to come.) His Jewish listeners would have been alarmed at this because they were very well aware of their history and of the prophet Jeremiah. The metaphor applies to both events. Once again, the warning is that the ‘pains’ will be minor at first, but the wise will pay attention to the signs and in order to be prepared.

1 Thessalonians 5:1-3

Paul uses the childbirth process to remind the church to be ready for the second coming. My husband and I had wanted to start a family for several years. As the time drew near for our first child to be born we were excited with anticipation. Yet, we were still surprised when the pains came on- suddenly with full force and close together! But we were prepared, and we greeted our daughter with joy and thanksgiving. Those who are prepared will greet the Lord with joy and thanksgiving because they will be prepared.

2. God's word also uses the natural to explain the course of sin in our lives through graphic detail. We have seen this bitter truth clearly in the history of God's people, Israel. We should learn from their experiences. Note the process and result of sin from the following passages.

Psalm 7:14-15

This passage was written long before Jeremiah's time. Evildoers are described as "pregnant with wickedness". There is no *inbetween*. One is either pregnant or not pregnant; one is either wicked or saved.

James 1:13-15

The natural process is that conception eventually results in a birth. Evil attracts and tempts. But we take evil into our lives (conceive) through desire which leads to the reality (birth) of sin and death. Sin is what brings pain into our lives.

II. Labor and delivery.

Jesus also demonstrated that he cared for women and children during his earthly ministry. He saw children as good. Childbirth is a *good thing* despite the difficulties of labor and delivery. A natural, healthy pregnancy brings the birth of a new baby. This is a joy and a blessing. This natural process of life is also used to help us understand the results of faithful living.

1. From the following passages what is the joy and blessing.

John 16:20-22

Jesus explains that the crucifixion will cause his followers sorrow and suffering. But that will all be forgotten when they see Him alive after resurrection takes place. Just as a mother forgets the pain of childbirth when she sees her child, they will have joy.

Acts 2:24-28

Peter uses the Greek word *odin*, which is usually used to describe labor or birth pains, to explain Jesus' resurrection. In this passage we have a 'mixed metaphor' (a combination of images that don't work well together). This actually gives more emphasis because of the pairing of terms. Two things are happening in the language: one is that Peter knows his audience understands the reference to 'birth pains' was used by their prophets to describe the fall of Israel, and to describe the toll of sin. But this time the result is that the 'agony' cannot hold Jesus because *he was sinless*. Jesus' victory in the resurrection is emphasized by the 'trick' Jesus played on death! Death gave birth to life.

Romans 8:18-25

Paul picks up the familiar ‘birth pains’ metaphor to describe the eternal struggle to break sin’s death grip on humanity. The hope of salvation brings an end to the anguish. Even while we are still enduring the struggle in this life, our hope is sure.

2. What do the following passages show about Jesus’s understanding of women?

Matthew 19:13-15

Jesus understood that the children were the dearest thing to their mother’s hearts. The kindness of Jesus in accepting and blessing the children was a gift to their mothers as well as to the children. Most mothers appreciate and value a person who helps her children.

Matthew 24:19-21

Jesus’ heart went out to pregnant women, or nursing mothers, who would be most vulnerable during the destruction of Jerusalem. He knew they would experience the worst suffering.

III. God coaches his people through their anguish. Jeremiah 1:4-8; 29:1-14; Daniel 1:3-20

It is common now for women to have a birth-coach. It is usually the husband, but other family members or friends are also birth-coaches. Before the days of hospitals, midwives helped women through the birth process.

Through Jeremiah, God gave warnings to Judah about their coming destruction as a nation. He promised that, as a nation, they would experience agony that could only be compared to the pain of childbirth. But he also gave interesting instructions about how they should carry on their lives *during* this time of suffering and exile in Babylon. Although they would be punished, they would not be abandoned.

1. When did God choose Jeremiah to be a prophet? (Jeremiah 1:4-8)

When he was in his mother’s womb.

2. How were God’s people instructed to live while in exile? (Jeremiah 29:5)

“Build houses and settle down’ plant gardens and eat what they produce.” They were to carry on with life as usual.

3. What was God’s instruction about marriage and children? (Jeremiah 29:6)

“Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage...do not decrease.” They were not to ‘shrink’ in despondency and depression. God still wanted his people to thrive.

4. How did God say they would be able to prosper even though they were in exile? (Jeremiah 29:7)

“...seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper”. They were not to live with an attitude of vengeance and resentment against their conquerors; they were to improve the land they touched.

5. What does God promise about his plans for them? (Jeremiah 29:11)

He had plans to prosper them.

6. How will they be able to find God? (Jeremiah 29:12-14)

They were to call out to him, pray and seek with all their heart. He promised to be near to them.

IV. Living above the anguish.

Even as Christians we still go through suffering because of the consequences of sin that controls our lives. The passages above offer valuable insight to us as well as to the ancient Israelites. We don't have to be overcome by the pain and suffering of sin, even though we may experience it. The advice God gave to His people through Jeremiah is still good advice. Each of these concepts is also a strong teaching in the New Testament.

We don't see 'weeping prophets' in the NT (other than Jesus and references to the urgency Paul feels for people to come to the Lord). We do need to be anguished for our sins and the sinfulness of earthly life, but we are told to live in JOY (cf. Philippians 4:4), because our anguish should lead us to Jesus. HIS anguish on the cross brings us salvation and victory. We celebrate that we have the answer to the anguish. Praise God for what He did in order that anguish cannot rule in our here and now...nor in our eternity! (cf. Jeremiah 29:11-28)

1. How do we know that God has plans for us? (Acts 17:26)

He has explicitly planned our times and places!

2. How should we live our lives? (Acts 17:28; Titus 3:1-2)

Acts 17:28- We are to live "in him" (Jesus).

Titus 3:1-2- We are to be a peace with all men and to pray for our rulers. Even if we must endure evil leaders, we must pray for them. That is the most powerful recourse we have because with God all things are possible and because God controls all earthly powers that be.

3. What is God's instruction about marriage and children? (Titus 2:3-5)

We should be busy with homemaking- caring for our husbands and raising children. This is a noble and powerful work because godly homemakers have a part in upholding the respect for God's Word. Perhaps the attack on the Bible we are seeing today is a direct result of women making selfish personal

4. How does God say we will be able to prosper? (Titus 3:4-8)

Our opposition (the lost, evil doers) will not have ways to malign Christianity. We will have the assurance that we have stood for truth no matter what happens, and we will know that our hope is secure.

5. What does God promise about his plans for us? (Titus 2:11-14)

Our salvation is sure. We wait for the Second Coming with hope and expectation. God plans to bring us to himself.

6. Why will we be able to find God? (Acts 17:27)

He is not far away from us. He is not hiding; he wants us to find him.

7. How do we know that there will someday be an end to all distress and anguish? (Isaiah 9:1, 6-7)

Distress will end. Jesus will uphold 'the government' in peace and power.

Key question: What steps do you need to take to have victory over the sins that bring anguish into your life and that bring anguish to God’s heart?

For additional reflection: Read Romans 1:18—2:16.

Consider the parallels in this passage to the things you have learned from the history of the Israelites—from their crossing the Red Sea until their destruction. What sins still bring anguish to *God’s heart*?

What will be the result for those who choose to rebel against God as the Israelites did?

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The soap opera-like story of God’s people takes a turn for the better as they finally rebuild the temple. God inspired two Persian kings, Cyrus and Darius, to support the project that took 150 years to complete. In THE STORY, chapter 19, we read that the dedication of this new temple moved the people of Judah to weeping, mixed with shouts of joy as they were overcome with emotion (Ezra 6). Years before God had given His people a sneak preview of this scene in their scandalous story when he sent Hosea to show them His version of reality TV.

Hosea was a prophet to Israel only a few years before they were conquered. History tells the sad story of the division of God’s people into two kingdoms. This was not what God wanted. The prophet’s message was for God’s people. Both kingdoms needed to hear the message of hope and redemption that Hosea taught through his own life. It was God who made it possible for the tribe of Judah to return and rebuild the temple. It was God who prompted both Darius and Cyrus to not only permit them to do so, but to support and protect them throughout the 16 years it took them to accomplish it. Hosea’s love story is God’s love story.

I. Hosea takes a wife. Hosea 1—2:1

God had tried to head his people away from their destructive path through the judges, the prophets and even their own history. Apparently God knew that sometimes a picture is worth a thousand words. He attempted to grab their attention through the bizarre. The prophet Hosea and his wife Gomer, publicly lived out a steamy love story, filled with all the betrayal and bad behavior that had typified the relationship between the Israelites and their God.

1. Who did God tell Hosea to marry? (Hosea 1:2-3)

God told Hosea to marry a prostitute. There are two ways to understand the passage: Gomer was a prostitute *when* they married, or she became a prostitute sometime after the marriage began. It seems more plausible that her wandering began after the first son was born. Either way, it is an astonishing command. In this setting God told Hosea to get married and raise a family. The times were evil; there was rampant murder, political unrest, and chaos.

2. God named each of Hosea and Gomer’s children. Note the meaning of each name from the passage, and tell why you think he chose each name. The Israelites commonly gave their children names that were tied to situations in the family or that held special meaning to them.

Jezreel- (1:4) “God sows”, or “God scatters” is a reminder that God does what He wants. Jezreel is the name of the location of the death of Jezebel, and of the shedding innocent blood when Jehu took matters into his own hands to punish Ahab’s family and the Baal worshippers. For that, Jehu’s descendants would also be destroyed

Lo-Ruhamah-(1:6) “Unpitied”, “Not loved” ...as in lack of compassion, or feelings of tenderness. This name is a warning. While God’s love (agape) never ends, mankind cannot reject God and still expect to enjoy his tenderness and compassion, or blessing. (A daughter)

Lo-Ammi-(1:8) “Not my people”. This is a prediction or a promise. God would withdraw his covenant because of their disobedience and rejection of Him. Remember that God was the initiator of the covenant, and the Israelites had broken the covenant. He had every right to end it. (Exodus 24:3-8).

In his book Be Amazed, Warren Wiersbe writes: “...the nation was rotten to the core; for honest government, pure religion, godly homes, and personal integrity had vanished from the land. Israel became an evil blend of Jewish ritual and pagan idolatry. The people loved it.” But God didn’t! He loved his people though, and chose this object lesson as an act of mercy, to bring His people back into the safety of a relationship with Him.

3. How do we know that Jezreel was probably Hosea’s son? (1:3) She bore *Hosea* a son. The other two children were born after Gomer began to stray.

4. What indicated that the other two children were not fathered by Hosea? (1:6, 7; 2:4)
The names are an indication of Gomer’s actions. “Gomer’s” children are called the children of adultery (2:4). Note the wording that announces Jezreel is “she conceived and bore him a son” (1:3). Only Gomer is mentioned with the other two children.

5. What was the promise that anticipated God’s reconciliation with His people? (1:10-11) God reiterates the promise that was made to Abraham and Sarah. The promise refers back to the names of Gomer’s children. God promised that a change would occur; they would no longer be unloved and rejected, and Jezreel would one day be a place of rejoicing.

6. How do we know that God had always loved his people? (2:1)
God called His people beloved. The story of Hosea is a picture of God’s redeeming love and of His desire to reconcile with mankind.

II. Gomer’s downward spiral. Hosea 2:2-8

In this passage the words Hosea wrote were from his own heart as well as from God’s heart. Solomon put it simply, “*A worthy woman is her husband’s crown; but she who acts disgracefully is like rotteness in his bones*” (Proverbs 12:4). Study the various emotions that are expressed by the betrayed husband. Remember mankind has been created *in God’s image* (Genesis 1:27). “So this was how God felt about his own people—bitterly betrayed, cut to the heart, disgusted, outraged. His tender love, his every gift meant nothing to a people enamored with Canaanite gods” (Spangler & Syswerda 277). God was revealing his heart through the things a man would feel. Answer the following questions with Hosea *and* God in mind.

1. Why did he want to rebuke his wife? (2:2)
She was seeking other men and having adulterous relations with them. Even the look on her face aggravated Hosea.

2. How did he feel about the children and why? (2:4-5a)

He rejected them because they were not his children.

3. What were Gomer's (Israel's) desires? (2:5b)

She was seeking her own pleasures of food and drink, "wool, linen, oil and drink" (luxuries) rather than the gifts Hosea would shower upon her. Accepting his gifts involved her relationship and fidelity toward him. She did not want to be faithful to him so she would rather be independent of him.

4. Hosea said he wanted to "block Gomer's path with thornbushes", and to "wall her in". Were these desires kind or unkind? Explain your answer. (2:6-7, consider 2:22)

He still cared what happened to his wife. He wanted to protect her from the harm that would eventually happen because of her lifestyle. God still works in the lives of people who need Him to steer them back to Himself through the situations in their lives. God hears the prayers of intercession for the lost. (cf. 1 Timothy 2:1-8)

5. Who actually had showered her with gifts? (2:8)

Hosea was the one who had actually showered her with gifts of love.

III. Redemption and reconciliation for Israel. Hosea 3:1-5

Again, Hosea's story and God's story are intermingled in the account of Gomer's rescue by Hosea. Although the account is succinct, the brevity of the words somehow underscores the sentiment. Take a look at the following scenes:

Redemption:

1. What was her situation at this point? Describe the Israelite's situation when they completely rejected God (3:2). She was victimized, disgraced, and helpless. She was a slave and had to sell herself to survive. Israel was plagued by idolatry, war, famine, and suffering. Their pagan worship was literal prostitution as well as symbolic (cf. 1 Kings 18). They were reduced to slaves. They were utterly despondent and suffering.

2. What did God order Hosea to do? How does this compare to God's relationship with His people? (Hosea 3:1)

God told Israel to buy his wife back from her holders. God stepped in and miraculously lifted his people up and empowered them to break away from their oppressors.

God also stepped in and miraculously restored His people only 70 years after they were taken into captivity. Not only that, during the whole process, the oppressors returned their spoils of war (gold and items from the temple), they also aided and protected them.

Reconciliation:

3. Who invited the reconciliation between Hosea and his wife? Who invited the reconciliation between God and his people? Hosea made the first move to bring his wife back into the relationship. God always acted to rescue the Israelites and to invite them back to Him. Zechariah the prophet reveals the wonderful plans God had for Israel in a beautiful passage that promises "*The city streets will be filled with boys and girls playing there*" (Zechariah 8:3-23).

4. How would the Israelites come back to God? How would a broken and victimized woman react to a second chance at life and love? (3:5)

They would return to seek God and they would come “trembling”. God’s great love and patience is beyond imagination. The chance to “start over” after such dreadful mistakes would be a humbling but uplifting experience. This would be very emotional. The people were overcome with emotion when the temple was finally restored and rededicated.

IV. Redemption and reconciliation for you and me. Colossians 1:15-23; 2:9-15

This reality show was not *just* for the Israelites. The running theme throughout God’s word is the redemption and reconciliation that is available to us because of His love. God’s plan was that all people would make Him the center of their lives and that He would love and care for them as a husband loves and cares for his wife (cf. Revelation 21:3-4).

Every person’s journey includes rejection of God through sin, realization of the state of helplessness, and returning to God with the help of Jesus. There is no one who will manage to live a life that does not need God’s covering (cf. Romans 3:23).

1. According to Colossians 1:15-18, who is the Lord Jesus Christ? He is Supreme.

- The image of God
- The firstborn over all creation
- All things were created by him.
- All things were created for him.
- He is before all things.
- He holds all things together
- He is the head of the church
- He is the only one to raise *himself* from the dead.

2. What is our status before we accept Christ as our Savior, and what caused that status? (Colossians 1:21)

We are alienated and we are enemies of God. We are also completely helpless because we cannot buy our innocence back. *We* may not perceive it, but this is how God sees us.

3. Exactly what did God have to do to make us alive with Christ? (Colossians 1:22; 2:13-15)

God had to make us free of blemish and accusation through Christ’s death.

He made us alive in Christ.

He forgave us all our sins by cancelling the written code (the law) that condemned us.

He took it away.

He nailed it to the cross.

He disarmed (evil) power and authority.

4. When do we “put off the old nature”? (Colossians 2:10-12)

We put off the old nature at our baptism when we are washed clean by identifying with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, because we have faith in *his power* that raised him from the dead.

5. We may come to the Lord, helpless and trembling, but how are we to live *after* we have received redemption and reconciliation through Christ? (Colossians 1:23)

We are established in our faith, firm, and not moved from the hope of the gospel. Now Jesus' spirit dwells in us (Acts 2:38b), and through His Spirit and we have His power to rely on. Our lives belong to Him, and we continue to walk with Him and to walk toward Him in faith, as we relinquish our own will to do His will.

Key question: What is your next step on the path to redemption and reconciliation? Will you take it?

For additional reflection:

Study these passages that discuss our redemption and reconciliation:

Luke 1:68

1 Corinthians 1:28-31

Ephesians 1:7

Romans 5:6-11

2 Corinthians 5:11-21

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All cultures see beauty in the face and form of a woman, even though each culture and each generation sees beauty in different things. Perhaps the art of making a woman beautiful is actually the oldest profession. Women take their cues about pleasing men from their cultural traditions. But wise women want to be beautiful in God's eyes, and they place the highest importance on pleasing Him. Esther seemed to be able please the earthly king, Xerxes, *and* the King of Kings. Surprisingly, some of the same things please both God and man. These are things all women should imitate, although this advice will not appear in the beauty magazines.

Xerxes was probably the son of Darius 1. Although there are objections to the historical accuracy of the book of Esther, there *was* a Persian king named Ahasuerus (Hebrew) or Xerxes (Greek). He reigned over the Persian Empire between 486-465BC, during the Greco-Persian wars. He suffered a defeat by the Greek navy at Salamis (some would say a *miraculous defeat*). It may well have been after this defeat that Xerxes threw his '180 day party' to bolster his bruised ego and to rekindle the passion for war among his supporters.

If anyone would know how to choose the most beautiful girl in the world it would probably be a Persian king. Imagine the enjoyment a search for the most beautiful *young* girls would bring to this carnal man, whose reputation with women is a historical fact. According to history, Xerxes had an unusually large harem, a bad temper, and an alcohol problem. Imagine God placing a young Jewish virgin in Xerxes' harem, in a degraded culture where powerful people victimized the weak and innocent.

Sadly, mankind hasn't improved much since Xerxes ruled Persia. Sex trafficking all over the world, child abuse statistics, and the unbearable lives that many women must lead all over the world testify to the truth we need to face in our time as well. But the fact is that God is the one who sits on an eternal throne, and he had a reason to put Esther there at that place and in that time. As usual, the personal story of Mordecai and Esther, and the larger story of the people of God were perfectly meshed in God's design. Even though we don't like the facts of Esther's life we must consider another fact: God says, "My ways are not your ways" (Isaiah 55:8). And these are the very evils that Jesus paid for on the cross.

I. Esther pleases Xerxes. Esther 2:5-18

The plight of Queen Vashti, Esther's predecessor, is recorded in the first chapter of Esther. Xerxes' made a completely selfish and disrespectful request of the Queen, but her reaction was not wise. Furthermore, it did nothing to help her situation; it only made matters worse. When Esther was brought to the harem she captivated her handlers and the king with her beauty, but that could not have been the only thing that fascinated them. When you answer these questions consider the normal

reaction of a young girl, who had been removed from her home with no choice in the matter, and discover what made Esther different.

1. What was Esther's background? (2:7) Esther (Hadassah- Jewish) was a young Jewess whose parents had both died. Her father's brother, Mordecai raised Esther as his own child. She was beautiful and had a beautiful figure. According to custom in Persia, young girls (as young as 7 years of age) might be chosen for the harem. Their family, nor the girls themselves, had any choice in the matter. If they were chosen, they went; and they were usually never seen again. Mordecai was a faithful Jew who kept vigil near the king's court which shows his deep affection for young Esther.

2. Who was Hegai? (2:8-9) The keeper of a harem would be a eunuch in order to guarantee the protection of the women in the harem. They were generally wealthy and educated because their position demanded expertise in many different capacities. The eunuch had administrative duties, but in some ways they operated as a concierge...they had to know how to get things done to keep order in the harem. These guardians were responsible for educating the young women, not only in the art of sensuality, but how to carry out the duties of a queen. They would also guide the education of the children who were produced since any of them might become the next ruler. While the harem eunuch had power and wealth, few men aspired to be one.

3. What kind of attitudes and actions on Esther's part would bring about Hegai's favorable opinion? Esther must have been 'teachable' at least. Coming from a traditional Jewish home, she would have learned to respect authority and how to conduct herself. Whether or not she was happy with the arrangement, she must have deferred to Hegai's advice. That she was charming and gracious is not something we can prove, but we can surely surmise that these traits were part of her personality.

4. What shows Esther's wisdom when it was her turn to visit the king? (2:9) She allowed Hegai to instruct her in detail about how to please the King. This would probably have been training in how to allure the king, including how to perform sexual acts. Since Esther would have been a young virgin, she would have had no previous experience. But the desire of the king for a young virgin probably did not mean that he wanted an innocent, who was unwilling or unable to participate in his pleasure.

Note that while the realities of the Persian Kingdoms offend most women's sensibilities, we also must accept the reality that God is not 'anti-sex'. Explicit passages of scripture explain the sexual relationship in marriage using sensual language. God's teachings about sex within marriage clearly point to the beauty and necessity of this part of the relationship (Proverbs 5:18-19, I Corinthians 7:4-5). The Song of Solomon is a love poem describing the love between God and mankind in sexual terms. Sex is a basic human need for which God has provided the marriage union. A man will be pleased and blessed if his wife understands this and enjoys this part of their relationship with him.

5. What did it mean that Hegai found favor with Esther? (2:9b) Hegai was pleased with Esther's response to his teaching. He "promoted" her to the best place in the harem and gave her seven maids.
6. What was the King's reaction to Esther? (2:17-18) He was more pleased by Esther than by any of the other girls, so he gave her Vashti's place.
7. Fill in the blanks and analyze the following events:

The king was **attracted** to Esther more than any of the other women, and she

won his favor and **approval** more than any of the other virgins. (2:17NIV)

First the king was **attracted**. (NASB says "loved")

Then Esther gained **his favor and approval**. (NASB says "found favor and kindness")

People notice beauty, and they are almost always attracted to physical beauty and some women seem to have an innate sensuality. But beauty in itself does not guarantee a good impression on others. It takes more than just beauty people to *find favor*. This implies that Esther had a manner, or qualities of character and actions, that were as pleasing as her physical attributes.

Physical beauty and sensuality are not always helpful. While one may enjoy the obvious benefits, the down-side occurs as she confronts stereotypical attitudes. A beautiful woman is often objectified and she struggles to get others to recognize her intelligence and strength of character. Other women are not always kind either. Judgmental attitudes and jealousy often plague relationships.

II. Esther reveals a beautiful strength. (Esther 2:10,11; 3—8)

The saying goes: "Beauty is skin deep." The pursuit of physical beauty is shallow and meaningless when it comes to real life struggles. Strength of character is what counts. When Mordecai reveals an impossible problem to Esther her actions give evidence of the character that drew King Xerxes and his court to her.

1. What personal information did Mordecai insist that Esther keep to herself? (2:10)
Mordecai instructed her to keep her Jewish heritage a secret. The Persians conquered Babylon shortly after they had taken the Jews into captivity. Note that God had already punished that empire because it had attacked his people. The Jews were not particularly in good standing with the Persians. Even though Mordecai had previously dignified himself by disclosing a plot against Xerxes (6:1-2), he knew that Esther would be in danger for her life if she revealed that she was a Jew.
2. What did Mordecai do that proved his concern for his adopted daughter? (2:11)
He would walk back and forth in front of the court of the harem for news of Esther.
3. What was the crisis that caused Mordecai and Esther to be distraught? (3:8-10)
Haman had manipulated the king into making a proclamation to destroy all the Jews who were dispersed throughout the kingdom.

4. How did Esther react to this news? (4:1-11) She was devastated when she received the message that Mordecai was in mourning. When she heard why she was reasonably troubled, but she was not paralyzed with fear. She was enough aware of her culture and history to know the danger this posed to the Jews, and to herself and her family. She was also aware of the Persian laws, which she lived under, that did not allow her to seek an audience with the king.

5. Mordecai's response was a challenge. What was it? (4:12-14) Mordecai wisely counseled Esther that she was put in that time and place for this reason. Jewish history is the story of how God protected the people who would be in the lineage of the Messiah. That meant a whole people and culture surrounded the Messiah; they were intimately involved in God's plan. Mordecai had that sense of destiny, and perhaps, only now understood why his adopted daughter was taken to the king's harem.

Esther decided to accept Mordecai's challenge and she quickly took action. Her decision led her to appeal to two kings. Wisely, she chose to seek the King of Kings before she sought out Xerxes.

From the limited information in the Bible story we assume that Esther wasted no time on the drama of the situation. She did not pine away about the danger she was in. She did not rant and rave about the destructive nature of sin, nor about why God would allow this to happen. She did not tell her girlfriends what fools Haman and the king were. She didn't weep at Hegai's feet, begging him to do something about her plight.

After she weighed Mordecai's advice, she made a decision and took definitive action. She instructed the Jewish people, for whom she would intervene, and she instructed her maids, over whom she had authority, to fast and pray. That Esther worked *within her own sphere of influence* is important to consider because assertive action is only productive when one has the influence or authority to back it up. In order to have that same confidence with the king, she went over the king's head to a higher authority; she went to God.

"Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: "Go, assemble all the Jews who are found in Susa and fast in my behalf. Don't eat and don't drink for three days, night or day. My female attendants and I will also fast in the same way. Afterward I will go to the king, even though it violates the law. If I perish, I perish!". Esther 4:15-16 (NET Bible)

6. Esther sought God and called upon certain people for support. (4:15-16)

What did Esther want her people to do? Esther asked the Jews to do a complete fast (without food *and water*)

What did she and her maids do? She and her maids, as per her instructions, did the same.

What kind of determination did Esther show? She had determination because she trusted in God for her strength and courage. She also knew she was not alone. She made the decision to let go of any concern for herself. She was ready to give her life for this cause. (She also knew that if nothing happened to change the situation she would lose her life anyway. See Esther 4:14).

7. Esther approached King Xerxes three times, at great risk. What was that risk?(4:10-11)

“All the servants of the king and the people of the king’s provinces know that there is only one law applicable to any man or woman who comes uninvited to the king in the inner court – that person will be put to death, unless the king extends to him the gold scepter, permitting him to be spared.” (NET Bible)

8. Attitude is shown by words and actions. Fill in the chart to analyze how Esther approached the king and note the words she used each time. (5:1-8; 7:3-6; 8:3-7)

| | Esther’s attitude. | Esther’s words and actions. | Esther’s request. |
|-------|--|---|---|
| 5:1-8 | Calm, humble and respectful. | She prepared by dressing in royal robes, she was dignified in waiting to be called, and followed the custom that pleased the king. Her approach to the king was in these terms: “If it pleases the king”. She planned something she knew the king enjoyed; a feast. | She invited him, and Haman, to two feasts. |
| 7:3-6 | She was respectful of the king but she was courageous. | She once again prefaced her remarks with deference to the king; “If I have found favor with you....and if it pleases your majesty....” | She explained the dilemma and the danger that Haman posed to herself and her people in a straightforward but succinct manner. |
| 8:3-7 | After the king’s response she revealed more of her emotions but she was still respectful and deferred to the king. | She fell before the king, weeping. “If it pleases the king”; “if he regards me with favor”, “if he thinks it the right thing to do”; and “if he is pleased with me”. | She begged him to find a way for her people to be spared by writing an order that overruled his Haman’s dispatches. |

9. What was the outcome for Esther’s people, the Jews? (8:8; 9:1)

He allowed *Esther and Mordecai* to write an order in his name and sign it with the king’s signet ring as a seal so it would be valid. The edict gave the Jews the right to defend themselves against any attack. They triumphed with the help of all of King Xerxes’ nobles, satraps, governors and officials. From then on the Jews celebrated two days in the feast of Purim to remember how God delivered them from their enemies. The feast of Purim was confirmed by a decree which Esther, along with Mordecai wrote and that was put into the king’s records.

Esther was a treasure among the Jews. Her bravery, and that of Mordecai, was celebrated by their people. But more than that, God used Esther to protect the greatest treasure. Jesus’ ancestors were among the Jews who were saved from Haman. Esther’s actions were her most beautiful attribute.

III. What makes a woman beautiful.

Survey's and studies about what attracts men generally reveal the obvious. Men *are* attracted to physical beauty. But what usually *keeps* a man attracted to that woman is hardly ever mentioned. When a man 'finds favor' with a woman, he will be interested in a relationship. A relationship is built on personality, character and intelligence as well as physical attraction. Men like women who are fun—who make *them* feel good. Most men want a relationship with someone they can trust. Some aspects of "finding favor" are necessary whether we're talking about getting along with a husband, a male employer, or a male co-worker, in fact, with women as well.

1. Several people in the Bible were favorable in God's eyes. What do you think caused God to find favor with each one?

Moses- Exodus 33:13-17. Moses approached God with honesty but with respect. He was teachable and he asked the sought the Lord, asking how to gain favor.

Samuel- I Samuel 2:26,35. Samuel acted according to what was in God's heart and mind. In other words, he was wanted to please God.

Mary- Luke 1:30, 46-55. Mary's song reveals a heart attitude that wanted to glorify God and that rejoiced in God.

2. What might be the thing that most pleases a man? What makes him "putty in a woman's hands"? (Consider Proverbs 17:1; 1 Corinthians 7:3-5) The healthy sexual relationship between a man and wife is obviously an important and necessary part of what makes the relationship pleasing for the man. But any man with whom you have a relationship must have your respect for the relationship to be satisfying *for him*. You must be able to respect your man for it to be satisfying *for you* as well. This may be an area of your relationship which demands much prayer and trust in God.

But few men tolerate a woman for long, if she is always demanding, critical. If a woman is too hard to please the man will quit trying. A woman who is peaceful, joyful, and fun to be around will be the one that he enjoys being with. This is the kind of charm, combined with respect that will please him and cause him to want to please.

A woman may claim to love her man. She may claim to respect the men she works with. But if she is a 'drama queen', easily offended and moody, most men will do their best to stay away.

3. In a crisis, why would it be advisable to pull grace, beauty and charm out of our "make-up case" instead of anger, words and drama? During a crisis, a cool head and clear thinking are a necessity. This is exactly the time when many women 'lose it'. When a husband faces a personal crisis, such as illness or difficulties with his work, he needs someone who will bring security and strength to stand by his side. If everything else is falling apart, he will be blessed if his wife doesn't.

What if the crisis involves you or the family? Your deepest hurt still doesn't give you license to add another unbearable burden to others around you. Of course Christian husbands, family, and friends are instructed to bear each other's burdens. But some women refuse to be consoled. Even as death loomed over her head, Esther relied most on God; she took the positive actions that she could; and she

never disrespected the king. She also *disregarded her own life*. She allowed God to have complete control of the situation, realizing that it might result in death. This is a good model for us to follow during stressful situations.

Key question: What attitude do you need to develop or what action do you need to take that would please a man in your life *and* that would please God?

For additional reflection: Compare the attitudes and actions of Esther with those of Delilah in the following aspects. Esther 2—4; Judges 16:1-50

Sex appeal-

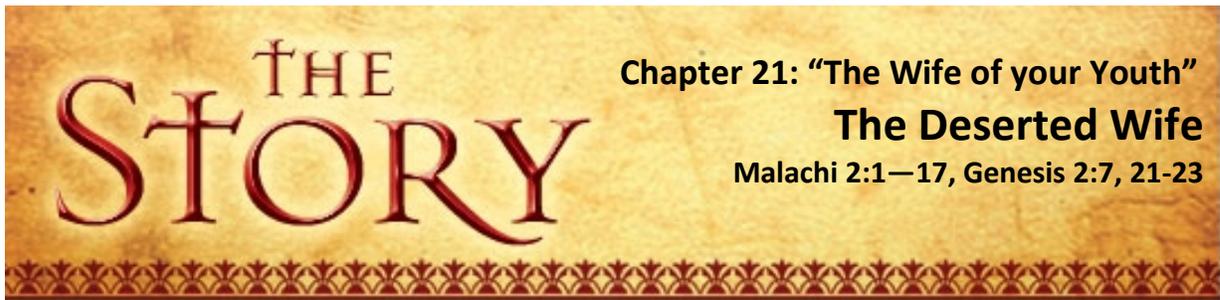
Trustworthiness-

Kindness-

Unselfishness-

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As we come to the close of the Old Testament story of God’s love, we see that “love” is still a problem for the Jews—a misplaced love. They have seen God rescue them miraculously and restore them to their land. With God’s help they rebuilt their temple and the walls of Jerusalem. Throughout the story, their *unholy self-love* brought about destruction in two areas: in their own hearts, and in their families. Once again God raised up a prophet, Malachi, to call them out, because after all this they continued to love themselves more than they loved God.

I. The root of the problem: The Priests no longer taught God’s Will. Malachi 2:1-9

1. Why does God say he will send a curse instead of blessing upon the people? (v.2)

This message is for the priests: “If you do not listen”.... Listen means to pay attention, as one in a court room would need to pay attention to the testimony in order to give a verdict. The *need* to honor God is a life and death matter that they have disregarded. In fact God has warned them (their whole history has warned them), but they did not heed the warning, so they will once again bear the consequences. Since the priests (and the people) have not honored God, they will also be dishonored. The graphic words “...I will spread offal (dung) on your faces” (2:3) reveals how God sees the people of Judah. We are honored when we reflect God. When we reflect the world (sin) we have disgraced, (literally defaced) ourselves.

2. What was it about Levi, the priests’ ancestor, that God said was lacking in the priests of Malachi’s time? (v. 5-6)

“He revered me and stood in awe before me” (2:5). Levi stood with God. They had dishonored and rejected God.

3. God told Malachi two important things honorable priests should do. Note them. (v. 7)

They had rejected God by rejecting his Word (teaching). The priests were to “preserve knowledge” and the people should receive instruction from them. They should “preserve” knowledge. It was the priest’s duty to guard the knowledge of God with the same care that a body guard would protect the life of the one in their trust. The ‘mirror image’ of their responsibility is to pass the knowledge on to the people in their teaching. They were not to preserve the knowledge for themselves; they were to preserve the knowledge by means of proper instruction. In fact God accused the priests of *causing* the people to stray. So He would allow the priests to be belittled to the same extent that they had belittled His word.

II. God calls it Detestable: Breaking covenant breaks God's followers. Malachi 2:10-14

The headings and verse notations in some versions interrupt the flow of thought in this passage. The logical transition in Malachi chapter two, when not interrupted, shows the reader that the problem of unfaithful priests has resulted in unfaithful people. The first nine verses of Malachi lead up to what God really hates. God has some strong language for those who break covenant.

4. What specifically profaned the covenant God had made with the Israelites? (v.10)

God's covenants, and His word, have always been for the benefit of his creation (2:5). Peace and unity among men is one of the greatest by-products of godliness. But because the priests had not fulfilled their ministry, the people became so degraded that brothers betrayed one another. The inability to keep covenant leads to a complete lack of trust and *this* is the essence of the breakdown of a society. This is precisely what God wants to prevent.

5. What does God call detestable? (v. 11-13)

Judah has broken covenant with God by worshipping false gods. This is detestable to God because they have 'joined with' false gods yet presume to continue receiving God's blessings. The breakdown of God's people begins with breaking trust with God. The result of breaking God's trust is that the people begin *to do unthinkable things*. These are the things which degrade them, which is the opposite of what God wants for them.

6. God pointed out that he knew they were disillusioned with their worship and offerings. Instead of blessing they mourned. They felt the distance from God and they felt that He did not see them. However the astonishing fact is that they were so blind to their own wickedness.

Why had God rejected their worship? (v. 14)

God rejected them because they had rejected the 'wife of their youth'. (Note that in rejecting the wife of their youth they were also rejecting their children by that marriage because now their loyalty was divided).

III. The nature of the marriage covenant: two become one. Malachi 2:15-16

This short passage is the clear and consistent demand from God for faithfulness to the marriage covenant because it is based on God's nature and upon their covenant with Him. While thousands of books have been written about the subject, the bottom line is found in these two verses.

7. God had already alluded to His right to instruct man because He is the creator. Re-read the creation of man and God's instruction to Adam and Eve regarding their union in Genesis 2:23-24.

Then fill in the following blanks from Malachi chapter two:

"Have we not all one Father? Did not one God create us?" Malachi 2:10

"Has not the Lord made them one ? In flesh and spirit they are his.

And why one ? Because he was seeking godly offspring ". Malachi 2:15

Why does the marriage covenant reflect the nature of God? God is *one*. In marriage the husband and wife become *one*. (God is complete in Himself. Mankind is not. In fact when God created man he said that it was not good for him to be alone. The woman and the man *together* are God's design for life on earth.)

8. What was Malachi's advice to the Jews on how to protect themselves in the spirit (the relationship with God)? (v. 15b) "Do not break faith with the wife of your youth."

9. What does God hate? (v. 16) Divorce.

10. It seems that God is equating divorce with violence in verse 16. How can divorce and violence be the same thing? (Consider the meaning of the word "one".)

The Greek word for atom is "ἄτομος" which means "one" or "undivided". We know what happened when scientists discovered how to divide an atom....an atomic explosion. What an apt description of the result of divorce in a family. Each member could testify to being devastated in one way or another. This is the epitome of violence.

God clearly asserts that He is "one" and that He has designed the marriage *union* to imitate His own nature. It requires great violence to divide something that cannot be divided.

11. Once again God gives a reminder about how to have spiritual health. What is it? (v. 16b)

"Guard yourself and don't break faith". (Do not be unfaithful.)

12. What was God's original complaint against Judah? (v. 11)

The detestable unfaithfulness of worshipping false gods.

Once again a break is made in the train of thought by the verse notations and headings in some versions. Read Malachi 2:15-17 together. God seems to be saying this discussion was tiring. Adultery was one of the abiding sins of his people. The consequences of divorce cause a 'domino effect' of misery that simply could not be denied. God simply says "Can there be any good in a sin? No! I am a just God." In God's eyes the marriage union can't be broken any more than He can be divided against Himself.

From Genesis to Malachi, we have seen a story of true love. God remained faithful to His covenant with His people, in spite of their rebellion and rejection. God loved them first, and he always loved them.

IV. Messages for women of today.

- The marriage covenant provides for and protects women.

At this point in our lesson, one might be thinking, “of course it’s wrong for a man to leave the wife of his youth...*but I was not the one who left!*” What does God have to say to these women, who, like their sisters in the Old Testament, have been left alone? Are they mistaken to believe the marriage union is a protection?

1. According to Malachi 2:14, what are the two benefits of marriage? Are these benefits applicable only to men? (Remember to whom Malachi is speaking.) “She is your partner and wife”. Some versions use the word “companion”. Companionship and the legal estate of marriage are two very real benefits of marriage and they are mutual benefits.

2. What things does Paul write in Ephesians 5: 25-33 that mirror Malachi’s message? (Compare Matthew 19:1-8; and Mark 10:1-12.)

Jesus’ words as revealed in Matthew and Mark reflect the same pronouncement that God made in the garden when he created Eve and brought her to Adam. This was the institution of union of marriage. Faithfulness in marriage is foundational in The Ten Commandments and the law, which the priests in Malachi’s time had rejected. Solomon wrote about the marriage covenant in Proverbs and The Song of Solomon. So the New Testament teachings on marriage repeat the Old Testament teachings upon which Malachi relied.

Paul introduces the concept of Christ’s sacrifice as an example of the duty of the husband toward his wife. When one realizes that Christian believers have not only the Old Testament and New Testament, but also the indwelling of the Holy Spirit to guide them, it’s a wonder that there would ever be a doubt about God’s will concerning marriage. It also brings a new light to the true desire of God behind the accusation made in Malachi. God will testify for the deserted wife because the husband is not just supposed to remain faithful but he *should be ready to die for her!*

- Godly people, men *and women*, have the leadership responsibility in the home and in the church to teach God’s plan for marriage.

3. From Malachi 2:1-9, what are the important principles about marriage that any leader should teach and live?

The marriage union of the man and woman illustrates that God is One.

The unity between the husband and wife cannot be broken and when it is, it causes violence.

Faithfulness in marriage provides the benefit of companionship and the legal state of marriage to each partner.

Faithfulness in marriage represents faithfulness to God and is a protection for the soul.

God hates divorce.

These are strong teachings for our society that values personal happiness and situational ethics above God’s Word. Even Christian women who are doing this study may be a little taken aback or even offended by the blunt truth. However these *are* the teachings, the ideal that we must hold up and teach to our children.

What God wants is holiness. The holiness we achieve is through the grace and mercy of Jesus. God knows there is a great gulf between His will and our obedience. This is why He sent His Son and that is why we must not only teach what God Commands but how to please God *with the forgiveness and help Jesus offers*.

4. We know that part of the reason God detested the unfaithfulness of the Israelite men toward the wives of their youth was because of his plan to send the Savior through the lineage of Judah. But in Malachi 2:16 He simply states that He wanted them to raise godly children. What does faithfulness in marriage teach the children?

Faithfulness in marriage gives children a foundation for a healthy spiritual and emotional life. They must understand that love is not a feeling but commitment to what is best *for the beloved*. Selfish choices DO NOT lead to happiness. Selfless choices lead to godliness, and the benefits of godliness are the fruit of the spirit.

5. Titus 2:1-5 gives a responsibility to women. How does that responsibility compare to the ministry of the priests in the Old Testament?

The priestly duties of teaching God's Word and guiding others in righteousness are clearly transferred to Christians in the New Testament, though other duties of the priests fell away. We are not to be the 'go-between' for our children and God, but we *are* instructed to lead our children *to God*.

In Bible times, and in some aspects it's still true today, a woman's greatest sphere of influence is within her circle of friends and family. Godly women are also instructed to teach godliness through our words and actions. Faithfulness in marriage sends a strong message. So strong in fact, that Paul advised the women of non-Christian husbands *not to divorce them* but to lead them to Christ *through their actions*. (I Corinthians 7:12-17; 1 Peter 3:1-2)

6. What does God hate and detest—sinful actions or sinful people? God detests sinful actions but He loves people so much that He gave His only son to save them.

Charles A. Kollar, in Solution-Focused Pastoral Counseling, writes: "What we believe we become. (The Bible) is given to teach us to be tenacious about the things of God and to develop a mature hope in his intention (Romans 15:4)." We simply cannot separate God from his word.

- Godly women who experience desertion and divorce must trust in *God's faithfulness*.

That *some* men haven't changed since Malachi's time is proven by the fact that the term "trophy wife" is common and well-understood in our society. In Formerly A Wife, Welby Obrien shares this about divorce: "Each of us is hurting over...the death of a relationship. We know first-hand why God hates divorce—not with a head knowledge of theological assent, but with the pain of personal experience. God knows what divorce does to its victims" (8-9).

9. Who testified on behalf of the deserted wife? Malachi 2:14 God. "The most important husbandly image in the Bible is not human but divine, as God is portrayed as the husband of his redeemed, who metaphorically constitute his bride and wife. 'Your maker is your husband,' Isaiah was regarding God

as their husband (Isaiah 54:5 RSV; see also Jeremiah 31"32). Several strands make up the motif of God as a husband" (Ryken, 413-415).

God portrays himself as a lover (Jeremiah 2:2), as a deserted husband (Hosea 2:13), and as a faithful husband (Hosea 14:14).

10. David was God's chosen king but he spent years running for his life alone, rejected, and sometimes bitter. David's Psalms are a message that God placed in his heart to share with His followers. From Psalm 73:21-28, what comfort is available to the wife who must endure desertion?

God understands our bitterness and grief. He is always with us and he is our strength. He is our refuge.

We must realize that no matter what happens in our marriage, **God is the one whom we worship**. As important as the husband is in our earthly relationships, God is still the One on the throne. A woman who misplaces her love is in just as much danger as a man who disregards God's will about marriage. A strong healthy love for a husband is not the same as our love and worship of God. Whether our husband is faithful or not is largely between Him and God, even though we carry a great responsibility towards our husbands. But whether the husband remains faithful or not, *God is faithful* and we must cling to him in spirit and in truth.

When we love God life is doable. When we love ourselves more than we love God, the first result is to turn away from The Word. However, when we love ourselves more than we love God, we destroy ourselves, and nowhere is this more clearly seen than in the marriage relationship.

Key question: How do you try to separate God from His Word? What will you do to change that?

For additional reflection:

In today's culture, those who follow God and his word are ridiculed. The idea of holiness is mocked, yet the same people expect to be blessed by God when they need him. Compare Hebrews 13:1-8 to the cultural norms we live with today.

Note from these passages who is faithful, and how.

Romans 1:16-17

1 Corinthians 1:9

Psalm 100

What does God reveal to those who are hurting and alone?

Hebrews 10:23

2 Thessalonians 3:3

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The “treasure” is revealed! At long last we learn how God’s work with the Israelites to bring the Savior to the world would be “accomplished” (Luke 1:1).

Imagine, the Savior would be born to an insignificant young Jewess, Mary. However she was not insignificant to God. Four hundred years after Malachi urged the people to honor God through faith and obedience, God introduced the world to one who did—Mary. The difference between the Old and New Testaments is the difference between light and dark. A light was coming into the world that would lift the burden of the law and of sin from God’s people. Luke specifically connected his story to Malachi’s last prophesy about the Messiah, in which he announced that one day the people would be “prepared *for the Lord*” (Malachi 4:5; Luke 1:13-17). Soon Israel would meet this son—Mary’s son—face to face. And Mary would be required to give up her son.

Luke’s account of Jesus’ birth almost seems as if Mary is telling the story. John Macarthur supposes that “Luke sought details about Jesus’ birth and life from Mary (because) he included details that only Mary could have known” (Macarthur 124). Luke introduces the story with John the Baptist’s birth announcement to Zechariah. He would be born shortly before Jesus, with a God-given purpose in life: to announce the Messiah’s coming to His people. John was Jesus’ cousin through Mary’s side and Malachi prophesied his birth (Malachi 3:1; 4:5-6).

This makes sense. If you or I were relating a fantastic personal experience, we would probably preface our story with something that would put it in context and make it understandable. The two miraculous births sit side by side in history. One leads to the other; God’s work is seen in both miracles.

But even though the conception of a child while still a virgin is magnificent, the kindness of God is revealed in an equally magnificent manner. Both Mary *and* Jesus were given another person who was related and involved in their story. The acceptance, along with a warm embrace that Mary probably received from Elizabeth would *had* to have been a great comfort to her. We don’t know that Jesus and John necessarily grew up together, but both were surely aware of their miraculous birth stories. The spiritual and emotional connection between the two men would have been real (Matthew 2:22-25). **God may ask the maximum sacrifice, but He is a loving God who does not abandon us to handle our faith duties alone.**

I. Mary found favor with God because of her faith. Luke 1—2

Sometimes we hear about Mary’s “simple faith”, but there was nothing simple about Mary’s faith, even though she was a young teen. We get confused and make faith about *us*. The strength of faith is found in the *object* of our faith. Look at the kind of faith Mary had from the information we find in the biblical accounts.

1. What was Mary's state of mind when the angel appeared? (1:29-30)

She was "troubled". She was alarmed, probably because of the appearance of the angel. She was also "wondering" or "pondering" what the meaning of this appearance meant.

2. What kind of questions did Mary have? (1:34)

"How can this be since I haven't been with a man?"

She can't imagine how she would be able to conceive and have a son.

3. What did the angel's comment in verse 37 reveal about Mary's thoughts?

He replied "Nothing is impossible with God" as though he knew what she was thinking--that what the angel had said to her *was* impossible. From her experience this could not happen.

4. What women from Israelite history might have come to mind as the angel reassured her?

Sarah, Hannah.

5. To whom, or what, did the angel point as the answer to Mary's fears and questions? (Is Mary's faith in question?)

He explained what God would do (v. 35-39). Her faith was not in question, and the angel gave a clear and direct answer to her spoken *and unspoken* questions. He also announced that her relative Elizabeth would also experience a miracle; she would have a child even though she was barren and beyond the age of childbearing.

II. Mary's faith was built on fact. Luke 1:46-55.

Mary's song revealed that she knew her history, and she knew the Jewish religious teachings. She had a faith built on the historical events that she knew as true. Yet the thoughts in Mary's song clearly point toward the coming of the Messiah.

Read Mary's Song, Note the historical events that might have been referred to: (The passages given are only a suggestion).

"My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant." (1 Samuel 2:1-2; Isaiah 61:10)

Similar expressions were oft repeated exclamations of prophets and patriarchs, when they realized God had chosen them as servants. This was a refrain in the Psalms as well. What an attitude...instead of "I'm so worthy that God has chosen me", it is "I'm unworthy but God has given me the *gift* of serving him. We need to realize that it is an honor and a privilege to serve the Most High God.

"From now on all generations will call me blessed for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name." (Genesis 3:15, Isaiah 7:13-14; Malachi 3:12)

Perhaps Mary realized this would be the seed that would crush Satan's head. She probably knew the messianic prophesies in Isaiah. They would have been passed on for generations and she had no reason to think that the account of this great miracle would not be passed from generation to generation as well. And this has in fact been the case.

"His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation." (Genesis 17:1-14; Exodus 15:1-2; Psalm 103:17)

Mary would have grown up with the teachings from the patriarchs and the prophets. God's covenant with Abraham, which opened the door to God's mercy and salvation for the world, was precisely intended to extend from generation to generation. The Psalmists celebrated God's patience and protection for the Israelites. The prophets reminded them of God's mercy and warned them not to take it for granted.

"He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts." (Exodus 15:3-21; Psalm 89:11-12)

One of the most commemorated events from Israelite history was the exodus. God commanded them to remember the Passover. Moses' and Miriam's praise song when God parted the sea could be a pattern for Mary's praise song.

"He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble." (1 Samuel 17; Daniel 4:28-36)

God has always proven that those who are great in their own eyes are weak. The stories of David's victory over Goliath, and Nebuchadnezzar's vivid dream, that predicted his own demise, are only two of many examples from Jewish history.

"He has filled the hungry with good things but he has sent the rich away empty." (Isaiah 11:1-5, 55:1-5; Psalm 107:9)

All provision comes from God. But clear biblical teaching reminds all generations not to trust in riches but to trust in God. As a relatively poor woman, Mary's realization that God was the one who provided for the poor would have been a real-life lesson. Isaiah predicts that the messiah would be a champion for the poor and for justice.

"He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers." (Isaiah 11:11-12; Jeremiah 31:3)

Mary concludes her praise song with a reminder that God's faithfulness to His people will never end. Indeed Isaiah predicted:

"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" Isaiah 9:6.

III. Mary was faithful through joy, doubt and sorrow. Matthew 27—28

Even though she had faith, the announcement of the angel, and the subsequent life she led would present questions and challenges to Mary's faith. From the moment of the greeting of the angel, Mary's life was like nothing she had imagined. Her reputation, her marriage, and her dreams of motherhood were affected. What happened to her was unimaginable, yet God brought great blessing along with the difficulties. Mary, of all people, was the first-hand witness of the life of our Savior, from conception to resurrection. She knew Jesus as her son and as her Savior.

1. Name the two who greeted Jesus, and note the messages that amazed Mary and Joseph when they presented Jesus in the temple in Jerusalem? What might have been troubling to Mary?

Luke 2:25-35 Simeon- When Simeon laid eyes on the eight-day-old infant, he essentially said, “Now I can die in peace”. He also predicted that Jesus would be powerful, yet greatly denounced. No mother wants to imagine such things about her precious newborn. But then Simeon goes on to predict that “a sword will pierce your (Mary’s) own soul”. These would have been frightening words.

Luke 2:36-38 Anna- Anna was a prophetess and would have been well-known in the temple since she “never left the temple”. She announced to all who would hear that Jesus was the Messiah.

2. What would have pierced Mary’s heart, even though they had escaped to Egypt shortly after Jesus was born? (Matthew 2:7-18)

The news that Herod gave orders to murder every baby boy in area of Bethlehem who was 2 years old and under would have brought great sorrow to Mary. She and Joseph may well have had family members who lost their sons.

3. What worried Mary when Jesus disappeared and was later found with the teachers in the temple? (Luke 2:41-51) It was a dangerous time and travelling was dangerous. He might have been lost in the crowds or kidnapped. From the events that surrounded Jesus’ birth, she would probably felt that he was in danger.

4. What “things” do you think Mary hid in her heart?

All the things that had happened to her, from the visit of the angel , the words of Simeon and Anna, their escape to Egypt and the deaths of the babies in Bethlehem to finding Jesus in the temple, astounding the teachers. All of these things would have been hard to understand, but one thing would have been clear: Jesus was different, and that somehow—he was in danger.

5. What did Mary see Jesus do at the wedding in Cana? Who believed in Jesus? (John 2:2-11) She saw him change the water to wine. The disciples “put their faith in him”.

6. Why did Mary and her sons try to restrict Jesus? (Mark 3:20-35; Luke 8:19-21; Matthew 12:46-50) They obviously didn’t understand his life’s purpose. They feared for him, and that might have meant a life difficult for them. What Jesus wanted and did was different from all others. He was not working for his own life, but for His Father in Heaven.

Mary must have realized by now that she would have to give up her son. She could see the unrest that surrounded him. She knew the political situation, and she knew the times. Anyone who drew this much attention and who consistently presented the people with leadership other than the Jewish leaders would have been at risk.

7. Did Jesus disrespect Mary in this incident? Did Mary and her sons disrespect Jesus? Explain. Jesus was not rude or unkind to them. He used the incident as an opportunity to teach. He didn’t reject his mother and brothers, he was, in effect, offering them the chance to understand his mission and be a part of it. At this point Jesus saw them among those whom he came to save.

They were acting upon what they saw and understood, and their understanding was lacking. They might have been acting out of pride or embarrassment, but from the accounts of the incident in the Gospels, there is no disrespect.

8. Jesus specifically pointed out that obedience to the Word brings favor (Luke 11:27-28). Why could Mary be included as one who was blessed? She had consistently lived a life of obedience, even though she did not understand who Jesus was at this point. He might have been including her as one who was obedient to God.

IV. Mary's sorrow turns to belief. Matthew 27—28; Acts 1

1. From the following two passages, note where Mary was and what she saw?

Matthew 27:32-61 (see also John 19:25-27). She was at the cross and witnessed the crucifixion. She would have also heard that the temple curtain had been ripped apart; she would have felt the earthquake; she would have known that many people came out of their tombs and that later they witnessed to people in Jerusalem.

Matthew 28:1-10; (see also Luke 24:1-10). She was with the other women who saw the empty tomb and the dazzling angel. She also saw Jesus and received his greeting. She joined the other women at his feet in worship, and she heard his instruction to tell his disciples to wait for him in Galilee.

God gave his only Son for you and me. But Mary also gave up her son. Mary's faith came from the teachings she had received about God. Those teachings had to have originated from the scriptures that the Jewish people trusted as God's Word. The messianic prophecies were hidden in the heart of every Jewess. However, the prophecies explained his suffering and death.

2. Read Psalm 22 and note what Mary must have realized on some level. She knew that her son would suffer and that he would be taken from her.

3. What do we know about Mary and Jesus' brothers from Acts 1:12-14?

They became followers. They were present during the establishment of the church. James, Jesus' brother, became the leader of the elders in Jerusalem and later wrote the Book of James to guide church to fuller obedience and understanding.

God called upon Mary because he knew her heart of faith and obedience. He was able to ask great things of her, knowing the pain and suffering that she would have to endure. The idea that faith and obedience protects us from sadness and suffering in this life is erroneous. When the angel announced God's will to Mary, she had to give up her own personal plans and ideas about almost every area of her life. As Jesus grew into a man, she had to give up her right to control and protect him. In the end, she had to completely give her son away to suffering and sacrifice.

V. Faith that gives up.

1. Fill in the blanks:

“For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith “ Romans 1:17.

Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned (Mark 16:16).

The Greek word for both faith and believe are two different forms of the same word. Faith or belief is the noun form: *pistis*. Believe is the verb form: *pisteuo*.

When faith is taught correctly, the natural progression is from belief to faith to belief to faith to belief. In other word, once we hear the gospel message and believe it is true, we have faith in the truth. Then as we mature and experience the Christian life a pattern develops where faith helps us to believe, which increases our faith, which increases our belief, which increases our faith...

2. Can faith exist without belief? (James 2:14) (What kind of faith would Mary have had if she had chosen to reject God’s plan for her?) **Faith and belief must coexist. Real faith cannot be invisible. To believe is to live a life that reveals faith.**

3. Can we have questions and still have faith? How? **One can have faith and believe, even though questions remain. If doubt controls one’s belief, the faith is weak and can be destroyed. But if faith controls one’s doubts, they will be resolved as the faith grows.**

4. Is it wrong to consider the cost of faith? Why or why not? (Matthew 13:44-46; Luke 14:28; Acts 1:3)

God encourages us to “consider” what we are doing. He encourages us to build on a strong foundation. Working through doubts, and seeking answers from the Word and from the faithful, are things we must do as part of our ‘homework’ to make a decision for Christ. Our faith in God is backed by reliable witnesses and proofs. He does not ask for blind faith or a ‘leap of faith’. We are asked to examine the evidence and make a wise conclusion.

We only know a fraction of what Mary experienced with Jesus. What she saw caused her to believe in him as Savior. John writes in his Gospel that Jesus did so many miracles that they could not be contained in any document (John 21:25). One of the ways we count the cost is to determine if we will *trust* the record we have.

5. How did your faith increase when your belief brought you to the point of godly choices or actions?

Key Question: What is it in *your* life that the Lord is asking you to believe Him enough to give up for His sake?

For additional reflection:

Read Hebrews, chapter 11, sometimes called the “Faith Hall of Fame”. Note what each faithful person had to give up, and what he or she gained in return.

Would you be able to give your child to the Lord for His service?

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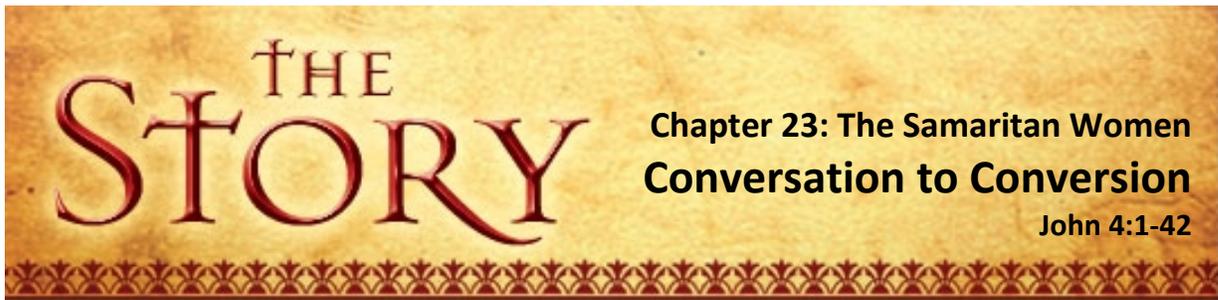
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Jesus' ministry on earth is introduced in Chapter 23 of The Story. His words and his work revealed who he was. As he went about preaching and performing miracles people began to follow him, as well as those twelve men he had chosen to mentor and train for his ministry. They would tell his story to the world. However, men were not the only followers. In fact God's word reveals that many women were among his followers and even some of the most broken women experienced his acceptance. One day in Sychar Jesus' own thirst brought him to satisfy her spiritual thirst. It was a tender, yet honest, conversation that led the tainted Samaritan woman to worship.

The story of the Samaritan woman is so meaningful that research on the subject provides mountains of resources. We could direct our thoughts in several different directions for this lesson, but what speaks loudest is the true worship that results when one knows the good news from God. Jesus restores lives that have been bruised and broken to pieces by the enemy. He explained his compulsion and his compassion when he returned from the temptation in the wilderness and announced, "*The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed,*" (Luke 4:18). The Samaritan woman is precisely the kind of person Jesus wanted to have a conversation with because he understood her shattered life.

I. A Simple Drink of Water. John 4:1—9

1. Why was Jesus passing through Sychar in Samaria? (vs.1-4)

In John 4:4 we read "Now *he had* to go through Samaria" (NIV). Perhaps he was led by the Spirit to a "divine appointment", but other than this wording, there is no specific explanation other than that Jesus was returning to Galilee from celebrating the Passover in Jerusalem. He chose to pass through Samaria, a distance of approximately 68 miles, for a three to four day journey. Because of their prejudice against the Samaritans, many Jews refused to travel through Samaria, taking the detour on the east side of the Jordan River. This would add around 50 miles, and at least three days to the trip. We know that his next stop was in Cana of Galilee, where he would heal the son of a royal official. Perhaps Jesus knew he had a schedule to keep.

The extra two days he spent in Sychar of Samaria were better used in teaching the people than avoiding them because of the prejudice. Remember, we read in Acts 1:8 that just before his ascension, he specifically instructed his followers to take his message to Samaria. Jesus had already set the example to break political barriers.

2. What was significant about the place he chose to rest? (vs. 5-6; Genesis 33:18-20; Joshua 24:32) Jesus, as God, knew the well and its history. He also knew that wells were iconic because of the historic meetings of patriarchs and their wives at wells (Genesis 24:17; 29:10). Jacob's well continues to be a landmark to this day. The well was a convenient stop for travelers between Jerusalem and Galilee (Köstenberger, 126). Both the Jews and the Samaritans knew the history of the well. The woman's own words, "...our father Jacob, who gave us the well..." (4:12) show that the Samaritans considered Jacob to be their ancestor.

The most significant thing about this setting may be that Jesus knew he would meet a thirsty soul at the well.

3. Why did it surprise the woman that Jesus initiated a conversation with her by asking for a drink of water? (vs. 7-9)

Righteous men did not speak to strange women in public. Add to this the fact that the woman was a Samaritan *and* an immoral woman and you have a recipe for a ruined reputation. The woman was well aware of these social taboos, so any approach would have alerted her.

4. What does this show about Jesus' priorities?

We can see how the conversation evolves. Jesus' thoughts were about the woman's soul, and he did not seem to be bothered by the appearance of any indiscretions. He put her spiritual well-being above his reputation.

II. More Than a Drink of Water. 4:10—18

1. What insights can we gain from the way Jesus directed the conversation to spiritual things? (v. 10-12)

He immediately took advantage of the common metaphor of water to direct her thoughts to spiritual things. (Proverbs 14:27, Isaiah 58:11)

We can use common things to plant seeds for evangelism without being offensive.

2. What did the woman's response in vs. 11 and vs. 15 indicate?

She was drawing water from the well at the hottest time of the day (noon), probably to avoid the other women who would have shunned her because of her reputation. This is hard labor that she must do every day, so her first thought is that maybe he could provide her a miracle of water so she would no longer have to go through this toil.

3. From this passage, we know she was aware of the religious history of her people. What was she thinking about Jesus' identity at this point? (vs. 12)

She mentions that he might be a prophet. She is probably thinking of the stories of the prophets who had blessed needy women like the widow of Zarephath who was helped by Elijah.

4. What was Jesus really saying to the woman when he talked about living water? (See John 6:35) He is talking about spiritual things, eternal life, and his own desire to heal her soul.

5. Explain the significance of the underlined words from verse 14: “a spring of water welling up to eternal life”.

Jacob’s well was a very deep well and was probably fed by an underground spring which means the water would always be fresh and clean. The comment is “reminiscent of Isaiah’s vision of people joyfully “drawing of water from wells of salvation” in Isaiah 12:3 (Köstenberger, 126).

The word for well in vs. 11 is *phrear*, meaning pit, or cistern.

In vs. 14 a distinction is made. The word for well is *pege*, meaning spring or fountain. The implication is a comparison between stagnant water and fresh, spring water. The comparison is poignant because the earthly life that comes from earthly water is short-lived and static in comparison to eternal, joyful life in God.

Up to this point Jesus had been conversing with the woman about spiritual things, yet it seems that she was only hearing an enticing offer provide water. Perhaps she realized that he could be a prophet; she may have even heard of a teacher who was been travelling around the region doing miracles. Now Jesus made the conversation personal to make his meaning clear.

6. What did Jesus’ comments about her many husbands reveal to this woman? (vs. 18-19) Hint: Do you think there was more conversation than we have recorded in the passage?

She realized that somehow he knew her past, but at the same time she realized that even though *he had known about her all along*, he’d still entered into this interesting conversation with her.

Jesus’ request to meet her husband seems abrupt in the passage. There may well have been more words in the conversation that Jesus to bring up her husband.

7. Describe in your own words the kind of life that Jesus knew this woman had experienced.

III. From Words to Worship. 4:19—42

1. In the following passage, underline the word “worship” in any form it appears.

“‘Sir,’ the woman said, ‘I can see that you are a prophet. Our fathers **worshiped** on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must **worship** is in Jerusalem.’

Jesus declared, ‘Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will **worship** the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans **worship** what you do not know; we **worship** what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true **worshippers** will **worship** the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of **worshippers** the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his **worshippers**, must **worship** in spirit and in truth.’” (John 4:19-24)

2. Who brought up the subject of worship? The Samaritan woman brought up worship. She might have been trying to lead him away from the subject of her husbands. This subject immediately reminded her of her unworthiness. This is painful territory for her. In an attempt to deflect what might turn into a personal attack she moved to a more comfortable battle ground- the dispute between the Jewish claim that the Samaritans, and their place of worship, were not acceptable to God. Actually, the conversation was going right where Jesus wanted it to...to her worthiness to worship.

3. According to Jesus, what is true worship? (vs. 23)

Jesus detected that her understanding of worship was weak...having to do with where one worships, or with 'credentials'- heritage. True worship is in "Spirit and truth". God had always sought the worship of all peoples. The Jews misinterpreted God's work of bringing the Messiah to the world through them as a political blessing instead of a spiritual blessing. They thought God was honored to have them, instead of realizing that they should be honored that He lowered himself to work through them. This is the attitude that blocked true worship. It still is.

4. What change in thought did Jesus force the woman to make? (See vs. 15 and 23)

She had to change her thoughts about herself, and about who God is. He wanted her to be aware of the spiritual realities and not to be tied to a worldly life. He wanted her to be open to the powerful revelation of who he was.

5. What startling announcement did Jesus make? (vs. 25-26)

He announced to her that he was the Messiah. The announcement "shows how Jesus is ready to reveal himself *to those who are open to his revelation* (emphasis mine), including non-Jews..." (Köstenberger, 158). This is the first time Jesus openly claims to be the Messiah. Imagine, Jesus first announced who he was to a sinful Samaritan woman. Does this remind us of how God works...lowly shepherds saw angels when Jesus was born, but Herod saw an enemy? A poor Jewish girl was Jesus' mother. God rejects the proud but chooses the humble to proclaim his glory (1 Peter 5:5).

6. What was the woman's response? (vs. 28-30)

She left her water jug and ran to town to tell everyone she saw what Jesus had said to her. She dropped everything because her life was completely changed.

We know that Jesus had many more conversations with the Samaritans. In fact, he stayed with them for two more days.

7. Note the key dynamics of fruitful evangelism that we can observe from this story? (Hint: try to experience the range of emotions the Samaritan woman would have felt.)

1. A non-threatening approach. In fact, allowing someone to help you in a way that they *can* is a good way to begin to win someone's confidence.

2. Taking advantage of conversation to direct the thoughts toward spiritual things, *without*, condescension or fault-finding.

3. Carefully pulling back layers of defense to reveal the true spiritual condition to meet needs.

4. Revealing what God truly wants from us- worship in spirit and truth, not just appearance.

5. Speaking the truth in love.

6. Staying with them in order to answer questions and to help them build a foundation of belief through teaching.

8. Describe how the woman worshipped in ‘spirit and truth’ after she was convinced Jesus was the Messiah.

When she was aware of whom Jesus was, she responded appropriately. She told others the truth that she had experienced.

Worship is not about technicalities; it is about an awareness of who God is and it is a heart-felt response to Him.

IV. From Conversations to Conversions.

Jesus cared about the Samaritan woman. His conversation with her resulted in the conversion of many Samaritans. This was more than just talk; Jesus touched her life in meaningful ways. Both Jesus’ approach to the Samaritan woman, and her response, provide us with a powerful example.

1. Note the instructions about our conversations:

Ephesians 4:29- *Speak what is “helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen”.*

Colossians 4:6- *“Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.”*

2. If you had been the woman, would you have been offended by Jesus? Why or why not?

3. What was the true solution to the woman’s problems? To ours? (vs. 23-26)

Knowing God and how God wants to be worshipped released her from the chains that bound her. Jesus knew that it wasn’t enough just to know who God was by definition; the woman knew that much about God. She needed to know how to respond to God and that God (by way of Jesus) personally cared that sin dominated her life.

True worship that is “in spirit and truth” brings blessing to the worshipper and to the world around him. Mark Moore explains worship in his book How to Dodge a Dragon: “It is not what we do, but what we are aware of...it’s fair to say that you have not worshiped until you get a clear vision of God.

When the disciples returned and found Jesus talking to the woman, they had questions. He had stressed what true worship was to the Samaritan woman, but the disciples were also confused. The message for them was that his *“food was to do the will of God”* (4:34). “The whole discussion was meant to distinguish the physical from the spiritual and to stress the importance of both” (Bryant & Krause 130).

We tend to categorize our spirituality *somewhere else*, away from our reality. That is not the way to worship God. He wants us to place everything about us under His control. He wants us to be aware of him, not just in a spiritual sense, but in a real ‘feet on the ground’ sense.

4. When did you really see God? Were you aware of who he is and what he has done?” (vs. 34, 35).

5. The Samaritan woman heard Jesus' claim, and she realized who he was. It changed everything. Soon the whole town knew. Explain how this might happen in your town to show that your worship is 'in truth'?

6. One of the reasons Jesus is worthy of worship is because he was the fulfillment of God's promise to send a Messiah. Note the promises to us that are found in Revelation 22: 7, 10, and 12.

"Behold, I am coming soon!"

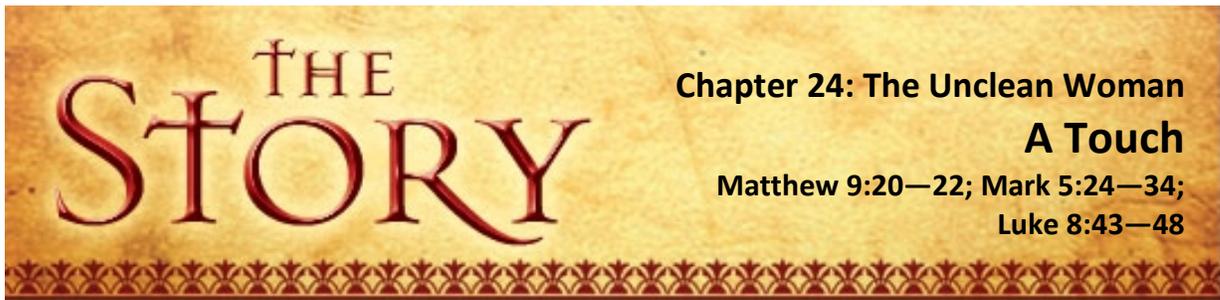
Key Question: What things will you remove from your life that block your vision of God and hinder your worship?

For additional reflection:

From Revelation 21:2—7, note what eternal blessings were available to the Samaritan woman that are still available for you and me today.

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It's still an 'untouchable' subject, even though a woman is no longer considered 'unclean' when she is menstruating. (See Leviticus 15). The words "female trouble" provide a catch-all phrase to cover various health concerns that only women have to deal with. Men will steer clear by finding an understanding woman in the congregation to minister to women who suffer from these illnesses. Chapter 24 of The Story (entitled "No Ordinary Man") describes Jesus' earthly ministry. Many women still relate to the Unclean Woman of scripture because they too experience excessive bleeding, pain, and in a word- suffering- related to ailments of the reproductive system. But Jesus wasn't ordinary; He didn't run, and He didn't hide. Real-life suffering touched Him to the core.

We find the laws regarding normal and abnormal menstruation in Leviticus 15:10-30. A woman was considered unclean for seven days from the start of her period and seven days following. In the case of longer or abnormal bleeding, she would be unclean as long as there was bleeding and seven days after. Anyone who touched a woman who was bleeding was considered unclean; anyone she touched was considered unclean, *even if it was just their clothing*. Imagine the implications of this law. Imagine that at least two weeks out of every month if a husband and wife even touched each other he was considered unclean and would need to go through the prescribed cleansing. What about the rest of the family? The law was a tremendous burden on the people, and "laws" cannot change hearts.

I. What happened?

Any investigator will talk to every witness to get to the truth. There are three different points of view in this story. We can learn much by investigating the events that took place from the viewpoints of the unclean woman, of Jesus, and of the disciples.

The Unclean Woman. Matthew 9:20—22; Mark 5:25—29, 33-34; Luke 8:43-44, 47-48

1. What was her problem and how serious was it? The wording in Hebrew: "Having spent the all from herself" (Elwell & Comfort), is poignant. She had been bleeding for 12 years. She had spent all her money on physicians and had suffered at their hands. At that time medical care was nothing like we know of today. It was a combination of common sense, folk lore, and experimentation. History records remedies for ailments at this time that are at best unhelpful, at worst—horrifying. This type of disease takes its toll on a woman's body and on her emotions, even with the best of medical care. She would probably have been fragile from the loss of blood. The length of time the woman suffered is a stark contrast to the immediacy of her healing.

2. How did she know who Jesus was? Mark 5:27 relates that "*she heard about Jesus*". By this time Jesus' popularity was on the rise and crowds gathered around him wherever he went. It's not hard to imagine that she would have heard about him from friends or just from local gossip.

3. What did she do to have the courage to approach him? (Matthew 9:21; Mark 5:28)
 “She said to herself...” She talked herself into it. What did she have to lose? She had tried everything else that seemed logical (physicians) to no avail. Note that after hearing of Jesus, this was a decision she came to within herself...she was not convinced or coerced.

4. What did she do and what happened to her body?

She approached Jesus with humility, with timidity, probably thinking that if she only touched his garment she would not draw any attention to herself. (The “edge of his garment” may have referred to a hem, corner or tassel.) With the touch she immediately felt she was healed.

The accounts in Matthew and Luke are meaningful in their brevity: *“She said to herself, ‘If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed.’ Jesus turned and saw her. ‘Take heart, daughter,’ he said, ‘your faith has healed you.’ And the woman was healed from that moment”* (Matthew 5:21-22). The immediate healing spoke for itself...eloquently and powerfully.

Mark’s account includes that the bleeding immediately stopped and she was “freed from her suffering” (5:29). The word for suffering is the same word for plague or scourge, which is an appropriate understanding of what the woman had endured.

“Later it was a common practice for the crowds to touch the hem of Christ’s garments and be healed (Mark 6:56).” (Robertson)

5. How did she react when Jesus revealed that she had touched him?

With fear and trembling she fell down before him and confessed what she had done.

6. What made her well? All three accounts record Jesus’ words “Daughter, your faith has made you well”.

Jesus. Matthew 9; Mark 5; Luke 8

The Gospel accounts give Jesus’ itinerary for approximately 48 hours before the encounter with the woman. He had maintained a grueling schedule of healing and teaching, including the press of the crowds that were following him. Remember, the Apostle John wrote that *“the whole world would not have room to contain the books that would be written”* about all of Jesus’ activities (John 21:23).

1. Go to the three passages that record this event and glance back at Jesus’ activities just before he encountered the unclean woman; briefly list what Jesus had been doing in that short time.

In the week to ten days prior to this event, the three gospel accounts record the following events:

| | Matt. | Mark | Luke |
|--|----------|---------|---------|
| Jesus heals a demon-possessed man | 12:22-23 | 3:20-22 | |
| Pharisees rebuked | 12:24-37 | 3:22-30 | |
| The sign of Jonah | 12:38-45 | | |
| Family seeks Jesus | 12:46-50 | 3:31-35 | 8:19-21 |
| Parables by the Sea | 13:1-35 | 4:1-34 | 8:4-18 |
| Parables explained and told in private | 13:36-53 | | |
| Orders to cross the Sea of Galilee | 8:18 | 4:35 | 8:22 |
| Jesus calms a stormy sea | 8:23-27 | 4:36-41 | 8:23-25 |
| Legion cast out of violent man | 8:28-34 | 5:1-20 | 8:26-39 |
| Jesus sails to Capernaum | 9:1 | 5:21 | 8:40 |
| Jairus asks Jesus to heal his daughter | 9:18-19 | 5:22-23 | 8:41-42 |
| Ill woman is healed by touching Jesus | 9:20-22 | 5:24-34 | 8:42-48 |

<http://www.lifeofchrist.com/life/harmony>

2. Try to imagine the strain and pressure Jesus would have endured from this crowd. Explain what you think the toll was on Jesus. The days preceding this healing would have been filled with increasing action that included an increasing press of people. Imagine the plight of entertainers whom the public idolizes. The difference here is that Jesus did not have body guards and armored SUV's to whisk him away. Jesus, as a human being, would not have been accustomed to that kind of intense pressure and the Twelve would not have been up to that kind of security, even though they tried.

Another difference is that the crowds *wanted, and later expected, something* from Jesus- they wanted help and healing, teaching, and even provision. As they saw the miracles the word spread and the demand grew, not just for Jesus presence, but for his work. It is no wonder that Jesus went away early in the morning for solitude and to commune with the Father. That kind of ministry was draining in every way. Jesus gives us more than just an example of a wise thing to do, He shows us what is *necessary to survive* this kind of stress.

3. What was on Jesus' mind when this incident occurred? (Where was Jesus actually heading next?) He would have had Jarius and his daughter in mind. From the accounts, Jarius asked Jesus to come with him to heal his daughter and almost as soon as they started out the woman touched Jesus.

4. What did Jesus realize *the moment* the woman was healed? "That power went out of him." It is interesting to ponder the meaning of this comment. We know that he was distinctly aware of the power and the touch.

5. What question did he ask? Explain what he did as he asked the question. He turned around and asked "Who touched my clothes?" He kept looking over the crowd.

6. Did Jesus pay any attention to the apostles' comments? Explain his attitude toward them. He kept looking even as the disciples were talking to him and the crowd was pressing on him. He was more interested in finding the woman than discussing what had happened with the disciples at that moment. He simply dismissed their comments.

7. What did Jesus say to the woman? Explain his attitude toward her.

"Take heart, daughter," he said, "your faith has healed you" (Matthew 9:22).

"Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering" (Mark 5:34).

"Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace" (Luke 8:48).

He was kind and encouraged her. He particularly focused in on her and paid attention to her. Jesus would probably have been looking directly at her and speaking, not scanning the crowd for someone else to interact with.

8. From Matthew 9:35-38, describe how Jesus viewed the people around him.

"He had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd."

He endured the stress, the crowds, and the personal sacrifice because he loved the people.

The Disciples. Matthew 9:37; Mark 5:31; Luke 8:45-46

1. Describe the reaction of the disciples to Jesus' question, "Who touched me?"

They were amazed that he would ask such a question since the crowd was large and was pressing upon him. They were unaware of the meaning of the question.

2. What do you think the disciples thought as they observed Jesus and heard his teachings during this hectic period of time?

The disciples were experiencing things they were unable to understand. At times they probably could hardly take it all in and using human, sometimes selfish, reasoning didn't help them understand Jesus and his selfless actions.

3. From Jesus' 'debriefing' with his disciples in Matthew 9:35-38, what could the disciples have perceived about their question in Mark 5:31?

If they had thought back to that event they would have understood Jesus' question came from his compassion for the woman. They were trying to get through the crowd to their next 'appointment'. Jesus was seeing the crowd as individuals who were in need.

In the space of a few seconds, a woman was healed; Jesus knew it; he was chided by the disciples; *and* he responded to them, as well as to the woman. No angry reaction to the stress—to the questioning—to the presumption of the woman. For Jesus it was business as usual. The biblical accounts describe a kind and compassionate man, calm in the midst of a whirlwind.

II. Conclusions.

1. What can the actions of the unclean woman teach us?

Faith! Take action in faith.

Courage and persistence.

Don't let the gravity of the situation paralyze us to the point that we are unable to take opportunities that God provides.

2. What can the actions of Jesus teach us?

His healing of and care for the woman is an encouragement to any who are in suffering. These stories are true, and they remind us of the One who has ultimate power. We know that we must touch *Him* to receive help.

On another level, Jesus' compassionate attitude and selfless sacrifice for others is an example to us. He maintained His relationship with the Father in order to maintain His ability to minister. It was not easy for him; it was as difficult as it would be for any human being to extend himself to the max.

3. What can the actions of the disciples teach us?

Not everything is as it seems. We may look at some situations through human eyes and not understand what God's perspective or plan is.

"So why the 12 years? Maybe it took that long to build her faith. Just like it took 120 years to build the ark and 40 years to build a nation ready to possess the land, it took 12 years of suffering until she was

desperate enough to believe enough to reach out and touch Jesus. 1 Peter 1:7 says, "That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ."

And maybe it took 12 years, so Jesus could be glorified in what He did (Wilson)."

III. Touching Jesus.

The real-life story of the unclean woman is also a real-life story of every person who comes to Jesus. What we experience when we come to Jesus is not unlike what the woman experienced. Not only does faith lead us into a saving relationship with Christ, faith leads us to *cling to Him* in order to faithfully walk with Him every day. With the metaphor of the unclean woman in mind, meditate on the changes in our lives when we draw near to Jesus.

1. Fill in the blanks: (The first letter of each word is provided from the NIV)

Then the woman, seeing that she could not go unnoticed, came t_____ and
f_____ at his feet. In the presence of all the people, she told why she had touched him and how
she had been instantly healed. Then he said to her "Daughter your f_____ has healed you.
Luke 8:47

2. Sin brings every kind of suffering. Make a note of some of the suffering that has brought you to Jesus with fear and trembling. (Hebrews 4:15-16)

3. What is the proper response to the spiritual healing and freedom that salvation brings?

4. What knowledge do we have to base our faith upon?

5. How much faith do we need to respond to Jesus? (Luke 17:5-6)

Key Question: What courageous act will require you to cling to Jesus in faith?

For additional reflection: The unclean woman was not the only person who summoned the courage to reach out to Jesus. In each of the examples below note what qualms they might have had to overcome in order to ask Jesus for help.

Mary- John 2:1-22

Nicodemus- John 3:1-21

The Official- John 4:43-54

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We read about several events during the third year of Jesus' ministry in chapter 25 of THE STORY. At this time Jesus was still popular with the people, but his enemies went from opposing Jesus to making plans to stop him. Meanwhile, Jesus had openly declared who he is and had openly taught the disciples about his soon coming suffering and death. After an intense period of travel, teaching and healings, Jesus arrived at the home of his friends, Martha and Mary, probably for some R&R. There, the two women served Jesus in their own way. However Martha discovered the kind of help that was not helpful.

Why did Jesus come to these friends at this time? We're told in John 11:5 that Jesus loved these sisters. The scriptures also tell us that many women followed Jesus and his disciples and cared for their needs. These would possibly have included wives of the disciples as well as friends who believed in him. We don't know that Martha and Mary followed Jesus with this group but we do know that they cared for him and his disciples needs at least in this incident. It's probable that they helped support Jesus ministry (Matthew 27:55).

I. Martha serves Jesus. Luke 10:38-40

If we want to see a Martha, most of us need only to look in a mirror. Even though we have deep belief, sometimes we try to hide a controlling spirit with a breathtaking busyness that takes away our peace and joy. Not only that, we get irritated when others choose a different path of service.

1. Who "opened her home"? Martha Some believe Martha was the wife of Simon the Leper, (Matthew 26:6; Mark 14:3; John 12:1).

2. To whom did she offer her hospitality? Jesus *and* his disciples.

Hospitality was certainly a specialty of *this* family. We will see in the next lesson that Martha was the opposite of another who hosted Jesus and his disciples. She was serving within her own giftedness and she had no idea there was anything amiss.

Martha acted appropriately within the culture of the time as well. Hospitality was expected and necessary. There were few options for travelers or for the needy. Guests were often considered to be sent from God so to care for their needs was a sacred duty. A proper host acted as if his guests were the lord and he was the servant. Martha didn't think she was doing anything wrong because culturally, she wasn't.

At the time, a woman's work truly was never done. With no helpful appliances, all that was done was done by hand...the hands of the woman of the house and her servants, if there were any. The day began with the grinding of grain for bread. The household awoke to the sound of the millstones; the sound of the millstones meant there was food for the hungry. Silence in the morning would not be a

good thing (Jeremiah 25:10). That work could take up to half the day. We can only imagine what would be involved in the preparation of even a simple meal for Jesus and his disciples (possibly 20-25 people if the women are included).

3. Use the following chart to contrast the attitudes and actions of the two women from Luke 10:39-40.

| | Mary | Martha |
|---|--|---|
| Actions | Sat at Jesus' feet, listening | Worked feverishly to prepare for the guests. |
| Attitudes | Calm, respectful of Jesus, attentive to his words. | Distracted by the preparations. Angry, self-pity. |
| Words | No words recorded, she was listening. | Demanded that Jesus reprimand Mary. "Lord don't you careTell her to help me. |
| Effect of actions, attitudes and words. | Mary displeased Martha but she pleased Jesus. | Martha was rude to both Mary and Jesus. |

4. Considering Jesus' activities of the preceding days, describe what might have been Jesus' needs? Food was not always the most important thing to Jesus. In fact he was sometimes at odds with the religious leaders as well as with his disciples in some instances relating to eating: Matthew 3:20- Jesus was so crowded he couldn't eat and his mother and brothers thought he was crazy; Matthew 15- *it's not what goes into the mouth that is important*; Mark 2:16- Jesus was eating with sinners; John 6:48ff- *I am the bread of life*; John 4:31-31- *I have food to eat that you know nothing about*.

5. Write a one word description of the way Martha reacted to her situation. Harried, exasperated

6. Write a one word description of the way Jesus reacted to his situation. Patient, firm

II. Jesus ministers to Martha. Luke 10:41, 42

Jesus was surrounded by people who did not understand him, and sometimes their efforts at serving him were off-track. His mother and brother tried to 'rescue' him when they thought he was delirious or misguided in his teachings. His disciples wanted to protect him from clingy mothers and children. Martha thought that a hearty meal at her table was what would serve him best. Each of these assumptions might have been correct from an earthly perspective, but Jesus had a different perspective. That is what he tried to help Martha understand.

Martha surely had the gift of service and/or hospitality. She is described here as serving and preparing a meal, and again at the dinner during six days before the Passover, just before the Triumphal Entry (John 12:1-2). But this time she confused her desire to serve Jesus with the desire to meet her own expectations and to serve her pride. Martha's actions were not necessarily wrong but her attitude, which grew in frustration to the point that she expected Jesus to reprimand Mary, was truly out of

place. What guest wants to settle an argument between the two women of the house, especially if that guest needs to take a break from distress and conflict?

1. What shows that Jesus was thoughtful of Martha in his response? The wording: “Martha Martha, you are worried and upset about many things”. Martha dared to sharply rebuke even Jesus, which would have been very inappropriate. However Jesus cared about her feelings and wanted to help her see a better way. He was not harsh; nor did he belittle her for her ‘littleness’. Interestingly, in this case the guest becomes the servant of the hostess.

2. What do you think was the “one thing” that was needed? (Was it something *he* needed or something *she* needed?)

She needed to be at peace. He needed peace. She needed to understand what was important and how to understand the opportunity she had to enjoy his presence. It may be that Jesus felt the need to enjoy hers, and her sister’s, presence and attention. No doubt the opposition of the religious leaders grieved him; and he knew that it would only become worse until it ended in his death. With this ahead of him in only a few short months, one thing he desired was to have the comfort of friends.

It may be that our worship would be more meaningful if we thought in terms of how we bless the Lord. God does not *need* our worship; but it pleases God when we seek Him and worship Him for Who He is.

3. What had Mary chosen?

Jesus said that Mary had chosen the “best part” (NET), “better part” (NIV), or the “good part” (NASB). The wording implies that what Martha had chosen was not bad but what Mary chose was what he preferred. We are reminded of his words to his disciples in Samaria, “I have food you know nothing about”. He wanted Martha to think in spiritual terms right now and to let go of her affinity to earthly things.

4. How would that have helped Jesus?

Dissension between two persons is always uncomfortable for a third person who is a friend of both. He would have enjoyed the visit with no tension- no drama- no hurry. It is a great blessing when friends are of one mind. What he enjoyed about Mary was that she was ‘in tune’ with him, Martha was not. How often are we busy in service but out of tune with our Lord?

5. How would that have helped Martha?

Martha would have been pleased that she was serving her guest with what was “best” in his eyes. She would not have had a stressful experience, and she would have avoided the resentment she’d had for her sister.

6. As Jesus took the opportunity to make something clear about Mary, what did he teach Martha? (42) He revealed that Martha’s attitude was actually *taking away* what belonged to her sister. She would have understood that she had presumed upon her sister as well as upon Jesus. Jesus’ presence was a blessing and Mary would not be denied that blessing, even if Martha did not choose to take advantage of the opportunity.

III. Martha believes without understanding. John 11:

Believing God doesn't always mean that we understand His ways. Until we see Him work in our lives, it's impossible to even begin to see things *through* His eyes. Though we will never have perfect knowledge in this life, as we walk with Him we build a bank of experiences upon which to base our understanding of His work in our present circumstances. Jesus used the death of his friend Lazarus to help his disciples, to help Martha, *and help us* understand how to believe Jesus.

1. Why did Jesus delay his response to the sisters' plea for help for Lazarus? (11:14)

"Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, *so that you may believe.*" Even after all the miracles, they did not understand he had true power. They also did not understand the teaching about his death and resurrection.

2. Who was the first of the sisters to meet Jesus as he approached? (11:20)

Martha ran to meet him as he drew near. Mary remained at home.

3. What did Martha say that she believed *about* Jesus? (11:21-22)

4. In the next interchange Jesus pressed Martha. What is the disconnect between what Jesus said and what Martha said? (11:23-27)

Martha stated, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world." She understood that he was the Messiah. Jesus explained to her what his role as the Messiah was, but she still did not understand that he was talking about his own resurrection as well as his power to raise her brother from the dead.

We have the same disconnect. We think we believe Jesus but when it comes to a difficult personal circumstance, we have no vision for what the Lord can accomplish. That may be because we don't see how the Lord can bless without fulfilling *our desire*, or we don't relinquish our smallness of thinking to imagine how He might work miraculously, completely outside of our will.

5. When Jesus called for the stone to be removed what did Martha's comment reveal? (11:39)

She did not think Lazarus would be alive.

6. Here was another teaching moment between Jesus and Martha. What was Jesus' reminder to his friend? (11:40)

"Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?"

7. What 'bank account' experience should the disciples have learned when Jesus raised Lazarus?

They should have connected this power with his teaching about his own death and resurrection. But human thinking is limited.

IV. What is admirable?

Right answers and a hectic schedule of ministry will not help our belief any more than Martha's frazzled way of serving helped Jesus that day in Bethany. Martha used her service as a cover for her desire to control those around her. Mary was not the only one who had to do things her way; she even expected Jesus to see things her way. While service is admirable, another thing is more admirable. When Lazarus died Jesus took the opportunity once again to correct wrong assumptions. We release the control of our lives when we have allowed Jesus to possess our schedules and our vision. Then we can begin to understand and truly believe.

1. As human beings it is impossible for us to fully understand God's ways. How are some of God's ways described in the following verses?

Psalm 145:17 *The Lord is righteous in all his ways and loving toward all he has made.* (Sometimes we are righteous but not loving. Sometimes we think we are loving but we are in the wrong. Jesus was able to live in both a righteous and loving manner—consistently.

Isaiah 55:9 *As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.* Sadly, our thoughts are usually confined to a bubble right around our own lives.

Romans 11:33-36 *Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments and his paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? Who has ever given to God that God should repay him? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.*

2. When did the disciples finally understand? (Luke 24:44, 45)

He opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. Now they were able to put together the 'bank of the knowledge' of the things of Jesus that they had seen and heard with the Old Testament Scriptures which they had been taught.

3. List the ways that God provides help to understand His ways?

2 Timothy 3:15-16 *...the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

Romans 8 In this chapter Paul explains life through the Spirit. "...those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires" Romans 8:5b.

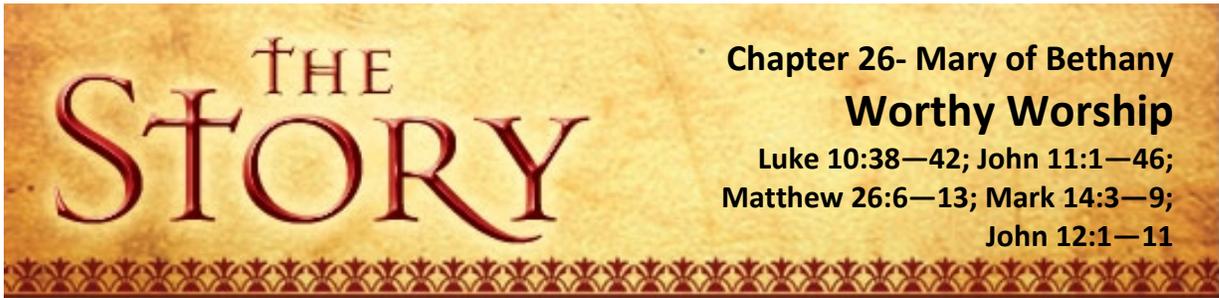
James 1:5 *If any of you lack wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him".*

Key Question: What are you trying to control with busyness that hinders your ability to understand and believe?

For additional reflection: John gives us Jesus' teaching about the Holy Spirit in chapters sixteen and seventeen. Study John 17:17—23, and note how Jesus planned for you and me to be able understand and believe?

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Chapter twenty-six of THE STORY, “The Hour of Darkness”, begins with the preparation for the Passover feast which took place the night before Jesus was crucified. To give Christians everywhere a vivid reminder of His suffering and death, Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper. He also revealed that one of his friends would betray him. Only four days before this Jesus was at another meal during which Mary’s act blessed Him so much that he announced she would be remembered every time the Gospel is proclaimed. As we read the story of Jesus’ death, it would be good to consider how Mary acknowledged Jesus with a beautiful expression of love—*worship that was worthy*.

During the Last Supper Jesus carefully explained what would become of him, and what they should do, though they didn’t understand his life would be taken within hours. He revealed the “full extent of his love” (John 13:1). He then washed their feet, and he asked them to remember the sacrifice he was going to make. Jesus could have shown the world raw power in order to demand obedience and loyalty. Instead he showed the power of perfect love by serving mankind in life and in death.

I. One thing. Luke 10:38—42; John 11:1—46

How can we offer worship that is worthy of One who suffered and died for us on that dark day? To understand the background we will return to the two passages of scripture from Martha’s story, but this time we will appreciate Mary’s part in them. There *was* a connection between Jesus and Mary of Bethany, but it is the same connection that we can also have with our Lord, the worship connection.

Our first introduction to Mary in Luke 10 gives us three clues about her heart of worship. Fill in the blanks to discover them:

“(Martha)...had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet, listening to what he said” Luke 10:39.

Jesus said “... only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better and it will not be taken away from her” Luke 10:42.

1. What is the attitude of heart when one sits at the feet of another?

Mary regarded herself with humility and she respected Jesus; she had a heart of devotion. She was open to his teaching, and she preferred to take the opportunity to learn from Jesus, even though it brought Martha’s scorn.

2. What does “listening” mean to you? How might the heart be involved?

(The Greek word used here is *akouo*. It is translated as hear, listen, understand, listen and respond.)

She gave him undivided attention in order to understand his teaching. Her heart was *inclined* to listen to him. (See Proverbs 2:1-2; 22:17). This kind of listening includes intention to obey.

3. What choice did Mary make?

Mary had grasped the fact that he might not be with them much longer. She made Jesus the priority. “The word ‘priority’ means ‘to prefer (George 14). So she chose to take advantage of the spiritual feast, rather than to become preoccupied with food.

The story in John 11 of the raising of Lazarus, give us more insights into Mary’s heart of worship.

4. When Martha ran to meet Jesus as he approached their home, what did Mary do? (v. 20)

She remained at home. Some interpret this to mean she was upset with Jesus. Several reasons could be given that are not negative in nature; other women were there mourning with her, or she may simply have waited until Martha greeted Him. There is no indication that Mary was angry; she might have simply been waiting to see what her friend Jesus would do. She also regarded him highly as a Rabbi. She would not have been disrespectful to him in any way. From the biblical depiction of Mary, she would not have been the type to simply ‘react’.

5. What was Mary’s response when she heard that Jesus was asking for her? (v. 32)

She immediately went to him.

6. What do you think her words imply: “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died”?

The words could indicate her disappointment, or they could simply be the fact that she believed he could have healed him *if he had been there*, but the idea that he could be raised from the dead was something she would not have dreamt of. She was naturally grieving the death of her brother.

7. How did this experience affect Jesus? (vs. 33-38)

Jesus was moved to tears. He had compassion on Mary and Martha.

8. Read John 11:38-44, and put yourself in Mary’s place. Remember that Mary had taken the time to listen attentively to Jesus’ teaching in the past. Mary had heard Jesus’ and Martha’s conversation at Lazarus’ tomb. Describe what Mary’s faith and feelings might be at this point.

Mary may have been thinking the same things, but we don’t know. She would have had great gratitude and joy when she saw her brother walk out of the grave. But she surely pondered over Jesus’ words and the miracle she had seen. She knew he had been speaking about his own death; now she saw that he had power over death. It would have been a chilling thought.

III. Mary Anoints Jesus at Bethany. Matthew 26:6—13; Mark 14:3—9; John 12:1—11

As Jesus’ time on earth drew to a close, we know that Mary was one of the few who understood, at least in part, what Jesus had been telling them about himself. John’s account reveals what Jesus had been teaching as that dark hour approached and it’s reasonable to believe that Mary heard Jesus’ teaching. Only a few days before the crucifixion, when Mary anointed Jesus’ head and washed his feet, she would have understood the following things about Jesus:

Luke 18:31-34- *Then Jesus took the twelve aside and said to them, “Look, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. For he will be handed over to the Gentiles; he will be mocked, mistreated, and spat on. They will flog him severely and kill him. Yet on the third day he will rise again.” But the twelve understood none of these things. This saying was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what Jesus meant.* (NET)

John 6:45-48- *It is written in the prophets, ‘**And they will all be taught by God.**’ Everyone who hears and learns from the Father comes to me. (Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God – he has seen the Father.) I tell you the solemn truth, the one who believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that has come down from heaven, so that a person may eat from it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats from this bread he will live forever. The bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”* (NET)

John 6:54- *The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.* (NET)

John 8:12- *Then Jesus spoke out again, “I am the light of the world. The one who follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”* (NET)

John 7:17-19- *So Jesus replied, “My teaching is not from me, but from the one who sent me. If anyone wants to do God’s will, he will know about my teaching, whether it is from God or whether I speak from my own authority. The person who speaks on his own authority desires to receive honor for himself; the one who desires the honor of the one who sent him is a man of integrity, and there is no unrighteousness in him. Hasn’t Moses given you the law? Yet not one of you keeps the law! Why do you want to kill me?”*(Net)

John 8:23-24- *Jesus replied, “You people are from below; I am from above. You people are from this world; I am not from this world. Thus I told you that you will die in your sins. For unless you believe that I am he, you will die in your sins.”* (NET)

John 8:31-32- *Then Jesus said to those Judeans who had believed him, “If you continue to follow my teaching, you are really my disciples and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”* (NET)

John 8:51- *I tell you the solemn truth, if anyone obeys my teaching, he will never see death”.* (NET)

What was going to happen to Jesus was no secret. The prophecies of the rejected Messiah in Isaiah 53 were widely regarded by the religious leaders. During his last weeks on earth, Jesus openly declared that he was the Messiah and that he was the fulfillment of the prophecies. Jesus declared it; Mary believed it. Even up to the last hours of his earthly life Jesus was trying to explain his mission, *and their mission*, to his Apostles.

The last few hours of Jesus' life on earth are narrated in "The Darkest Hour", Chapter twenty-six of The Story. During the Last Supper Jesus carefully showed them the "full extent of his love" (John 13:1). Complete the chart to compare the two foot washings.

| | The Supper in Bethany Matthew 26:6-11; John 12:1—11 | The Last Supper John 13:1—30; Luke 22:14—38 |
|--|--|---|
| Who was present? | At the home of Simon the leper, disciples, woman with alabaster jar of expensive perfume, Lazarus, Martha, and Mary. | Jesus and the disciples |
| What happened immediately before the foot washing? | They prepared a dinner for Jesus. | They were eating the evening meal. Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper. |
| Who acted as a servant? | Martha served. | Jesus |
| Whose feet were washed? | Jesus' feet | He washed the disciples' feet. |
| What items were used to wash the feet? | Mary used her hair | Jesus took the towel and basin. |
| What was the reaction of the recipients of the foot washing? | Judas and the disciples complained about the expense of 'wasting the oil'. | Peter protested and Jesus explained that anyone who did not accept his act would not be with him. |
| What was the purpose of the act? | Mary honored Jesus with this action as an expression of her love and understanding of his coming death. | To teach the disciples about humility and Judas is specifically mentioned. |

These two beautiful acts teach us different things. From Mary we see a heart of worship. From Jesus we see the why He is *worthy of worship*.

During the Last Supper Jesus carefully explained what would become of him and what they should do, though they didn't understand he would really be killed within hours. He revealed the "full extent of his love" (John 13:1). He then washed their feet, and he asked them to remember the sacrifice he was going to make. Later that evening Judas acknowledged Him by an expression of love—*with a kiss* he betrayed Jesus. What a contrast to the supper, only four days before at the home of Simon the Leper, where Jesus was honored by Mary's selfless act. It blessed Him so much that he announced *she* would be remembered every time the Gospel is proclaimed. That night Mary acknowledged Jesus with a better expression of love—*worship that was worthy*.

IV. Worthy Worship

The truth is, we *must* worship. “The need for worship is as natural as the need for protection and love, (but) God does not accept pretend worship” (Benson 49,51). To worship like Mary we need to know what is acceptable to our Lord. As you answer the following questions, allow God to lead you to worthy worship through His Word.

1. Worthy worship can only happen when the worshipper is *able* to worship.

We are not worthy *to worship*. Read Hebrews 9:1-14 and fill in the blanks to note *how* we are able to worship God. (Note that the Greek word *latreuo*, translated as “serve” in the NIV, also means worship—as a slave worships or serves a master, or as divine service.)

“How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve (worship) the living God!” Hebrews 9:14.

How did Jesus make it possible for us to worship? Christians are able to worship because Jesus shed his blood for us. We are able to worship because only Jesus’ perfect (unblemished) sacrifice could remove the barrier between us and God. The word for *unblemished* means morally faultless, or unable to be blamed. This is not possible for us; our consciences have the ‘imprint’ of experiencing sin on them. Only Jesus is without sin, and he has no sin on his conscience. But He cleanses us and then equips us spiritually to enable us to worship in spirit and in truth. (See John 4:24)

2. Worthy worship can only happen when the object of worship is worthy.

Meditate on the following passages and consider Whom we worship.

Read 1 Timothy 1:15-17 and note God’s attributes from verse 17.

“Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen” 1 Timothy 1:17. “Worship God!” Revelation 19:10 (See Psalm 46:10-11).

Explain in your own words why God is worthy of worship.

3. Our worship must be based on Truth, Who guides us through His Spirit and His Word.

That night in the upper room, Jesus told the apostles about the sacrifice of his body and blood. This happened in real time and in a real place. Worship is not *only* in our hearts and minds. Hear the Truth through these passages.

Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth and the life No one comes to the Father except through me” John 14:6.

“This is the one who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ.

He did not come by water only, but by water and the blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies because the Spirit is the Truth” 1 John 5:6.

Remember that John wrote his gospel *after* the day of Pentecost. His letter was written to the churches of Asia, which Peter and Paul had established, to counter the false teaching that Jesus was only a spirit and that faith is only spiritual. He explains that Jesus was both human and spiritual. He was baptized by John the Baptist as a real human being; he lived on earth as a man; and his disciples knew him as a man, who was crucified, who shed blood. When we receive his spirit at our baptism, His spirit guides us. His Spirit can live in us to help our beliefs and our actions to be consistent with his commandments. We don't just worship Jesus in our hearts, but we worship him with our lives.

4. To worship in a worthy manner we reflect the One we worship. Mary had understood the lesson Jesus taught when he raised Lazarus—that *he had power over death*. She knew that Jesus would sacrifice Himself, so she sacrificed herself in the only way she knew how. Her sacrifice told Jesus that she understood what He would do, and that she would honor Him with her whole life. Discover how our life of worship reflects Jesus' life of sacrifice:

John 7:38-39. "Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will

flow from within him. By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified". (See Acts 2:36-39).

Romans 12:1. "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship".

Worship is a rich, full experience. It is not just limited to feelings and emotions, yet it is also not limited to physical acts. Worship encompasses our whole being, and we experience the benefits of an attitude of worship in every area of our spirit, our thought lives, and in our human existence.

Key Question: What is your holy and pleasing sacrifice of worship to God?

For Additional Reflection:

The subject of worship takes a lifetime to examine. A good next step is to consider what the Word teaches in the following passages.

Deuteronomy 6:13a: "You _____ the Lord."

Psalms 29:2: "Ascribe to the LORD the glory due to his name: _____ the LORD in the splendor of his holiness".

Matthew 4:10: Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ' _____ the Lord your God, and _____ him only'".

Revelation 14:7b: _____ him who made the _____, the _____, the _____ and the _____ of _____".

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THE STORY

Chapter 27: Mary Magdalene Released

Luke 8:1-3, Matthew 27:55-56

Mary Magdalene became one of Jesus’ disciples as his popularity reached its peak. During his last year of ministry, she and the other women who followed Jesus witnessed the opposition against him grow to a deadly force. Chapter 27 of THE STORY relates what very well could have been Mary’s testimony of what occurred three days after Jesus was unjustly crucified. Mary knew from personal experience that Jesus had the power to release one from cruel bondage; surely she also knew how Jesus had released Lazarus from the bonds of death. As she remained at Jesus’ side throughout his ordeal she might have been waiting to see if he could also release himself from those bonds of death. Jesus did not disappoint her.



Much of Jesus ministry was in the area of the Sea of Galilee. He would have encountered Mary in her city of Magdala, with a population of around 40,000, whose main industry was fishing and producing dried fish. It was urban, known for immorality that often marks economic centers, and also seems to have been an area of demonic activity since several exorcisms took place there (Mark 1:39).

Numbers indicate approximate order of events. Arrows indicate direction, but not specific routes, of travel.

I. The Women Disciples of Jesus. Luke 8:1-3, Matthew 27:55-56

The New Testament writers openly discuss women who had a part in Jesus’ life and in the life of the early church. Most represent excellent examples of Christian living. Mary was never mentioned in a negative light in Scripture. It is only supposition that she is the un-named “Sinful Woman” who anointed Jesus (Luke 7:37-39).

There are 12 biblical references to Mary Magdalene, all in the Gospels. In *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, Fahlbusch and Bromeiley note that “Mary is not a pitiable, repentant sinner; rather an honorable model of discipleship” (446). She is more faithful than either Peter or the other disciples.

1. From Luke 8:1-3 and Matthew 27:55-56, list each woman who is mentioned as a follower of Jesus and how she is described in the chart below.

| | |
|----------------|---|
| “some women” | “who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases” |
| Mary | “who was called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had come out” |
| Joana | “the wife of Chuza (Herod’s servant)” |
| Susanna and... | |
| “many others” | “who were contributing to their (Jesus and the disciples) support out of their private means” |

2. What was their service to Jesus and what does this service imply about their resources?

Women often supported Jewish rabbis. The rabbis, who were the Jewish teachers, cared for the needs of their students out of their own resources, rather than receiving pay for their services. Consequently, they were supported by others, often the mothers. Women helped meet their needs, including finances. The women who contributed to Jesus' needs, as well as the needs of his disciples, would have included the wives who travelled with them, and these supporters. Some of these women must have been wealthy, but not all. The Luke passage reveals that "women from every social stratum" were among Jesus' followers (Cox 79).

3. Fill in the blanks. In Luke 8:2, Mary is described as one 'from whom seven demons had come out'.

The Greek for 'went' is *exerchomai*. Another understanding of this wording is: to flow out from, to come forth, to cast out.

The Greek for 'demons' is *diamonian*. It is also translated as 'devil' or 'god' and refers to a spiritual being that is inferior to God, or ministers of the devil.

"The Devil, or Satan, is the chief enemy of Jesus and the establishing of the kingdom of God. In his ministry, especially in his exorcisms, Jesus engages in the first stage of the defeat of Satan in casting out his evil minions. Jesus' complete defeat of the Devil and his demons is expected in the eschaton" (the end of history). (Green, McKnight & Marshall 163).

It should be noted that in scripture, demon possession is not necessarily a result of sin, nor does it imply that the victim was *more* sinful because of the evil spirits. There is also "a clear distinction between demon possession and diseases, including epilepsy and paralysis", see Matthew 4:24 (MacArthur 174). In fact, exorcisms were referred to as 'being healed' (Luke 8:3).

4. Explain the kind of oppression you think Mary Magdalene endured, and the relief that you think she would have experienced when she was released from the oppression from seven demons.

In scripture demons manifested themselves by fits, madness, and the victim usually inflicted harm upon himself. There are probably no words to explain Mary's relief and gratefulness. But her life surely gives the answer. Jesus relates the fact that one who was demon possessed would need to take steps to prevent reoccurring possession after being healed (Matthew 12:43-45). (Could Jesus have been thinking of Mary Magdalene when he mentioned this?)

Mary was one of Jesus most loyal followers. Our study will reveal the extent to which she gave her heart and her life to Jesus from that day on. Apparently she took no notice of any personal danger that could occur from openly following him even through the crucifixion and burial.

II. The Loyal Women.

We can learn who of Jesus' followers was present at Jesus' death, burial and resurrection from the four gospel accounts. Each report differs, not because of discrepancies because the four accounts do not conflict. They are however from different points of view, shared within the context of to whom the writer is speaking and what each writer wants to bring out through his account of Jesus' life. There are key people and events that do not change.

We don't often pause to consider these women as real persons, who stood near the cross and as watched Jesus die, and then were present at the empty tomb. We give a cursory reading to lists of names in order to concentrate on what Jesus went through. But it can be meaningful to take a look at these details, understanding that the writers listed these names for a reason. Our empathy for the real, life and death situation they faced makes the story even more significant.

1. What did the disciples do when Jesus was arrested? (Matthew 26:56)

They fled.

2. We know that Judas had betrayed Jesus to the authorities, and Peter denied Jesus while waiting with bystanders to see what would happen. To see which followers stayed with Jesus, review the four accounts and note the names that are mentioned.

At the Crucifixion and Death

| Matthew 27:27—55 | Mark 15:16—41 | Luke 23:26—49 | John 19:16b—42 |
|---|---|--|--|
| The soldiers- 27:36 Two robbers- 27:38 Chief Priests , teachers of the law, and elders 27:41 "those standing there" within earshot of Jesus- 27:47 Centurion and guards-27:54 Many women, watching from a distance- 27:55 Mary Magdalene 27:56 Mary the mother of James and Joses, Mother of Zebedee's sons | The soldiers- 15:24 Passersby- 15:29 The chief priests and teachers of the law- 15:31 Some women watching from the distance- 15:40 Mary Magdalene Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses Salome Women who had followed him and cared for his needs- 15:41 Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem | A large number of people, including women, who mourned and wailed- 23:27 Two criminals- 23:32 Rulers- 23:35 Soldiers- 23:36 Centurion- 23:47 The women who had followed him from Galilee, standing at a distance- 23:49 | Soldiers- 19:16b Two others who were crucified with him- 19:18 Jesus' mother- 19:25 His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, Mary Magdalene The disciple whom he loved- 19:26 The man who saw the soldiers pierce Jesus' side- 19:35 |

At The Burial

| Matthew 27:61—28:8 | Mark 15:42-47 | Luke 23:50—24:1—11 | John 19:30—42 |
|---|---|--|--|
| Joseph from Arimathea- 27:57 Mary Magdalene- 27:61 The other Mary | Joseph of Arimathea- 16:42 Mary Magdalene- 16:47 Mary the mother of Joses | Joseph, from Arimathea 23:50 The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee- 23:55 (they went home to prepare spices and perfumes and rested on the Sabbath 23:56) | Joseph of Arimathea- 19:38 Nicodemus- 10:30 |

At The Resurrection Morning

| Matthew 28:1-20 | Mark 16:1-9 | Luke 24:1-12 | John 20:1-18 |
|--|---|--|---|
| Mary Magdalene- 28:1 The other Mary Angel of the Lord- 18:2 Guards- 18:4 Jesus- 18:9 | Mary Magdalene- 16:1 Mary the mother of James Salome A young man in white- 16:5 Jesus- 16:9 | The women- 24:1 Two men in gleaming clothes- 24:4 Mary Magdalene-24:10 Joanna Mary the mother of James, The others with them Peter- 24:12 | Mary Magdalene- 20:1 Simon Peter- 20:2 The one Jesus loved (the men returned home) Two angels in white- 20:12 Jesus- 20:14 |

3. How many of the 12 disciples remained at the scene through the death and burial? Only John is mentioned. The scriptures do not name any other disciples who were present at the crucifixion, death or burial. Only Peter and John went to the tomb, after the women told them it was opened and that Jesus was gone.

4. To whom did Jesus appear first? Mary Magdalene To whom did Jesus speak first? Mary Magdalene

5. How does Jesus demonstrate his compassion for Mary Magdalene? He told her not to fear. He comforted her because she was crying by calling her name and allowing her to recognize him. He explained what was happening.

6. What does he commission her to do? He asked her to go to the disciples and tell them what he had shared with her.

The outstanding loyalty of the women followers may have come from the natural caring nature of women. It may have also come from the fact that most of these women had nothing to lose in being identified as a follower of Jesus. They may have seen Jesus as a person, while the men might have seen Jesus as their leader. However the fact is, Jesus first spoke to a woman, and the good news that JESUS IS ALIVE, was first told by a woman.

Mary was the first to discover the resurrection; she saw the angels; she was the first to see Jesus; and she was the first person to tell the resurrection story. It is her testimony that we have recorded in the four gospels. From the narrative in John, it seems that she alone spoke to Jesus that morning. Interestingly enough, the other disciples thought her news was nonsense! In fact, later Jesus rebuked them because they did not believe (Mark 16:14). Like Mary of Bethany, Mary Magdalene was more receptive of Jesus teaching than were the actual twelve chosen followers.

The angels of the Bible looked like men. These were described in terms of their clothing- white or gleaming white. Biblical angels that appeared to humans didn't have wings or halos.

The four accounts of the end of Jesus' life and of the resurrection dovetail with each other. Even though there are differences, each one adds to the complete picture.

“Matthew wants to underline the miraculous and also explain a rumor that the body of Jesus was stolen. Luke stresses the fulfillment of the words of Jesus and yet the disbelief of the apostles. John, by focusing on a single character and her intimate discussion with Jesus, points

out that in the resurrection and ascension of Jesus the promises of John 13—16 are fulfilled. It is when we look at the resurrection through such eyes, informed by the perspective of each Gospel writer, that we see not simply a miracle, nor even the fact of the resurrection, but the message the church has believed that God wanted to communicate in and through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” (Kaiser, David, Bruce & Brauch 508)

III. Bondage is Our Choice. Romans 6:15-23

Freedom and slavery are used to explain the purpose of Jesus’ life and death on earth. We can join Mary Magdalene in rejoicing in the resurrection because slavery and freedom are not just a metaphor; they are the reality we live with as human beings. Deepen your understanding of this truth by examining the following passages.

1. How does sin enslave us? (Galatians 5:18-21; Romans 8:5)

Galatians 5:18-21- *“But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witch-craft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God”.*

Romans 8:5- We are controlled by sinful nature, and on our own we *cannot please God*.

2. If we sin more don’t we show how much grace Jesus has? (Romans 6:15) *“By no means!”*

3. To what or to whom are we enslaved if we are disobedient? (Romans 6:16) We are enslaved by the one whom we obey- Satan, and sin. We are enslaved to the basic principles of this world (Galatians 4:2-3).

4. What is the end result of sin? (6:16b) Sin leads to death. We should note that Satan’s desire is to end our physical life before we have a chance to receive Jesus and eternal life. Every sin mentioned in Galatians 5:18-21 leads to *human death*. Our culture is fast becoming a culture of death. It is distressing for Christians to see how our young people are now wearing ‘death’ in their choice of clothing, make-up, and jewelry. Unwittingly they are advertising for their own demise.

5. If we voluntarily present ourselves as slaves to God, what is the pay-off for us? (Romans 6:17-18, 23) We are set free from sin; we have eternal life.

6. Since sin must be paid for by death, whose death covered the cost of our sin if we choose to give our lives to God? (Romans 6:23)

Jesus Christ our Lord has paid for us.

IV. Released from Bondage is Our Choice

We are created to enjoy friendship with God in His world. Our sin not only took us out of the perfect place He had created, it prevented God from enjoying His creation. Through the following passages, discover how God’s solution gave us an even better relationship with Him.

1. What is set free from the bondage of decay through Jesus Christ? (Romans 8:19-21)

The creation itself will be freed from the bondage of decay.

2. What did Jesus have to share in to set us free? (Hebrews 2:14-15) Jesus had to share in humanity-as flesh and blood, in order to shed blood.

3. Since we are no longer slaves, what is our relationship to God? (Galatians 4:4-7)
Because Jesus came as a human we have the right to be sons, children, of God. Jesus brought us into the family so we are also heirs.

4. What does our freedom in Christ allow us to do? (Galatians 5:13-14) Our freedom allows us to serve one another in love. We have a new purpose in life, instead of seeking the things of the world, which decay and which will eventually be destroyed, we seek to serve others in love. This is a purpose that will have eternal rewards and this work cannot be destroyed. The fruits of the labor of love cannot be taken away from us and it will not decay.

“For he who was a slave when he was called by the Lord is the Lord’s freedman; similarly, he who was a free man when he was called is Christ’s slave. You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men” (1 Corinthians 7:22-23). Freedom isn’t free; Jesus paid the price. We can use our freedom to return to bondage, or we can use our freedom to remain loyal to Jesus until He returns for us.

Key Question: How will you use your freedom in Christ?

For additional reflection:

From the following passages note what things will not set us free from sin:

Philippians 3:9

Romans 7:18, 24

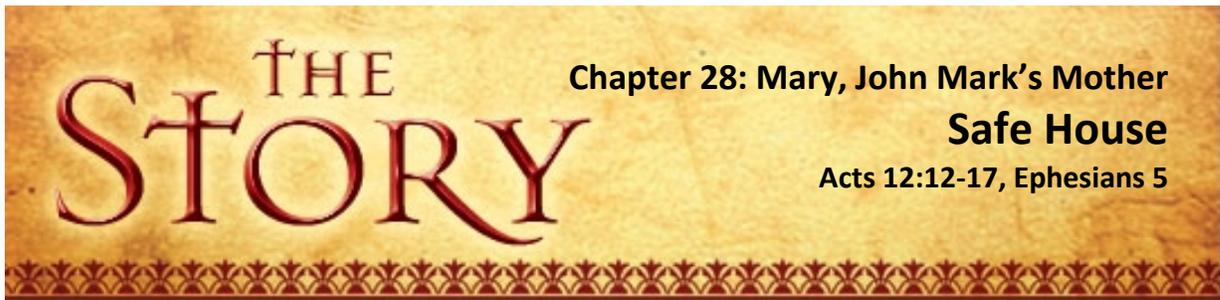
Revelation 3:17

Matthew 19: 24-28

1 John 2:15-16

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Though it was not a safe time to be a Christian, the early church persevered; one of the things that helped them endure faithfully was prayer. In “New Beginnings”, chapter 28 of THE STORY we read how the Apostles taught the gospel message of salvation and how the church began. The early growth was explosive and impressive. But when the Jewish leaders saw how their whole power structure was threatened, they turned on the Christians; the enemies of Christ continue the same pattern to this very day. These believers revealed the characteristics of the victorious Church when they met together at the home of Mary, the mother of John Mark, to pray for the safety of a brother they loved. May we follow their example in life and prayer.

The Scriptures introduce this Mary when Peter was imprisoned in Jerusalem, about fourteen years after the Day of Pentecost. Peter was delivered from prison as Christians were praying. This amazing event illuminates the work of the Holy Spirit through people who voluntarily unite in His love and submit to His authority.

I. Best of Times, Worst of times. Acts 1—12

When He established the church using signs and wonders, God fulfilled what the prophet Joel predicted, and He did this to verify the apostles’ teaching. Peter and the Apostles explained who Jesus was and invited their listeners to become his followers. In his sermon, Peter invited them to come to Jesus and to receive the indwelling of His Spirit to guide their lives—something the Old Testament law couldn’t offer. In the beginning, the new believers “*enjoyed the favor of all people.*” But that soon changed.

Jesus’ teachings and actions bewildered the powerful Jewish leaders. They saw that He had power to do amazing things. However, because He refused to use His power to benefit them, or to deliver them from Roman authority, they became His enemies. They assumed the crucifixion would mean the end of His following as well, but they soon realized the error of their plan. Instead of scattering, about 50 days later the number had grown to 3000 believers, with more joining every day (Acts 2:42, 47). Interestingly, they took the calculated risk and continued to oppose the work of the Holy Spirit through which God began to establish His Kingdom. History through the ages reveals that the enemy still uses the same tactics, with the same results. Persecution energizes the cause of Christ, the faithful grow stronger, and they increase in number. The enemies of Christ only defeat themselves.

1. Note the events from the Acts passages that show how the new believers were threatened as the church grew. (Dates are approximate).

AD30-37-

- 2:1-13, 41. On the day of Pentecost the church was established. Three thousand believers (men) were baptized that day. The church continued to grow daily.
- 4:1-4. Peter and John were seized and thrown in jail but the number of men grew to 5000.
- 5:17-21,29-33. All the apostles were arrested and put in jail but the angel of the Lord brought them out and ordered them to go to the temple courts and preach Jesus.
- 7:54-59. They stoned Stephen to death.

AD 39-40

- 8:1-3. A great persecution broke out against the church and “all except the apostles were scattered. (See Acts 1:8. This was Jesus’ command/prediction.)

AD 44

- 12:1-2. King Herod arrested believers and had James the Apostle, brother of John, put to the sword.
- 12:3-4. He seized Peter and planned to bring him to public trial.

II. God Led Peter to Safety. Acts 12:5-17

The believers saw God demonstrate His power and protection, even in the midst of severe persecution. The Jewish (and later the Gentile) opposition used all the human power that was available—from politics to purely vicious physical attacks, including murder. These enemies were sure they were doing the right thing, but their efforts seemed to inspire growth rather than thwart Christ’s church. The friends who assembled to pray for Peter when he was arrested could have told them why.

The Lord saw to it that those who opposed the church met with consequences. He met Saul on the road to Damascus, and Saul ‘saw the light of day’ (Acts 9:1-31). Herod on the other hand, died a terrible death (Acts 12:21-24). Though they bruised the new church, God not only protected the believers, he also provided them with teachers, and their letters. Eventually the four Gospel accounts were written to guide the new churches.

1. What was happening while Peter was in jail? (v. 5) They were praying.
2. Who woke Peter up? (v. 7) An angel.
3. What was Peter’s state of mind as the angel led him away from the jail? (v. 9) He thought he was seeing a vision.
4. Where was Peter when he “came to himself”? (v. 11) The length of one street away from the jail.
5. When Peter finally realized he had been delivered from Herod by God, where did he “just happen” to go? (v. 12) He went to the home of Mary, the mother of John Mark.
6. What was the reaction of the people when they saw Peter in person? (v.16) They were astonished.

7. When Peter finally gained entrance into the home, what did he tell them? (v. 17) To be quiet and he described what had happened.

8. To whom did Peter send the message about his experience? (v. 17; Acts 21:17; Galatians 1:19) He sent a message to James, the brother of Jesus, and the other believers.

9. What would this testimony mean to the people who met in Mary's home, and to the church leaders who were under persecution? It would bring them joy and relief. Their trust in God would be validated and they would be comforted that God was protecting His Kingdom.

III. Mary, the mother of John. Acts 12:12-13; Mark 14:51

This Mary is only named one time in the New Testament, but studying the events and people that surrounded her gives us some important information. We can discover several reasons why Peter knew that Mary's home was a safe place. Her example will still benefit those who want to serve God in our day as well.

My husband's family hosted many travelling evangelists and missionaries who visited their church in the St. Louis, MO area. He can name many workers, well known to the Christian Church, who used his bed while he went to 'the basement'. This was a wonderful benefit to him in many ways. Not only was his home open and welcoming, he has friends who have proved to be mentors, supporters, and maybe even more important- good memories. I imagine that Mary's home was like this in many ways: a welcoming place, a relaxing place, and a safe place for a boy to be raised (even though the persecution was only a few streets away).

Mary's home: Acts 12:12-13

Though the early Christians met in homes (Acts 8:3), it was also the practice for many Jewish synagogue meetings to take place in an extra room or a home that would accommodate a group. It would actually have been the natural thing for the Christians to meet in homes especially after the persecution of Christians by the Judaizers. These people used what they had to benefit the Kingdom.

Tradition tells us that Mary's home was a recognized center for the church in Jerusalem. It may have been the home where the Upper Room was located. Although this is speculation it is a strong assumption considering Mark's reference to himself (Mark 14:51). When Paul went to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Peter, they may have stayed at Mary's home (Galatians 1:18).

1. What does an outer entrance tell us about a home, even today? An outer entrance usually indicates an ample dwelling place, and that people of means are the owners of the home. Only the wealthy of that era owned homes with outer entrances.

2. How many people were gathered there? Many people were there.

3. What kind of people were they? They were believers who were praying to God for Peter.

4. What does the fact that Mary had a maid imply? She was a woman of means if she had a maid.

Mary's influence: What we can learn about Mary's family also gives us knowledge about the kind of woman Mary was. Answer the following questions about Mark:

5. Who was her son and what did he write about? Mark 1:1; Mark 14:51 Mark wrote the story of Jesus and he included that he was present the night of the Jesus' arrest in the garden.

Despite a rough beginning with Paul and Barnabas, John Mark later wrote the book of Mark which is a portrait of Jesus for the Gentile Christians in Rome. His gospel is regarded as the "basis of Matthew and Luke because they include practically everything that is in Mark" (Barclay 347). The strong tradition is that John Mark mentions himself as the young man who fled the scene of Jesus' arrest in the garden. It may have "been his way of saying 'I was there' without mentioning his own name at all (347).

6. Whom did he accompany in ministry? Acts 12:25

He accompanied Barnabas and Saul when they returned to Antioch from Jerusalem.

7. How did the following evangelists describe Mark?

Peter- 1 Peter 5:13 "my son Mark"

Paul- 2 Timothy 4:11 "...and bring Mark with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry."

8. Who was a relative of Mary and John Mark? (What was his relation to Mary?) Colossians 4:10
Barnabas and John Mark were cousins. That would have made Mary Barnabas' aunt.

9. What kind of man was he?

Acts 4:36-37- His name means 'son of encouragement'. He was a wealthy land-owner who sold a field and gave the money to the apostles when the church was first established in Jerusalem. He was a believer from the beginning of the church.

Acts 11:22-26- Barnabas was sent to Antioch to help the believers who had been scattered there. When the church grew he needed help and went to find Saul. They worked together for a year.

Acts 13:2- Through the Holy Spirit, the Lord called Barnabas and Saul to the work of evangelism.

10. What are fair conclusions that we can draw from this information about Mary's home and influence? Mary and her family were some of the earliest believers and possibly were followers of Jesus when he was alive. She raised her son in an atmosphere that put him in contact with Jesus and his followers. John Mark probably witnessed much of Jesus life and gave testimony of it in his writing of the Gospel of Mark.

One of Barnabas' parents was a sibling to Mary or her husband. Mary was his aunt and was also probably influenced by her. He was one who gave foundational support to the early church out of his own resources and as such, would have known John Mark most of his life. The implication is that John Mark was younger than Barnabas.

Mary was probably one of the "go to" persons in the early church. Her home was a base for Peter and housed one of the churches in Jerusalem.

IV. A Safe Place | Peter 3—4

Jesus taught his followers that the world would know them by their love for one another (John 13:35). Love creates a safe place for those who would be drawn to the church. Later, Peter wrote two letters of encouragement and instruction to the churches. His good friend, Mary, had lived out many of the same characteristics that Peter wanted to see in all believers. From the selected passages in 1 Peter, chapters three and four, make a description of a brotherhood of love. (Try to imagine Mary's thoughts if she had read this letter. What memories would some of these suggestions have brought back!)

3:1-6- Wives can win husbands who are non-believers through submission, pure behavior, purity and reverence. Much talk does not influence men, godly living will. A mild disposition and tranquility is more beautiful than clothing and adornment.

3:8 Live in harmony with one another- be "on the same page" (of one mind).

Be sympathetic; have a concern for each other's hearts.

Love as brothers- consider one another as family members. Family members are strongly attached to each other, even distance and time does not break the bonds of family unity.

Be compassionate; have the ability to share grief and burdens.

Be humble; consider the other person, not just as good as, but *better* than yourself.

3:9 Don't just refrain from retribution when someone does something wrong to you, pay them back *in love* (with a blessing).

3:10 Do not do damage with your tongue (words). Keep your speech clean and truthful.

3:13 Seek peace and keep after it (don't give up).

3:14 Don't fear. Believers who trust God do not fear the future, even if they face suffering, because they have an eternal perspective (1 Peter 4:12-19). We help each other, and we are strong, when we all focus on God and not on our suffering. (A bad tornado ripped through our part of southwest Missouri when I was a child. My mom came to get my sister and me from our beds. My sister wanted *Daddy* to hold her. She could only feel safe if she was with *him* because he didn't seem afraid.)

4:1-2 Live for the will of God. This will result in unselfish ways.

4:7 Be clear-minded and self-controlled, so that you can pray. If we are distracted and paralyzed we will find it very difficult to trust God and pray. We must train our minds to focus on the Truth of who God is rather than the threatening circumstances that seem so overwhelming.

4:8 "Love each other deeply"

4:9 "Offer hospitality without grumbling"

4:10 Every gift that we have should be used to minister to one another. This grace.

4:11 We should serve one another with the strength that God provides (which includes the gifts He gives), and *this* is how God will be praised.

Key question: Which characteristics will you develop in your life to create a safe haven for your family and church?

For further reflection: Study the fellowship of the early church and note how they applied the above characteristics:

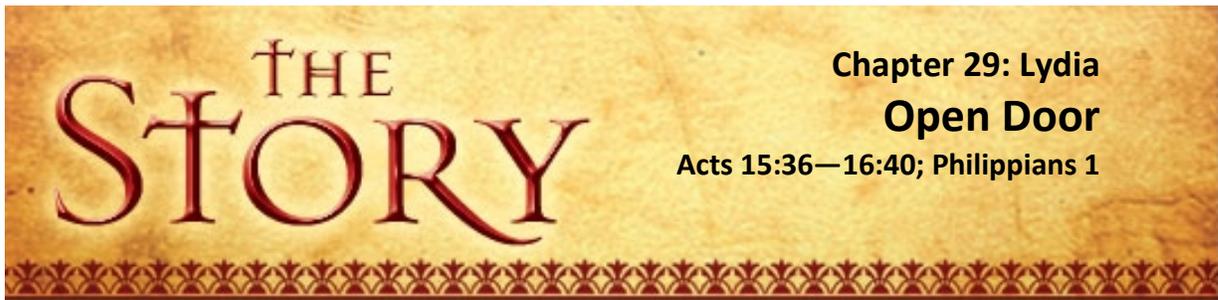
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Acts 4:32-36

Acts 6:1-7

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With little fanfare Luke describes how Paul arrived at Philippi, where he met a woman who opened her door for the first church in Europe! The Story, chapter 29, summarizes the missionary work that Paul and his teams accomplished. Upon arriving in a new area, Paul's strategy was to connect with the local synagogue where he knew he would find followers of God. He would introduce Jesus to them as the promised Messiah, through whom they would find salvation. Often the doors to the synagogue soon closed to him, as well as the minds of the synagogue leaders. However Philippi was not a Jewish region, and there was no synagogue. God led Paul straight to Lydia.

I. Led by the Spirit. Acts 15:36—16:10

The second missionary journey began with what might have seemed like a step backwards-- a disagreement between Paul and Barnabas. Actually, hindsight gives us the advantage of seeing that the ministry was doubled as two teams were now evangelizing. Discover how God led Paul and Silas to Philippi.

God's leading is always a difficult thing to describe. As humans we often struggle to discern the difference between God's will and our will. But there are times when the way is simply blocked, and we have no choice about a certain path. Then it would be wise for us to accept it as God's will for the moment. Then we should look for other doors that God may open. We don't know exactly how the "*Spirit of Jesus*" led Paul (16:6-7), but from the result we know it was fruitful for them to make a change in plans.

Luke used the phrase "*Spirit of Jesus*" to explain the directives they received. While not precisely equal to the Holy Spirit it is "indicative of the continued work of the risen Christ through the Spirit. The Spirit is the representative of Jesus" (Guthrie 510). In his textbook on Acts, Mark Moore explains that the phrase may carry the same connotation as "Spirit of the Lord" or "Spirit of God", echoing back to the Old Testament title for Yahweh. "It is a way of putting Jesus in God's place of authority in the midst of Paul's mission. Thus we encounter the Holy Spirit (v.6) the Spirit of Jesus (v.7), and God (v. 10) in a single breath. This is the first time since Jesus' baptism that all three members of the Trinity have shown up in the same place and time" (Moore 281). This was not an incidental shift of direction; this was a serious, deliberate directive that is important to the growth of the Kingdom of God...no less than opening up a new continent to Christianity!

1. What was Paul's desire? (15:36) Paul wanted to go to the churches in Colossae and Ephesus.
2. Who joined them in Lystra? (16:1) Timothy Who joined them in Macedonia (16:10) Luke.
(The pronoun "we" indicates that Luke joined them here.)

3. Why didn't Paul travel more extensively in Asia and Bithynia like he desired? (16:6-10) The Holy Spirit did not allow them to continue.

4. Note that Paul's team was redirected two times. What door was opened to them? (16:12) Paul received a vision of a man from Macedonia urging them to come over to help them. So they immediately headed toward Macedonia and arrived in the leading city of Philippi. There they established an influential church.

Christians had been scattered all over the known world during the years of persecution in Jerusalem, yet there is no record of any churches that had been established in Macedonia before Paul arrived. Now the Lord had prepared the way, and He had opened the hearts of some who would carry on the responsibility even after Paul's team had to leave.

II. "Meet Me By the River". Acts 16:11-15, 40

For many years our family traveled between Mexico City, Mexico, and the St. Louis, Missouri area. We clocked hours on the road, and singing praise songs helped occupy four wiggly children. "Meet Me by the River" was a favorite. That song reminds us of the hope of that river of everlasting life that flows from God's throne (cf. Revelation 22:1). One day I'd love to sit by the 'Eternal River' and talk to Lydia about her life and to learn about those god-fearing women whom Paul found by the river near Philippi.

Philippi fit right in to Paul's pattern of establishing churches in important commercial junctions, and to this day these areas are still key localities. It was near gold and silver mines, it was one of the most strategic military sites in Europe, and it was a Roman colony. Roman colonies were established by parties of "three hundred veterans with their wives and children who made settlements in Rome's far-flung Empire" (Barclay, Logos Library System). They retained the same rights and privileges of any Roman citizens. The scripture refers to Philippi as a leading city, possibly because it also had a "flourishing economy, and a famous school of medicine" (Kistemaker U Hendriksen 583), which is probably why Luke called it '*a leading city*'.

1. On the Sabbath, what were Paul and his team looking for when they headed to the river? (16:13) They went to find a place of prayer. Since the Romans were suspicious of foreign cults, and there was no formal synagogue in the city, Jewish believers often went outside the city to worship so as not to draw attention to themselves. Paul would have known this custom and probably assumed he'd find some people who worshipped God near the river.

2. Describe who they found there. (16:13-14)

Some women who were assembled and a woman named Lydia who is described as "*a God-fearing woman*". Tradition was that ten heads of families were necessary to form a synagogue so there may not have been that many Jewish families in the area. These women were probably gathered to pray and to repeat the Shema-an important Jewish prayer, and to read from the Law and Prophets.

3. How did the evangelists take advantage of this open door? (16:13)

They sat down and began to speak to the women. The next verse leads us to know that Paul was teaching the way of salvation to them.

4. What are the two distinct terms that Luke uses to explain how Lydia received the teaching? (16:14)
She *listened* and *responded*.

“listened” in Greek is *akouo*- it means to understand or to ‘perceive the sense of’ (Net Bible)
“respond” in Greek is *prosecho*- it means to attend to, to hold on to, to apply to oneself.

5. Besides the words of the evangelist, what influenced her heart? (16:14) The Lord *opened her heart to understand*. “Salvation originates with God. In Greek Luke changes the verb tenses to emphasize God’s work. ‘While Lydia *continued to listen*, God *once for all opened her heart to have her apply her mind to the things that were being said* by Paul (Kistemaker & Hendriksen 591).

That God moved Lydia’s heart does not mean she had no free will in her decision. She was already a God-fearer, and her heart was inclined to God...she was a “seeker”. When God’s Word was presented to her, she was in agreement with the working of God through His word (Hebrews 4:12).

Jesus said, “*No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him*” (John 6:44). “Simply put , if you are a Christian, it is because God made you, bought you, sought you, accepted you, protected you, and sustained you. Though human volition is clearly part of the conversion, God’s calling precedes and dominates our response” (Moore 284).

6. What was her response? (16:15) She was baptized, following the practice of the New Testament church when it was inaugurated on the Day of Pentecost.

7. What did she persuade Paul and his team to do? (16:15)
She persuaded them to stay with her in her home.

8. How many people do we know were travelling with Paul? (15:40, 16:10-note the pronoun “we”)
At least four people are indicated in the Scriptures: Paul, Silas, Timothy and Luke

9. Where did the church of Philippi meet? (16:40)
In the home of Lydia.

III. The Philippian Church. Acts 16:14-40.

Lydia is the second woman mentioned in Acts who made an important contribution to the body of believers in her area. Her story is similar to the story of Mary, the mother of John, about whom we studied in the previous lesson. She was a Jewess in Jerusalem who offered her home as a meeting place for believers, even during a time of persecution. Lydia was a Gentile who opened her doors to the largely Gentile Philippian believers. The first converts to the Philippian church make up a cross-section of the culture of the day. The interesting thing is they could have come from any city in the world today!

What was true of the Jerusalem church was true of the Gentile church. The Lord raised up people who were able to support the ministry and provide for the practical side of the evangelistic efforts as well as the spiritual side. The church was not just made up of only poor and needy individuals. In fact, we will see the church in Philippi begins as a cross-section of society. This was already true of the Jewish Christians. There were needy people, workers (slaves), and wealthy people who bonded together in

Christ. The New Testament clearly teaches that God has gifted each one with abilities to benefit his Kingdom (Ephesians 4:11-13).

1. The next time Paul and his team went to a place of prayer whom did they rescue? (16:16-18)
A slave girl who profited her owners by fortune-telling. She followed them, heckling, until Paul demanded the evil spirit to leave her alone.

2. How did that good deed affect Paul and Silas? (16:19-24)

Her owners were furious because their way of making money was taken from them. They seized Paul and Silas and took them before the magistrates who had them beaten. They stirred up such a mob that the whole crowd started beating them. After that they were thrown in prison.

3. As you read the story of what happened next, note the things that only God could have done. (16:25-29)

16:25- gave Paul and Silas peace- they were singing hymns

16:26- an earthquake shook the foundations and the doors flew open

The bonds of the prisoners came loose. (In a normal earthquake the bonds would have tied the inmates to certain death because they would not have been able to get away from falling walls. In Mexico we experienced earthquakes. The rule was, 'Run outside to an open field as fast as you can'.)

16:27- none of the prisoners escaped. Were other prisoners converted as well? We just don't know!

16:28-29- The Jailer was overcome when he realized that a great power was at work, and his heart was open to whatever Paul and Silas could tell him.

4. How did the jailer respond when Paul taught him the about Jesus? (16:30-34)

He was immediately baptized, as well as his family.

5. After the magistrates had to apologize to Paul and Silas, what did they (the authorities) do? (16:39b)
They escorted Paul and Silas out and begged them to leave town.

6. Where did they go before they left town? (16:40)

They returned to Lydia's home where the believers were.

7. What did they do there? (16:40b)

They encouraged them. They undoubtedly told them all about what had happened in the jail. This would have given them opportunity to express God's great love and protection for them, to help them grow in their faith and perseverance. The book of Philippians that Paul wrote later does just that. This experience mirrors Peter's experience in the jail in Jerusalem. Paul might have even related how God had delivered other evangelists from the hands of the enemy.

There is no doubt that God orchestrated the establishment of the church in Philippi. He worked miraculously in the lives of the first three converts in Philippi.

8. Note briefly how God opened the doors to their hearts.

Lydia- God actually directed Paul and his team to Philippi. God prepared her heart to receive and respond to the message of salvation that Paul taught.

The slave girl- Once again, Paul was at the right place, at the right time, to rescue the girl and deliver her from the evil spirit.

The jailer- Could God have orchestrated the whole imprisonment so as to reach this jailer? At least we know that God sent an earthquake to release the men, and through that situation the jailer learned about Jesus and was saved.

9. God also provided a benefactor for this new church plant. What do we know about Lydia?

Her profession and resources. (16:14a) She was a seller of purple. “It took 8000 special mollusks, one drop of dye from each, to produce 1 gram of purple dye”(Irvin, 287). Lydia would have been wealthy and it was probably a generational or family business.

Her character. (16:14b) Luke writes that she was God-fearing. She responded to the Lord’s work in her heart and deed. She would have been of good character.

Her dedication. (16:15) She wanted to support the evangelists and church in Philippi by providing housing.

Her sacrifice. (16:40) This involved hosting several people at the very least and possibly for a good period of time. It was also probably a personal risk, considering the reaction to Paul’s work.

Her home. (16:15, 40) It became the place where the church met.

10. Considering the treatment Paul and Silas received, what kind of risk would Lydia and the other believers have been exposed to? The slave owners, the mob, and the authorities would have been enemies of the believers, especially anyone who was connected with Paul.

We know that the Philippian church underwent persecution from Paul’s letter (cf. Philippians 1:27-30)

IV. Our Open Doors.

The birth of the church in Philippi was lovingly and carefully brought into being by none other than Jesus Himself, through His Spirit. He held their hearts and, we can almost imagine, the hands of the evangelists and their first converts. But is the story any different today? Is our Lord still so vitally interested in the birth of new churches around the world? Let’s analyze. Answer the following questions about churches you know:

1. Prayer was a key characteristic of both New Testament churches that we know met in the homes of godly women (Acts 12:12; 16:13). How has prayer been a key characteristic of the churches you know?
2. Describe the details and situations that you know only God could have brought about.

3. Are you acquainted with a church that started in someone's home? (Give details.)
4. Tell how God has opened doors for someone to know Christ?
5. Tell how God has moved someone's heart to *pay attention* to the teaching of the Word and to *respond*.
6. Now that you know the story of the Philippian church, read Philippians 1:3-6. In your own words, explain why Paul wrote that "*he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus*". Paul knew exactly how God began that good work in the Philippian Christians. He was involved in their lives, and they were dear friends of his. When we are a part of each other's 'history' we have a special connection with them (Philippians 1:8). The Philippian church did undergo persecution, and Paul wanted to encourage them in their faith.

Key Question: How is God opening the door in your heart to help you to pay attention and respond to Him in some area of your life?

For additional reflection: List the assurances that Paul shares with the Philippian believers in his letter to them:

1:7

1:12-14

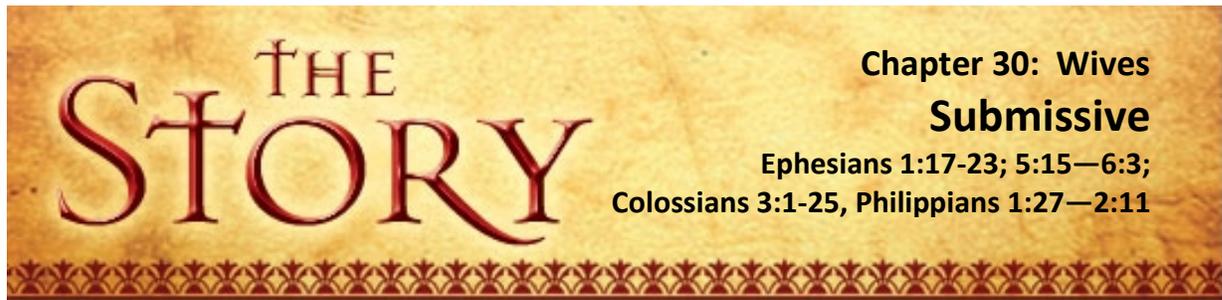
1:29

3:20

4:8-9

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“Paul’s Final Days”, chapter 30 of the THE STORY, tells us how one of the most influential men in history “finished the race”. His conversion from a murderer of Christians, to a fervent ambassador of Christ shows the great power of Christ *in us*. The letters he wrote from prison to the churches he established give us a glimpse of what was on his mind: the unity of believers in the love of Christ and under the Lordship of Christ. The church is God’s plan to bring all people to Christ, but the family is not only supposed to illustrate that relationship, it is the real life workshop where the skills to relate to one another are learned. Submission to authority is the key. It’s not only wives that must *submit*.

We saw in the garden that this love story between God and his creation started out with a broken heart- God’s. He allowed the human beings that He created in His own image to have the freedom of choice. One thing we know is that God *had* all the power He needed to force us to submit. The beauty of the Gospel message is that He chose to use His power to help us to submit voluntarily.

I. All Power and Authority. Genesis 3:1-13; Ephesians 1:17-23

As we near the end of THE STORY, we find ourselves returning full circle to the dilemma that faced Eve. Perhaps Paul was thinking, “By now, we should understand submission.” But the truth is the struggle still goes on in every life and in every relationship. Discover what God wanted women to understand through Paul: that our best choice in life is *submit to God*.

1. What was the question that Eve was forced to answer and how did it convict her? (Genesis 3:13)
God asked Eve, “What is this you have done?” In a real place and in real time Eve made a choice to disobey God. She knew what God’s will was and she determined in her own mind to step away from God and move toward God’s enemy.

2. What had she chosen *not* to do? (Genesis 3:2-3)
She chose *not* to submit, of her own free will.

Many years later Paul was praying for the Ephesian Christians with thanksgiving because, in Christ, they had something Eve didn’t have. Eve didn’t have the knowledge and power of Christ dwelling within.

Isn’t it interesting that Adam and Eve walked with God, talked with God, knew his *face*, looked into his eyes...yet they did not withstand the temptation that Satan put before them. They were not one with God, He only dwelt *with them*, He did not dwell *in them*.

3. What kind of authority does Christ have in the church? Ephesians 1:22
God put *all* under His authority and made him head of the church.
In Greek, “all” is *pas*- whole, entire, everything. Christ has all power.

4. Fill in the blanks: He is seated “in the heavenly realms, far above all rule, and authority, power, and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come” (Ephesians 1:21).

Explain what Christ’s total authority means to you in your own words. (cf. Rev. 1:8)

Nothing can contain Him, even death. He can do what He wants with no limitations, yet He has the power to *be love*. If He were any less he would *be evil*, because total power without love would be out of control. God’s power is contained voluntarily between the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. That is why love is more powerful than evil.

5. How much power is working in the lives of Christians? (Ephesians 1:19-20)

He works in our lives with the same “*incomparable greatness*” that raised Jesus from the dead and placed Him as head of the church.

6. What does Paul pray that the Ephesian believers *would have*? What are the two things he wishes they *would know*? (Ephesians 1:17-18)

“I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints...”

He prayed that they would have the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, and that they would know the hope of their calling.

Sometimes we get confused because we try to “overthink” an issue. But we don’t have the ability to think like God does. There are some things we must accept. That God is the source of all power and authority is truth. That He has placed all power and authority in Jesus Christ is truth. That the Spirit of Jesus Christ (the Holy Spirit) dwells in Christians is also truth. When women submit their minds to the truths of *God’s* authority we will open the door to the restoration of our relationships. The letters of Paul that come toward the end of his life include instructions about personal and family relationships. Discover why our best choice regarding relationships is: *submit to God*.

“At the heart of this submission is the notion of ‘order’. God has established certain leadership and authority roles within the family, and submission is a humble recognition of that divine ordering” (O’Brien). God’s design in no way denotes inferiority or lesser value, but rather refers to role and function. When God designed the one to be the helper of his highest creation, he made another of the same quality. When God planned for the creature who would bring the children into the world he certainly would not have made her inferior, less honorable or less glorious. Neither does the authority that is instilled in the husband’s role imply tyranny or oppression.

II. Power and authority in the family. Colossians 3:1-25

In light of the truths about Christ’s authority, as explained in Ephesians 1:17-22, analyze the Colossians passage about the family.

1. What advice does Paul give as introduction to this passage? 3:1-2 Seek the things above where Christ is; think about the things above because our lives are hidden in Christ. "Hidden" implies *concealed, or remains (stays)*. We are safely tucked into Christ's heart, and we don't need to be burdened with worldly things. (This does not mean we are unconcerned about the lost, our culture, or about living responsibly in the world. It does mean we don't fear the world, nor do we find satisfaction in worldliness.)

2. According to this passage, how can we allow Christ the right to control the way we relate to each other? 3:9-11 We are being 'clothed with the new man', in other words we are being transformed into the image of the One who is in charge of this "extreme makeover"...we are being fit into His existence. "Christ is all and is in all".

3. List the controlling attitudes that Paul suggests for dealing with interpersonal difficulties. 3:12-17
a heart of mercy,
kindness,
humility,
gentleness,
patience, bearing with one another
forgiving one another,
love, which is the perfect bond
Let the peace of Christ be in control in your heart
be thankful
Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly
teaching and exhorting one another with all wisdom, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs,
all with grace in your hearts to God.
And whatever you do in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus,
giving thanks to God the Father through him."

We need to realize that God has placed these important letters of Paul together in one volume. We aren't restricted, as the early church was, to one letter or to pieces of his writings. His teaching about the wonders of being a new creation in Colossians 3:1-17 lead up to the instructions about the family, and the consistent thread throughout the passage provides explanation. So, in light of the fact that Christ possesses all authority in the world and in the church, as we learned from the letter to the Ephesians, we may receive further teaching about the family through Paul's letter to the Colossians.

4. Note the specific instructions about family relationships from Colossians 3:18-21.

Wives- *submit yourselves to your husband as this is fitting in the Lord (as a Christian)*

Husbands- *love your wives and do not be bitter toward them.*

Children-*obey your parents in everything because this pleases God*

5. Paul anticipates that each individual will hold this personal reservation in his or her heart: "But what about *my needs?*" What will we receive if we obey these teachings? 3:23-24
(Note that this assurance begins the closing thought that applies to the whole passage, not just for verse 22.)

We will receive our inheritance from the Lord. The appropriate consequence will apply whether we are obedient, or whether we are disobedient. In other words, we are not to be concerned about whether we are fairly treated, because we can trust the God who has just been described as love, and who is just. Gruden, in his book about the foundations of the family suggests that “in informal settings, one can hear Christian feminists say, ‘I’ll submit to my husband if he also submits to me’.” This is not implied in Paul’s teachings. “The wife’s submission to her husband is *not conditional* on his loving her after the pattern of Christ’s love, or showing his unceasing care for her. A wife’s “voluntary response [of submission] is not called for because of her role in society, nor is it to be understood as separate from her submission Christ. Rather, it is part and parcel of the way she serves the Lord Jesus (cf. Col. 3:23 of servants who engage in wholehearted work for their masters and in that very action serve their heavenly Lord).” (O’Brien). A wife’s submissive response is *to Christ first* .

6. How does Paul classify the lack of submission to these instructions? 3:25
It is wrong to disobey these instructions.

7. Reread Colossians 3:1-25 in its entirety and find who has the power and authority in all personal relationships? Christ has the power and authority in all things, including personal relationships.

8. Fill in the blanks: For a women to voluntarily defer to her husband is submission to the Lord.

IV. Power, authority and the church. Philippians 1:27—2:11

Bradley Blue writes “early Christianity expanded throughout the Empire house by house,” (Marshall & Peterson 474). That was not just the early evangelist’s missionary strategy; it was *God’s* missionary strategy. God has designed just two social structures: the family and the church. The early church met in family homes. Ideally the church and home would mirror one another. The mission of each is parallel: the birth and nurturing of children. Discover what is true about submission in the church.

1. What were the Philippian Christians facing, and can we relate to the same things today? 1:29
They were facing persecution because of Christ. We certainly endure difficulties as Satan continues to work against us in our own lives as well as in the society. World-wide persecution against Christians is increasing and we are heading toward the same thing in our own country.

2. How should we conduct ourselves then? 1:27a
We should conduct ourselves in a “manner worthy of Christ”. What would be worthy of Christ? Nothing less than spirit-filled reactions to our circumstances will do. We must show Christ in all things and remain faithful against all obstacles.

3. How should we relate to one another in the church? 1:27b
We must see them as partners, fellow soldiers in the cause of Christ and we must work “side by side” (in harmony) with them. This solidarity is what holds the line against the forces of evil.

4. What would complete Paul’s joy (as well as bring joy to Our Lord? 2:2
Paul writes: “complete my joy and be of the same mind, by having the same love, being united in spirit, and having one purpose.”

5. What are the results if we live this way? 2:1

“Comfort of love, fellowship with the Spirit, affection and mercy” are the consequences of unity. This is true of the church as well as the family.

6. What should our treatment of others be, and what is the motivation for it? 2:3-4

We should imitate Christ’s concern for others, and His humility. We should treat others as we would like to be treated.

7. Paul describes the attitude of Christ in 2:6-8. Which concept is most meaningful to you? Explain.

8. What will be the final result of Jesus’ humbling of himself? 2:9-11

He will be exalted above all things.

9. Fill in the blank: Power and authority came to Jesus through submission to God.

V. The Mystery explained. Ephesians 5:15—6:3

Our human minds can’t understand how submission will ultimately give us power, or how humility will ultimately result in exaltation. But if we demand power, and if we try to exalt ourselves we will **never understand**. Paul seems to portray the family as a working lab where Christians can test how the knowledge and power of *Christ in us* functions.

Power struggles are the antithesis of God’s design. He has structured the family to provide a safe place for children to be born into and to be nurtured. If *God’s family* is the church; new birth in Christ unites believers with their Creator and with each other, in the security of His love. The church was God’s plan from the beginning. Larry Crabb writes in the introduction of Connecting, that through the church “the gospel of Christ connects us to God, to ourselves, and to others; it places something alive and wonderful in our forgiven hearts that bridges the gap of separateness and joins us in life-bearing union”.

1. What is the structure?

5:22-24 Wives submit to husbands as to the Lord.

5:25-31 Husbands love wives as Christ loved the church- sacrificially and for her benefit.

6:1-3 Children obey parents so it may go well with them and they may enjoy long life.

2. How are children viewed? (5:1; 6:4) Children are to be dearly loved and not exasperated.

Characteristics of a godly home:

3 Fill in the blanks to reveal distinctive characteristics of a godly home and a healthy church.

“Be imitators of God...and live a life of ⁽¹⁾ love .” Ephesians 5:1-2

“(2) Submit to one another out of reverence for Jesus Christ .”
Ephesians 5:21

“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be ⁽³⁾ united to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. Ephesians 5:22-33 (See “Who’s Who in the Family” by Carol Stine)

Often we strive to find the ‘pecking’ order in the family and we have a distorted idea of how submission works. It’s a given that God is our Lord and master. But in the marriage relationship, husbands and wives have a responsibility to each other...there is no such thing as making the spouse ‘a priority’; the spouse must be closer than that. Two existences are not unity. Paul teaches that we must be one with our mate...spiritually, emotionally and physically. So that alone... we are not whole.

4. How do we know that Eve was a part of Adam (one flesh) at the creation? Genesis 2:18-24
Eve was made from a rib that was taken out of Adam.

5. When a man and woman are joined in marriage they are one flesh.

This is not a mystery in the sense that we cannot understand it. What God did in Jesus Christ was to join mankind in his humanness and make a way for mankind to join Him in His Spirit. God made a way for mankind to come back into intimacy with Himself, through Jesus Christ—when we freely choose Him. Marriage is the human relationship that is patterned after the oneness (unity) of God. “The mystery is not any particular marriage or marriage itself; it is the union of Christ and the church which is reflected in a truly Christian marriage. Such a mystery is indeed ‘profound’”(O’Brien).

“Theologically, Paul’s argument does not move from human marriage to Christ and his church; rather, Christ and the church in a loving relationship is the paradigm for the Christian husband and wife” (ibid). In fact, we are “members of his body” (Ephesians 4:25). This is why adultery is so devastating. It corrupts the relationship between the marriage partners, but it also corrupts the reflection of the Trinity. In the process adultery reflects what the enemy is- separation from God, destruction of everything good.

6. When we become Christians, who joins our spirit? Acts 2:38; Ephesians 3:14-21
God gifts us with the Holy Spirit (the Spirit of Jesus). This is how we “receive Christ”.

7. To summarize, write the three main characteristics of the church and of the family from the passages above ⁽¹⁾ love, ⁽²⁾ submission, and ⁽³⁾ unity. (See question #3 above).

The biblical teaching on marriage reveals that it is a spiritual relationship, that God designed it, and that He needs to be involved in the relationship for intimacy and unity to develop. It’s easy to see why the world rejects God’s pattern for marriage, in fact, rejects marriage at all. A marriage between a believer and a non-believer presents some difficulties, although that is not to say love and unity are absent. Nor is every Christian marriage trouble free. But the Bible speaks to this issue as well.

8. How should a wife influence a non-believing husband? 1 Peter 3:1-4
A woman will draw her husband to the Lord through the inner beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit.

9. According to Paul, should a wife divorce a non-believing husband if she accepts the Lord after she has already married? I Corinthians 7:12-13 **No, they should remain married if they love each other.**

The truth is Satan destroyed God's plan for marriage when he led Eve to rebel against God. But an even more powerful truth is that through our marriage relationship God can purify our hearts and bring out the gold in us...if we let Him.

Key question: How will you submit to the Lord in an important relationship in your life?

For additional reflection: Answer the following questions regarding the marriage relationship from Ephesians 5:25-29?

What would indicate a husband's submission to the Lord in his relationship with his wife?

What is the example he should follow regarding his wife?

Why should an unmarried Christian woman consider a prospective husband's relationship to God?

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Who's Who in the Family, Ephesians 4-6

by Carol Stine

Intro: 4—5:20

This section explains how to achieve unity in the body of Christ. In a nutshell, *unity is* what makes a church work and *unity is* what makes a family work. The ground rules for the proper function of the church are the same for the proper function of a family. For unity to 'happen' Christians must live as *children of the light*. Once again, this is the same in the church as well as the family. But what makes us *children of light*?

Christians are given very clear and explicit instructions on how to treat one another in vss. 4:17-5:15. It would be absurd to neglect these instructions when teaching about family relationships, especially the roles of the husband and wife. In fact, there is such a natural connection between the relationships in a church and the relationships within a family that Paul segues into even more specific instructions for the family starting in vs. 22. Note that for the rest of the letter the instructions to family members and instructions for the church members mesh.

The "hinge" between the general instructions to the church and the section where specific instructions to the family begins is found in vs. 21.

"Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ."

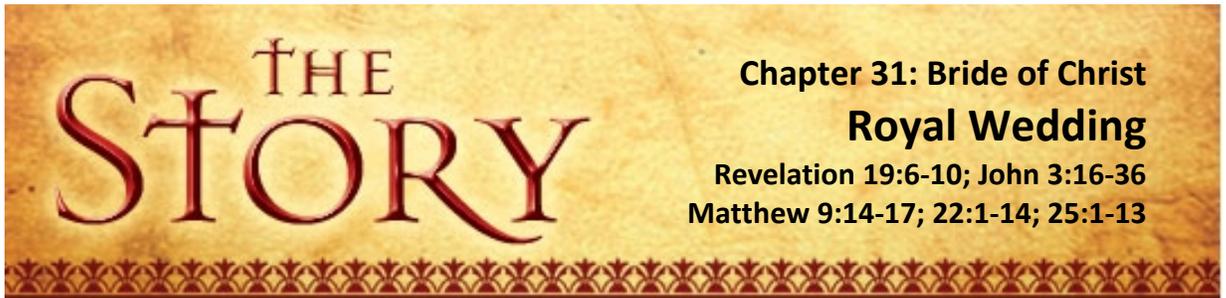
This is what children of light do. A wise and honest mentor is obligated to refer back to vs. 21 every time someone seeks to 'pull rank' over another. In every situation or problem *both husband and wife submit to the Lord* by seeking to meet the needs of , and by seeking what is best for, the other. Who has the last word? **God**. As long as this ground rule is understood and obeyed, the rest of the instructions in 5:22-6:9 will profit the church and families. At every point that an individual seeks his own best, or grasps for his own needs to be met over the needs of the other, the relationship is dysfunctional. Since even the most sincere Christians still must battle sin and selfishness, every relationship will be a training ground for learning these truths.

So, wives must submit to their husbands as they submit to the Lord. (vs. 22-23). This instruction has a built-in protection for the wife. A husband who thinks this teaching is a green light to authoritarian, overbearing, abusive behavior is rejecting the true teaching. He is head over the wife "*as Christ is the head of the church...*" How was Christ the head of the church? He loved the church. He was the *Savior* of the church. He suffered and died for the church. This is explained clearly in vs. 25-31. How interesting. Three verses are needed to tell the wife to submit to the husband, and five verses explain that husbands must love their wives. Could it be that the Spirit knew men would have a hard time with their command to submit to unselfish love?

Equally impressive is the reason behind the command that wives must submit to and respect their husbands (vs.33). This submissive spirit grows out of the fertile ground of appreciation for sacrifice that an honorable husband will make for the family. Traditionally, men were taught from little up to be strong protectors and providers. The Ephesians teachings grow men who are willing to lay down their lives for their families. A woman who chooses to rule the roost and thwart this desire of the man to be the "Knight in Shining Armor" is disappointed when she finds that her lack of submission drives a stake into her husband's hearts. Bleeding hearts don't love well. But they will often take action to force the woman's submission. Hence the sad cycle of dysfunctional relationships which cause the ruin of almost 50% of marriages in the U.S.

Submit (*hupotasso*) in Ephesians 4-5: To defer

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| 1. to arrange under, to subordinate | 4) to submit to one's |
| 2) to subject, put in subjection | 5) to yield to one's admonition or advice |
| 3) to subject one's self, obey | 6) to obey, be subject |



The Book of Revelation is the last book of the Bible; it is God’s last inspired word to mankind, and concludes His message in a glorious shout of victory. A few snapshots from John’s masterpiece are brought together in chapter 31 which wraps up The Story. God sent this message to encourage the Church, however John uses a form of writing that is unique to the New Testament and more common to the Old Testament (Ezekiel, Daniel etc.). Layers of repeating metaphors that intertwine make interpretation of the book open to many opinions. But one thing rings clear: God’s promise in Genesis—that Satan would be crushed—comes true through the work of Christ, and God will reunite with His creation. Then the victory party will begin “because the wedding celebration of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready” (Revelation 19:7).

I. The Bride.

Weddings, brides and grooms, and married love resonate with women like no other. What girl doesn’t dream of her wedding day and her ‘prince’, who will find her, rescue her, and ‘live happily ever after’ in love with her.

Three women are mentioned in Revelation: the mother (12:1-17), the harlot (chapters 17—19), and the Bride of Christ, (19:8 through the end of the book). The metaphor of the bride is not new in Revelation; it has been a running theme throughout God’s Word, and we have followed it through The Story. Discover what we can know about the bride.

1. What does Paul use to teach about the relationship of Christ and his church? Ephesians 5:22-32
He uses the marriage relationship. (Ephesians 5:32)
2. Ezekiel 16 describes God’s love for his people in violent terms that are hard to read. What is revealed about the “bride” and what does God do about it? **He describes how God found them abandoned at birth “as they lay kicking in their blood”. He rescued them and cared for them. But they abandoned Him and prostituted themselves. They committed every despicable crime and lived selfishly. Yet God would remember them and restore them and make his covenant with them.**

This chapter explains God’s feelings in human terms. His people rejected him, yet even worse, they destroyed themselves when they rejected Him. This is what God sees and what breaks His heart because He longs for them to be well, dressed in an embroidered dress, of fine linen...adorned with jewelry of gold and silver. Instead they were dressed in rags, filthy, covered in blood.

The graphic nature of these descriptions should reveal how God sees us in our sin. Mankind is pitiful, suffering, and valueless without God.

3. How much does the groom love the bride? Ephesians 5:25-27; Isaiah 49:16

He sacrificed his life for her. "See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands..." (Isaiah 49:16), predicts the crucifixion. In light of the Ezekiel passage, God's way of restoring his creation is for Jesus to take the punishment that "the bride" (we) deserve for our wrongs. This is the truth that Paul echoes in Ephesians 5 when he says the husband must be willing to give his life for his wife just as Christ gave up his life for the church. Christ as the bridegroom has already walked the path of sacrifice for His beloved.

Psalm 45 was commissioned for the wedding of the king's son but, "he felt himself commissioned by the Spirit of God to write about the heavenly King, the Messiah, taking a bride" (Elwell).

4. How does the bride look? Psalm 45:11-14

The net Bible version says she is "absolutely magnificent...decked out". "All glorious is the princess within *her chamber*; her gown is interwoven with gold. In embroidered garments she is led to the king;" (Psalm 45:13-14a). This is what every bride wants: to appear beautiful and glorious for her husband.

5. What is her wedding gown made of? Revelation 19:8

The wedding gown for the Bride of Christ is fine linen which is the righteous deeds of the saints. This is a comforting thought for individual Christians who labor tirelessly for the Lord, often unnoticed and unappreciated. Our righteous deeds are for the glory and pleasure of Christ, but we must realize that each act is another thread in the "fine linen" that adorns the church. This is the reason the church is *absolutely magnificent*, and glorious to the bridegroom.

This verse, coupled with teaching in the epistles such as the Ephesians 5 explanation of Christ and the church, reveal that the "bride" is the church of Jesus Christ.

6. In Revelation 21:2 and 21:9-21 we see two metaphors layered together. What is the bride and what is she compared to in John's description of the "bride and wife of the lamb"? How is she adorned in these two passages? The church is the bride, beautifully prepared for her husband (see Revelation 19:8). The bride is now described in terms of the Holy City, the New Jerusalem. The bride is described as a great city with walls made of precious stones, gold and jasper and "every kind of precious stone", and streets of gold and transparent glass.

This passage reasserts the truth that God dwells in the hearts of his followers, the church, so it is God's glory that is shining through the believers. John reveals the intensity of God's love for his bride through the description of the church as the bejeweled Holy City. There are no human terms that will do justice to the glorious and victorious church of Jesus Christ.

II. The Bridegroom. John 3:16-36; Matthew 9:14-17, Revelation

Discover the explanation about Jesus that John gave to his disciples from John 3:16-36:

1. Describe the actions and desires of God, the lover of mankind? John 3:16-17

Jesus is a gift from God. God loved the world so He gave Jesus, his one and only son, to save the world. His desire is that NO ONE should be lost. His purpose is *not* to condemn the world but to save the world.

2. What terms does John use to describe his own relationship with Jesus? John 3:27-29
John ascertains that he is not the Christ; instead, the person of importance is Jesus. He uses the metaphor of the friend of the bridegroom to describe his relationship to Jesus

3. What terms does John use to describe Jesus? John 3:28-29
Jesus is the bridegroom.

4. How does he then explain Jesus' superiority? John 3:30-31
"He must become greater; I must become less." John goes on to explain that his words are of human origin, but that Jesus is from above, and He is the one who has the message from heaven.

5. What is John's warning? John 3:32-36
Whoever rejects Jesus' message will be rejected by God. "God's wrath remains on him".

Discover the clarification that Jesus made about himself to John's disciples from Matthew 9:14-16:

6. How does Jesus describe His followers? Matthew 9:15
His followers are the "guests of the bridegroom".

7. How does Jesus describe Himself? Matthew 9:15 Jesus announces that he is the bridegroom.

In weddings of our day the bride usually steals the show. But in Revelation, the groom is most important because he is the Lamb of God. What do the following passages say about the bridegroom?

Revelation 5:6, 9- Jesus is described as a lamb, "looking as if it had been slain". But he is worshiped by the creatures and he is declared worthy because he "purchased men for God from every tribe".

Revelation 7:9-10- The lamb is before a great throng of people and he receives worship with God.

Revelation 7:17- The lamb is at the center of their throne and he will be their shepherd.

Revelation 19:7- We rejoice because the wedding of the lamb has come.

Revelation 21:23- The city of God needs no sun because God's glory is the light and the lamb is the lamp. "In the present earth most of the energy needed for light and for all the life processes comes from the sun either directly" or indirectly (Gilbrant, 337). In the New Jerusalem, Jesus will provide everything we need.

Revelation 22:1- A river of living water will flow from the throne of God and of the lamb.

Why is it so important to see that the lamb and the bridegroom are one and the same? (John 1:29; 1 Peter 1:19)

The New Testament clearly teaches that Jesus is the lamb (John 1:29; 1 Peter 1:19). Jesus claimed to be the bridegroom as well. The two familiar metaphors come together in Revelation where the lamb *and* the bridegroom are Jesus.

III. The Wedding

Some familiarity with traditional Jewish wedding customs helps us understand the wedding metaphor. The marriage begins long before the wedding! There are four parts to the process. The **etrothal** is an agreement between the groom and the father of the bride that is much more serious than our engagement. When the agreement is made they are man and wife. A **waiting period** follows during which the groom pays the dowry or provides a service equal to the amount owed to the father of the bride. The bride is occupied as well; during this time she prepares herself for the wedding. After the agreed upon interval the groom, along with a **procession** of his friends, takes the bride from her home to his home, or to the home of his parents. At last the celebration begins with a **wedding feast** that may last seven to fourteen days!

Match the following scriptures that correspond to a part of the Jewish marriage:

Betrothal *“I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him”* 2 Corinthians 11:2; Hosea 2:19-20.

Waiting Period *“In my Father’s house are many rooms....I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am”* John 14:2-3.

Procession *“At midnight the cry rang out: ‘Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!’”* Matthew 25:6 (from the Parable of the Ten Virgins, Matthew 25:1-13, also see 25:31-33).

Wedding Feast *“The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son”* Matthew 22:2ff.

It’s no accident that men and women are ‘wired’ to need a loving relationship. Likewise, God makes no apology for His desire to have a loving relationship with his creation. Jesus understood his role because the bride and groom are God’s idea! It is right and good to celebrate a wedding because it is the picture of the great celebration to come, when Jesus and His church can be together, face to face, for eternity.

IV. The Bride of Christ: A Saved Church or Saved Individuals? YES!

If the church is the bride of Christ, how do we fit in as individuals? In 1910, Scottish theologian, Peter T. Forsythe explained God’s love for the whole world as love “directed upon the world in such a way that it should be taken home in every individual experience”. The church is the bride of Christ but we have the assurance of God’s Word that Jesus is the lover of each soul.

1. Fill in the blanks to learn about the relationship between the lamb and His bride:

“God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out and find him, though he is not far from each one of us.” Acts 17:27

“And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.” Romans 5:5

“All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.” 1 Corinthians 12:11

“You should keep your relationship with God to yourself.” Sadly, this false teaching even confuses believers. Like a bride, we cannot help but share our feelings for our beloved. But we cannot simply be “satisfied with a personal union with Christ, securing our own future. The gospel deals with the world of men as a whole” (Forsythe).

2. Determine how the individuals who make up the “Bride of Christ” relate to one another:

1 Corinthians 12: 12-31

We are one body with many parts. Each person is important because we are designed with abilities and interests (gifts from God), that benefit the body of Christ. We are not made to be loners. We are created (in the image of God) for relationship. That relationship is between our fellow Christians *and* with the Lord whom we serve together. So much should we function together that we coordinate and function as one entity.

Ephesians 5:19-21

Our relationship with one another within the body of Christ should be joyful, characterized by the Spirit who is love. Paul describes our way of speaking with one another in terms of “psalms, hymns and spiritual songs”. Our communication with each other should sound like music to our ears...and more importantly *to God’s ears*.

We are told to submit to one another...to voluntarily lift each other up, (to think more highly of the other person than of ourselves, Romans 12:3). Submission to one another is what enables the body of Christ to function in unity.

3. Explain in your own words how the church, made up of *many* individuals, is the Bride of Christ.

William Hendriksen explains in More than Conquerors that the Bride of Christ was chosen from eternity (and for eternity). “And now, after an interval which in the eyes of God is but a little while, the bridegroom returns and, ‘it has come, the wedding of the lamb’. The church on earth yearns for this moment.”

Key Question: Are you a part of the Bride of Christ, prepared to join the lamb for the wedding feast?

For additional reflection:

1. Paul explains in Romans 2:6 that “*God will give to each person according to what he has done*”. (See also, Psalm 62:11-12). From the context and from our study of the Bride of Christ, what is the most important thing for each one of us to do? (Hint: Romans 3:21-26)
2. How can you make more room in your heart and life for God’s *Treasure*?
3. What righteous deeds will make up the “fine linen” in your wedding gown?
4. What meaningful truth have you discovered in your journey through The Story?

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