

CREATED FOR GOD'S WORK

Bible Study • Leader Guide

[Please provide a copy of this study and a Bible for each participant. Assure the group that all narratives shared within the group stay in the group, unless permission is given.]

Opening Prayer: Dear Father in heaven, send Your Holy Spirit to guide us as we study Your Word. Help us to understand the message You have for us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Read Ephesians 2:10.

Which words stand out for you? What is your reaction to these words?

God's workmanship: The word "workmanship" used here is the Greek word *poiema*, meaning a work of art or a masterpiece. (John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scripture* by Dallas Seminary Faculty, New Testament edition. Colorado Springs, Colorado: Chariot Victor Publishing, 1985, 624.)

Our good works do not belong to us. They are created by God for us to do. "The verb 'to create' is used in the Bible to express the idea of God bringing something into being out of nothing." (Walter L. Rosen, *EPHESIANS — The Church: God's Servant, God's Word for Today*. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1996, 18.)

Because of faith, given to us by the Holy Spirit, we are able to do good works. (*The Lutheran Study Bible*, English Standard Version. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009, 2019.)

Our omniscient and eternal God prepares these works beforehand.

Participants may have other responses.

In this Bible study, we will read the stories of women from the Old and New Testament who were created to do God's work.

(If time is short, have individual women or small groups take one or two of the women and report back to the group.)

Deborah

Read Judges 4 and 5.

1. What work did God have for this woman to do?

She was a prophetess and judge for Israel. She settled disputes between the people.

2. How did she react?

She did what the Lord asked of her. She told Barak to do as God had commanded him. He was to gather 10,000 troops and take them to the Kishon River, where he would be met by General Sisera of Jabin's army. She let Barak know that the victory would not lead to his glory but result from the actions of a woman. At Barak's request, Deborah agreed to accompany him. She reminded Barak that the Lord went before him.

3. What was the outcome?

Israel was given the victory, as Deborah had prophesied. Deborah and Barak sang a retelling of the victory, praising God, and encouraging the soldiers.

4. How was her situation remarkable or unique?

Deborah is the only woman judge mentioned in the Bible.

Jael

Read Judges 4:9, 17–24.

1. What work did God have for this woman to do?

Her actions would give the Israelites victory over the Canaanites.

2. How did she react?

General Sisera came to her tent, trusted her, lay down, and fell asleep. She was able to approach him and drive the tent peg into his temple, killing him.

3. What was the outcome?

The Israelites defeated the Canaanites by God's plan.

4. How was her situation remarkable or unique?

A woman gave the final blow for the victory. This was considered a shameful defeat for a proud warrior. (*The Lutheran Study Bible*, English Standard Version. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009, 388.)

Rahab

Read Joshua 2, 6:22–25, Hebrews 11:31, Matthew 1:5.

1. What work did God have for this woman to do?

With her home built in the Jericho wall, she was in a strategic position to hide the Israelite spies. God chose her to do just that. The spies were checking out Jericho in preparation for taking the city.

2. How did she react?

She hid the spies on her roof under stalks of flax. She confessed to the spies that she believed their God was the God of heaven and earth. She said she knew that the Lord

had given them the land. She related what happened at the Red Sea and what had happened to the two Amorite kings. Rahab asked the spies to spare her family from death when Jericho was taken. When the king of Jericho asked about the spies, she reported that they had gone out of the city before the gate closed. She encouraged the king's men to pursue them. She gave the spies instructions for a safe escape plan. As instructed by the spies, she tied a scarlet cord around the window of her house, so that they could spare her family.

3. What was the outcome?

The Israelite spies successfully escaped from Jericho. The Israelites did take the city. Rahab's family was taken out before the city was set on fire. She and her family continued to live in Israel.

4. How was her situation remarkable or unique?

Rahab was a prostitute. She confessed her faith in the God of Israel. "In the midst of judgment and destruction comes a scene of mercy and safety. The former prostitute, with her God-given faith, and her family are delivered from the judgment that surrounds them — a picture and reminder of God's mercy in Christ as the place of refuge." (This statement is found in the notes for 6:22 in *The Lutheran Study Bible*, English Standard Version. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009, 350.) Rahab is mentioned in Hebrews 11:31 in the "By Faith" chapter. Rahab was an ancestor of Jesus Christ.

Esther

Read Esther 2, 4, 5:1–8, 7, 8:1–8.

1. What work did God have for this woman to do?

She was put in a position to influence the Persian King Ahasuerus (Xerxes) regarding a plot against the Jews by Haman, one of the king's officials.

2. How did she react?

When the king was looking for a young woman to replace Queen Vashti, Esther was chosen as one of the women to be considered. When it was her turn to go to the king, she asked for nothing except what Hegai, the king's eunuch in charge of the women, advised. She obeyed her guardian Mordecai and did not make known her kindred or her people. Esther won favor with the king and he set the royal crown on her head. He gave her a feast. When Mordecai learned of the plans of Haman, he went to the entrance of the king's gate in sackcloth and ashes. Esther called for Hathach, the eunuch appointed to attend her. Hathach went to Mordecai and learned of the plot against the Jews. Messages were carried back and forth. Then Esther agreed to go before the king, though it was against the law to approach him without being called. She was willing to do it, even if the king had her killed.

3. What was the outcome?

The outcome was that Esther won favor in the king's sight. He listened to her request to have a feast for the king and Haman. Haman's plot was exposed and he was hanged. Esther saved the Jews and was given the house of Haman.

4. How was her situation remarkable or unique?

Esther was Jewish. She was bold enough to approach the king, even though it was against the law to do so without being called.

Elizabeth

Read Luke 1:5–17, 24–25, 39–45, 57–66, 80.

1. What work did God have for this woman to do?

She was to give birth to and raise John, the Baptist. John would prepare the way for the Messiah.

2. How did she react?

We know of Zechariah's initial reaction to the message from Gabriel, but we do not know of Elizabeth's initial reaction. After she conceived, she acknowledged that God had taken away her reproach among people. She proclaimed that Mary was carrying her Lord. When John leaped in her womb at Mary's greeting, she shared this with Mary. Elizabeth expressed wonder that Mary had come to visit her. One can only imagine what a comfort Elizabeth was to Mary.

3. What was the outcome?

Elizabeth gave birth to John. Her neighbors and relatives rejoiced with her. His family followed the instructions that were given to Zechariah at Gabriel's announcement. John grew and became strong in the Spirit. He was in the wilderness until the day of his public appearance.

4. How was her situation remarkable or unique?

Elizabeth was barren and past childbearing age. Elizabeth and Mary were relatives.

Mary, the Mother of Jesus

Read Luke 1:26–38, 46–55, 2:1–7, 15–21, 39–52.

1. What work did God have for this woman to do?

She was to give birth to and raise Jesus, the promised Messiah. She was an eyewitness to the life of Jesus and may have been a source for Luke's gospel. (See the note for 2:19 in *The Lutheran Study Bible*, English Standard Version. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009, 1709.)

2. How did she react?

At first, Mary was troubled by the visit of the angel, but the account says she tried to discern the meaning of the message. She responds with, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?” (Luke 1:34b). Mary “wonders in faith.” (See the note for 1:34 in *The Lutheran Study Bible*, English Standard Version. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009, 1706.) Contrast this with Zechariah’s response. Mary describes herself as a servant and is ready to do God’s will. She breaks into a song of praise, describing God’s actions throughout history. After the visit by the shepherds, Luke says *Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart* (Luke 2:19). When Jesus was eight days old, his parents took him to be circumcised and he was given the name of Jesus, as instructed by the angel.

3. What was the outcome?

Mary gave birth to Jesus. He grew and became strong and wise. He did fulfill His role as the Messiah, who was crucified for our sins and rose from the dead, then ascended back to heaven.

4. How was her situation remarkable or unique?

Mary was a virgin, but she was able to conceive Jesus by the Holy Spirit. She was from Nazareth, described as an “obscure and insignificant” town. (See the note for 1:26 in *The Lutheran Study Bible*, English Standard Version. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009, 1706.)

The Grateful, Forgiven Woman

Read Luke 7:36–50.

1. What work did God have for this woman to do?

She was an example to the Pharisees and to us of what it means to have sins forgiven. She gave Jesus an opportunity to teach about the need for forgiveness of all sinners and the reaction of sinners to having sins forgiven.

2. How did she react?

She heard that Jesus was dining at the home of a Pharisee. She entered the home with an alabaster flask of ointment. She wet Jesus’ feet with her tears, wiped them with her hair, kissed his feet, and anointed them with the oil.

3. What was the outcome?

Even though her behavior would be viewed as scandalous for that time, Jesus sees her behavior “as reverent and appropriate.” (See the note for 7:38 in *The Lutheran Study Bible*, English Standard Version. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009, 1724.) Jesus takes advantage of this situation to tell a story that illustrates the reaction of having much debt forgiven, in other words, of having much sin forgiven. Jesus tells

her that her sins are forgiven and that her faith has saved her and given her peace. Faith is a free gift.

4. How was her situation remarkable or unique?

She was a known sinner, likely a prostitute or adulteress. Simon, the Pharisee, did not think Jesus should be associating with her.

Lydia

Read Acts 16:11–15.

1. What work did God have for this woman to do?

She was a Christian witness to others. She was an example of Christian hospitality.

2. How did she react?

She listened to Paul's Gospel message.

3. What was the outcome?

The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul (Acts 16:14b). She and her household were baptized. She opened her home to Paul.

4. How was her situation remarkable or unique?

Lydia was a seller of purple goods. Purple dye was expensive and made a profitable trade. (See the note in 16:14 in *The Lutheran Study Bible*, English Standard Version. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009, 1869.)

Consider the variety of work that God created for these women to do, their responses, and their unique circumstances.

What work has God created for you to do?

Closing Prayer: Dear Father in heaven, guide us to know the work You have created for us to do. Support us in carrying out those works. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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