EVERYDAY WOMEN, EVER FAITHFUL GOD

Joining Old Testament Women on Their Walk from Fear to Faith

Journey alongside some special women in the Old Testament on their walk from fear to deeper faith in our amazing God. Be challenged and encouraged as you discover and apply wonderful, timeless truths of God’s character to our modern, hectic lives.

Melanie Newton

JOYFUL WALK BIBLE STUDIES
We extend our heartfelt thanks to the many women who served as editors for this study guide. Without your help, we would never have accomplished this monumental task in a timely manner.

Melanie Newton

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We pray that you and your group will find Everyday Women, Ever Faithful God a resource that God will use to strengthen you in your faith walk with Him.

SCRIPTURE QUOTATIONS

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USING THIS STUDY GUIDE

This study guide consists of nine weekly lessons arranged chronologically according to Old Testament history. For those who are not familiar with the history of Israel found in the Old Testament, each lesson begins with a brief history of a particular time period and then covers the lives of 1-2 women who lived during that time.

The lessons are divided into 4 daily sections that should take about 30 minutes per day to complete. The first 3 sections study the passages thoroughly. The fourth section asks you to reflect on what you’ve learned. The goal is to help you establish a regular time of study in the Word for 5 days each week, considering your small group session to be one of those days.

THE BASIC STUDY
Each lesson includes core questions covering the narrative associated with each woman’s life. These core questions will take you through the process of inductive Bible study—observation, interpretation, and application. These are more easily understood in the context of answering these questions:

✓ What does the passage say? (Observation: what’s actually there)
✓ What does it mean? (Interpretation: the author’s intended meaning)
✓ How does this apply to me today? (Application: making it personal)

STUDY ENHANCEMENTS
To aid in proper interpretation and application of the study, we have included study aids titled: Historical Insights, Scriptural Insights, Focus on the Meaning, and From the Hebrew (definitions of Hebrew words). Embedded within the sections are optional questions for further research (For Further Study) and thoughtful reflection (Think About It).

TELL YOUR STORY
This study is about the faith walk of women, both those who lived in years past and those who live in the present, each of whom have a story to tell about her trust in God’s faithfulness and goodness. The scripture passages tell each Old Testament woman’s “Story”. In order to learn how to tell your own story, you’ll be encouraged in each lesson to write parts of your story that relate to what’s learned in the lesson. Those particular questions are marked by a footprint symbol (_footprint_). At the end of the course, you’ll have enough information to put together a “My Story” of your own faith walk with God.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE
A small group discussion guide is included at the end for leaders to more effectively use the limited discussion time in small group each week. The suggested questions and activities correspond with and depend upon the personal study done by the women at home.
DISCUSSION GROUP GUIDELINES

1. **Come to small group** each week whether your lesson is done or not. You’ll learn from the other women. We want you to be here with us as often as possible so we can get to know you!

2. **Share your insights** from your personal study time. Remember, as you spend time in God’s Word, the Holy Spirit teaches you truth! Decide that you will, with God’s help, **set aside some time 4 days each week** to do the study questions. The goal of Bible study is not to “get the right answer;” it is to get to know Jesus! It will change your life!

3. **Respect each other’s insights.** Listen thoughtfully. Some of the questions are “share questions”. The answers to these questions are your personal experiences, not strictly the same factual information for everyone. These questions have no “right” or “wrong” answers.

4. **Encourage each other.** Each woman in your group is important to the group and important to God. He can use each of you in someone else’s life. Consistent attendance benefits the whole group, but come whenever you can. Don’t miss because you haven’t done your questions, or have missed for awhile...you are a vital part of your group.

5. **Share, but do not dominate** the discussion. (Some of you are more vocal than others!) It’s important that we share the available time we have with everyone.

6. **Celebrate our unity** in Christ! We want to avoid controversial subjects such as politics, gossip and denominational differences.

7. **Pray together.** Sharing one another’s needs and praises is important as well. Your group should plan to spend 10-15 minutes each week on prayer requests and prayer. Write the requests down so that you can continue to pray for the individuals in your group through the week and follow-up on the requests. Remember that anything shared during the group time is not to leave the group (unless permission is granted by the one sharing) in order to gain each individual’s trust and vulnerability to share.

8. **Get to know the women** in your group. Consider having lunch together, starting a play group, visiting one another, or other ways to get to know one another. However, with the advent of so many home businesses, it is our policy that you do not use your small group members for solicitation purposes.
INTRODUCTION

THE OLD TESTAMENT

Many women today have very little knowledge of the Old Testament. What’s written in it happened so long ago. How can this apply to me today? What do those women have in common with someone like me who lives more than 2000 years later?

Maybe these women lived 2,000 – 4,000 years ago, but they were still women just like us. They cooked meals, did laundry, and raised children. They had responsibilities inside and outside of their homes. They experienced hormone fluctuations, PMS, and menopause. They laughed with their kids, differed with their husbands, and cried when a loved one died. At one time, they were all 20-somethings, then 40-somethings, then 60-somethings and more. Their hair needed to be combed and fixed, and it turned grey as they aged. No doubt, some of them, if not all, had something on their bodies that sagged.

They also experienced fear at various times in their lives just like we do. Real fears and imagined fears with invading enemies, sick husbands and children, and empty pantries. They faced creditors and surprise house guests. They even had “bad” days when things didn’t go right, sometimes due to their own choices. These were EVERYDAY WOMEN, just like us.

As we study their lives, we’ll see an EVER FAITHFUL GOD in action. He’s our faithful God whose character never changes. He’s as faithful now in our everyday circumstances of life as He was years ago to them. We can feel confidence in His presence and active involvement, even when we can’t see it. And, knowing this, we can trust in Him whenever we are afraid. That’s our faith walk—going from fear to faith.

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THE GOD OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Yhwh (thought to be pronounced “yahweh”) is the Hebrew personal and covenant name of God in the Old Testament. In our English translations, it is usually written as LORD (capital letters). In Exodus 3:14-15 when Moses asked God for His name, God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM (Yhwh) has sent me to you.’” This was the name by which God wished to be known and worshipped in Israel. The name expressed His character as the dependable and faithful God who desires the full trust of His people as Israel’s redeemer and covenant Lord.

In John 8:58-59 (and other places), Jesus applied God’s name “I AM” to Himself, thus declaring Himself to be God and expressing the eternity of His being and His oneness with God the Father. So, the EVER FAITHFUL, promise-keeping God of the Old Testament is embodied in the Lord Jesus Christ of the New Testament and forever.

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THE WALK FROM FEAR TO FAITH

Jill Briscoe once said, “Women are a fear-driven, performance-oriented species.” She’s right.

Fear is an ever-present emotion with us. Real fears and imagined fears. Is it realistic to think we can live without fear?

The psalmist says in Psalm 56:3-4, “When I am afraid, I will trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can mortal man do to me?” Notice he doesn’t say “if I am afraid”. He says, “when I am afraid”. Fear is a normal human emotion designed by God to alert us to danger so that we will take action against it. Yet, sudden fear can cause us to be terrified. Women are particularly vulnerable to panic and hysteria. God knows this. When we are afraid, God wants us to trust Him and not give way to fear. Learning to do so is our walk from fear to faith.

As we join these Old Testament “everyday” women on their walk from fear to faith, we will see consistent truths that we can apply to our lives today in our faith walk. In every case, we know that God loved her. He knew what was going on in her life. He was able to do something about it. During her faith walk, a loving God said “no” to some things. Yet, she chose to trust Him rather than submit to fear. And, God rewarded her faith with an outpouring of His blessing in other ways. Likewise, God may not choose to rescue you from everything that is threatening you. But, in any and all situations, you can count on these truths…

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

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# OLD TESTAMENT TIME LINE

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SARAH — A WOMAN LIKE US

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

Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight. For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful… like Sarah … You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear. 1 PETER 3:3-6

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

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

The patriarchal era is important to us. Through Abraham and his descendants, God began to develop a people of His own. The Abrahamic Covenant (God’s unconditional pledge to Abraham) contains many precious promises: Abraham would have numerous offspring; his descendants would possess the land of Canaan, and the Messiah would come forth one day from his line. These promises passed on to Isaac and Jacob. Jacob’s sons formed the nucleus of the twelve tribes of Israel. Through one son’s kindness (Joseph), the infant “Israel” (72 people) entered Egypt and grew into a great nation.

DAY ONE — READ AND EXAMINE

Sarah is mentioned more times in Scripture than any other woman, even Mary the mother of Jesus. She is the first woman mentioned in Hebrews 11, what is often called “The Faith Hall of Fame”, and God uses her as an example for us to follow in 1 Peter 3:3-6. We should, therefore, want to find out what Sarah was like. Was she perfect? Did she ever make a poor decision? How was she like us? How can we be like her?

1. Read the scripture passage above. What words or phrases jump out at you?

Although the focus of this passage is a marriage relationship, the principles relate to any woman’s character (“inner self”), especially the qualities of a gentle and quiet spirit which are precious in God’s sight. These enable a woman to “do what is right and not give way to fear.” But, you may be thinking, “What does that mean”? Let’s find out.
2. Read the definitions for “gentle” and “quiet” in the margin at left. Why would these qualities in a woman be precious to God? NOTE: Gentleness and peace are fruits of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5: 22-23) in a believer’s life and, thus, available to every Christian woman who desires them.

3. Read Psalm 56:3-4. Notice the psalmist says “when I am afraid” not “if I am afraid.” Read the definition for “give way to fear” in the margin. What does the psalmist say we should do when we are afraid?

4. Back to 1 Peter 3:3-6, the phrase “the holy women of old” includes women we’ll be studying this semester. From this passage, how did they keep from “giving way to fear”?

Moving from Home (at 65 years old)…

5. Read Genesis 11:27-12:9. Describe Sarah and her circumstances in life at this time. NOTE: Although they are called Abram and Sarai at this time, for consistency’s sake, we’ll use “Abraham” and “Sarah” (names later given to them by God) throughout this lesson.
6. Barrenness for a woman in Sarah’s time was very painful, not unlike for a woman in our time. Sons, in particular, were needed to carry on the family name and livelihood. How do you think Sarah’s barrenness would have affected her feelings of security (particularly with Abraham) and significance (her status)?

7. Read Genesis 12:10-13:2. Why do you think Sarah went along with Abraham’s “Tell them you’re my sister” plan?

8. What might have been her emotions during this time?

9. Would you have done the same to save the life of someone you love? Explain.

10. God honored Sarah for not giving way to fear (1 Peter 3:5-6). When Abraham failed to protect Sarah in this incident, what did God do for her?

11. Abraham had not given over the safety of his own life to the Lord yet because his faith did not extend to this area. Like Abraham, what area of your life have you never really given over to the Lord, and how does this affect those around you?

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

**Think about it:**
Abraham was able to share his personal fears with Sarah. Is your husband or closest friend able to share personal fears with you? Why or why not?
12. Sarah was ~65 when she left Haran, moving to who-knows-where. Sarah was willing to cooperate with God’s plan for Abraham even when it was tough for her. How are you at encouraging your husband or your closest friend to follow God’s leading? Ask someone in your small group to pray with you this next week.

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

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

—Taken from *Handbook on the Pentateuch*, page 91.

**Day Two — Read and Examine**

10 years later (Sarah is now ~75)—

1. Read Genesis 15:1-6. What was Abraham’s concern? What was still God’s plan? How many times had He told Abraham this already?

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

3. Sarah’s “Plan B” becomes a nightmare! Our example was no perfect woman. She was just like we are. Look at her behavior!! How did Sarah react?

4. What was threatened in Sarah’s life, and what confirmation did she need from her husband?
13 Years Later (Sarah is now ~89)…

5. Read Genesis 17:1-6; 15-22. God once again told Abraham His plan to provide descendants for Abraham and a faithful people for Himself. How did Abraham respond this time? What additional information is given in Romans 4:18-21?

6. Read Genesis 18:1-15. Why do you think the visitors came by Abraham’s tent? What did the Lord give Sarah for the first time?

7. What was Sarah’s initial response? Why?

8. Read Genesis 20. This happened shortly after the “tent” visit. Abraham nearly jeopardized the whole situation by again placing Sarah in another man’s harem. He fails in the same area of faith in which he failed 25 years earlier. (See questions in Day 1 for review.) At 89 years of age she was taken into a harem of the reigning king. (This gives further information regarding Sarah’s beauty. God must have turned on her hormones again in a big way—super estrogen!!) Did Sarah try to protect herself this time or argue with Abraham? What does this tell you about her trust in both her husband and her God?

9. Sarah loved Abraham for many years. She followed him in some very tough situations. Their life was definitely not static or boring. Just like ours. If you have been married for several years, in what areas have you learned greater love and trust of your husband? If you aren’t married, can you think of a couple that has exhibited growth in their love and trust for one another?

From the Hebrew:
The Hebrew word translated “pleasure” in verse 12 is “eden” which is synonymous with sensual pleasure.
10. In what areas of your life have you learned greater trust of your God? Describe one area more fully in the space below. Please consider sharing this with your small group.

Focus on the Meaning:
The name Isaac means “he laughs”. In what ways is this an appropriate name for this baby?

Think About It:
“God’s plan is completely different from what you could ever imagine and much more glorious than you would ever expect.”

— Mike Messerli

Have you noticed this in your life? Is anything really too hard for the Lord?

Day Three — Read and Examine
1. Read Genesis 21:1-7. Describe Sarah’s experience and the story she had to tell (vs. 6).

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

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

5. Discuss God's response to the situation.

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

7. Read Genesis 23:1-4, 16-20. Sarah lived to be 127 years old. What do you learn of Abraham's regard for her until death? NOTE: He did not take another wife until after she died (Gen. 25:1).

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

Scriptural Insight:
Sarah's words were recorded as scripture in Galatians 4:28-30. Read these verses to see how her words were used.
9. From our study, write down at least 7 descriptive characteristics of Sarah, positive or negative, that will help you to remember her.

**DAY FOUR — THE WALK FROM FEAR TO FAITH**

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

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

1. List all the situations in Sarah’s life that could have “terrified” her.

2. Considering those “opportunities” for being terrified, in which ones did Sarah, by faith, do what was right and not give way to fear?
3. Is there a problem right now in your life where you must make a choice to do right, but the possible consequences fill you with fear? From our study of 1 Peter 3:3-6 (refer to Day One), what heart attitude will best help you face this problem with courage rather than terror? Are you willing to trust God and live by faith in this area? Ask someone in your small group to pray for you.
JOCHEBED & MIRIAM — INFLUENTIAL WOMEN

Time: the Exodus ~1450 B.C.

For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

ROMANS 12:3-5

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

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

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

DAY ONE — READ AND EXAMINE

Miriam’s Childhood and Her Mentors…

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

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

*Miriam’s name in Hebrew means “bitterness.” The Greek version of her name is Mary. In Israel’s history after this time, Mary, Mara, and Miriam were popular girl’s names.*

3. Based on the information in the text, how would you describe Miriam’s mom Jochebed to someone? In other words, what character qualities do you “see” in her?

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

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

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

7. Moses, Aaron and Miriam came from a home where parents were walking by faith in their God. What kind of home did you grow up in? How has this affected your ability to courageously trust God and not give way to fear?
Day Two — Read and Examine

80 years later...

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

7. Prophesying also could involve an enthusiastic praising of God inspired by the Holy Spirit. Read 1 Samuel 10:5-10 and 1 Chronicles 25:1. What activities were associated with prophesying? In what ways does Exodus 15:20-21 fit this description of prophesying?

8. The Holy Spirit still inspires us to break out in enthusiastic praise to God through song, poem, or other creative means. Can you recall a time in your life when you were inspired to praise God through one of these means? What creative means has God given you that you use to praise Him with? Maybe you have written a song, a poem, created a work of art, or simply sang praise songs to Him. What led to this? Share about a time when you felt like breaking out into spontaneous praise to God in one of these ways or another way.

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

Think About It:
Jesus had a testimony to share. He said in John 8:14, “Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid, for I know where I came from and where I am going. But you have no idea where I come from or where I am going.” What He said about Himself was His STORY.

9. Miriam testified about God’s faithfulness through her use of poetry, song, and dance. Even if you’ve never testified like Miriam did, your STORY of God’s faithfulness in your life is your testimony about Him. Write a short paragraph (below and on the next page) telling of an area in your life where you have recognized God’s faithfulness to you. This is a part of your STORY of God’s faithfulness.
DAY THREE — READ AND EXAMINE

~2 years later…

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

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

3. Discuss the Lord’s response to their behavior (vs. 2-9).

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

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

Think About It:
One of the torments of jealousy is that it can never turn away its eyes from the thing that pains it.
6. How did Miriam’s brothers respond to the discipline of their sister?

7. Read Deuteronomy 24:8-9. What do you think was the effect of Miriam’s banishment from the camp for 7 days…
   • on her?
   • on the people?

8. Read Romans 13:1-2 and Hebrews 13:7,17. How does this incident illustrate these passages?

9. There are serious consequences of our attitudes towards authority. Though all of us are not leaders, all of us are under some kind of authority in the Church. Is there someone in leadership now of whom you are jealous, resentful, or disapproving? Do you try to undermine their leadership by gossip or slander? Read Proverbs 10:19. Discuss how to apply this scripture to your life.

10. Read Mark 10:42-45, Galatians 5:26, Philippians 2:3-4, Romans 12:3-5, and 1 Peter 5:1-5. These verses, teaching how we should all relate to each other in God’s family, apply as well to leaders. What attitudes should we have if we are in leadership positions in the Body of Christ?
God loved Miriam’s family. He knew what was going on in their lives. He was able to do something about it. But, God did not give Jochebed her son back permanently to raise nor did He prevent them from having to go through the agony of hiding baby Moses. Miriam was given great responsibility and privilege, yet she also had to live with the consequences of her sin. During her walk, a loving God said “no” to some things. Yet, Miriam and her family chose to trust Him rather than submit to fear. And, God rewarded their faith with an outpouring of His blessing in other ways. Likewise, God may not choose to rescue you from your “Egypt”. But, in any and all situations, you can count on these truths…

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

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

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

3. What fears have confronted you this week? How have you dealt with them?
RAHAB — A PAST AND A FUTURE

Time: Into the Land ~1400 B.C.

By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient. HEBREWS 11:31

Historical Insight: After 40 years of struggle, Israel stood poised to enter the Promised Land. But she would enter without Moses for he was dead. Much work remained. This beautiful new land was dangerous. Numerous city-states dotted the landscape, each a well-fortified, walled fortress with a battle-tested army. Conquest would be a difficult, time-consuming task.

But, God remained faithful to His people. He equipped a new leader, Joshua, who had been trained under Moses’ leadership for 40 years for this job. Joshua knew that the 2.5 million Israelites plus their flocks and herds needed to cross a flooded river and begin their conquest of the land. So, he sent 2 spies to secretly scout the area of imminent war, particularly Jericho—the strategic point to reach the three passes through the wilderness to the rest of Canaan. God took care of the river crossing for the Israelites, miraculously providing dry ground for them to move through and onto Jericho—a walled city on ~9.5 acres—one around would have taken ~1/2 hour!!

DAY ONE — READ AND EXAMINE

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

Getting to Know Rahab...

2. Read Deuteronomy 2:24-25; Joshua 2:1-24; and Joshua 9:9-11,24. What did Rahab, the people of Jericho, and the surrounding nations know about Israel and her history?

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

4. Use adjectives to describe Rahab in your own words.
5. What conclusion did Rahab make about the God of Israel? Could anyone else in Jericho have come to the same conclusion? Explain.

6. Rahab was given an opportunity to make a conscious choice for God based upon the facts she knew about Him, and she responded with FAITH! Faith resulted in action. What did she do that day?

7. What risk was she taking?

8. Discuss how you would reconcile Rahab’s disobeying and lying to her king when compared to the principle studied in the last lesson from Romans 13:1-5. See also Exodus 1:15-20; Acts 4:19, 5:29.

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**For Further Study:**
Research the ancient city of Jericho. What was it like for Rahab to live there?

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

**Scriptural Insight:**
The early church viewed the blood-colored cord as a symbol of Christ’s atonement like the blood of the Passover lamb.
After the spies’ return, God parted the Jordan River for the people to cross. All of those men who had been born in the wilderness were circumcised. The Passover was celebrated. And, they ate produce from the land. The manna stopped the next day.

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

3. How did Joshua and the people respond?

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

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

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

**Historical Insight:**

Surrounding Jericho was a great earthen rampart, or embankment, with a stone retaining wall at its base 12–15 feet high. Above that stood a mud brick wall 6 feet thick, 20 feet high. At the crest of the embankment was a similar 20-foot high mud brick wall reaching to ~46 feet above the ground level below. This loomed high above the Israelites as they marched around the city each day for seven days. Humanly speaking, it was impossible for them to penetrate the impregnable fortress of Jericho.

Archeological evidence reveals that the mud brick city wall collapsed at the time the city met its end (~1400 B.C.) except for a short stretch of the north city wall that did not fall as everywhere else. Also, there were houses built against the wall as in Joshua 2:15. Excavations showed that the bricks from the collapsed walls formed a ramp against the retaining wall so that the Israelites could climb up over the top as is described in Joshua 6:20. The city was thoroughly burned.

—Taken from “The Walls of Jericho” by Bryant Wood, Creation magazine, March 1999, pages 36-40.
7. Rahab had to wait patiently for God to act. Remember that she did not know the “marching” orders. We also must wait for God’s “always perfect” timing in answer to our prayers. Is this a problem for you? Have you become discouraged (or been discouraged in the past) from having to wait? Read Psalm 27:14. How does this scripture and the story of Rahab encourage you?

Think About It:
Read the words to the song below. Have you considered that God was in the waiting, too?
“You are in the waiting in that moment of my life
When my faith and hope collide
My heart’s anticipating just how and when You’ll move
Oh, that’s when You prove
You are in the waiting too”
—“In the Waiting” by Shannon Wexelberg

For Further Study:
Research others in scripture who experienced a time of waiting for God to act upon a promise (for example, David, Paul). What did they do while waiting?

Rahab and Salmon had a son, Boaz.
Boaz was the father of Obed;
Obed, the father of Jesse;
Jesse, the father of King David.
And from the line of King David of the tribe of Judah came the promised Messiah, Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord.”
—Francine Rivers

DAY THREE — READ AND EXAMINE
1. Read Matthew 1:5, Hebrews 11:30-31, and James 2:25. This is Rahab’s report card. What does it say?

2. “Disobedient”—the word used to describe the rest of the people of Jericho in Hebrews 11:31—means “to refuse to be persuaded.” See your answers to the questions in Day One. Did God give them an opportunity to be “persuaded”? Explain.

3. What does the mention of Rahab three times in the New Testament tell us about the grace of God?
4. Rahab was likely a prostitute just as it is written. In what ways did God forgive her past and give her a new future?

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

**Scriptural Insight**

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

— Taken from The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Old Testament, page 330

Perhaps the reason her name is always followed by “the prostitute” is that the name “Rahab” also referred to a mythical sea monster often used symbolically for Egypt (Isaiah 30:7; Job 9:13).

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**DAY FOUR — THE WALK FROM FEAR TO FAITH**

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

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

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

3. We will probably never be faced with the dramatic circumstances of Rahab, but we do have our own distressing situations in life. Read Psalm 40:1-3 and 46:1-3 (at left). What problems are you facing now, and what choices are available to you? How will you respond? Journal this in the space below and on the next page. This is part of your story.

“I waited patiently for the LORD; he turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the LORD.”

—Psalm 40:1-3

“God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.”

—Psalm 46:1-3
DEBORAH & JAEL — RESOURCEFUL WOMEN

Time: the Judges ~1400-1000 B.C.

For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. Ephesians 2:10

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

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

• Sin (particularly idolatry and immorality) — Not long after getting settled in her land, Israel adopted the religion and the lifestyle of the pagan Canaanites by worshipping idols and practicing immorality, theft, and murder. Her society fell apart. Tyranny and force became the norm; inept leaders were unable to check the excessive violence. Selfish desires for tribal glory and supremacy, as well as unwillingness to accept reproof, led to tragic civil wars.

• Suffering (having enemies rule over them or terrorize them) — Because of their idolatry and hard hearts, God brought severe judgment on the land, allowing the Mesopotamians, Moabites, Canaanites, Midianites, Ammonites, and Philistines to oppress and dominate His people for a time.

• Supplication (calling out to God, earnest prayer) — The enemies’ oppression of the people drove them back to their God and calling out to Him for help.

• Salvation (in this context meaning deliverance, aid, victory, or prosperity)—God would send human leaders called “Judges” to defeat the oppressing nations and bring periods of rest. These Judges—8 in all—were civil and military leaders who led the nation against its enemies. Their civil job was to urge repentance (turning back to God alone, in faith) and to give counsel. Then, the land would experience peace for 20-40 years during the lifetime of their “deliverer.” Not long after that person died, the people went back to their wicked ways, beginning the cycle again.

One such judge was Deborah, who came along ~100 years after Joshua died...

Day One — Read and Examine

1. Read Deuteronomy 28:1-25; 29:16-18. What were God’s general instructions to Israel concerning life in the land?
2. Read Judges 2:6-23. In verses 10-19, the repeating pattern of the book of Judges is described here. [For more detail, see Historical Insight above] Why did the Israelites forget God and sin so readily after Joshua died?

3. Read Genesis 18:19; Deuteronomy 4:5-9, 29:24-27. Discuss cause and effect in these passages.

4. How is God’s faithfulness demonstrated in the way He dealt with His people?

**DAY TWO — READ AND EXAMINE**

**Getting to Know Deborah...**

1. Read Judges 4:1-16. Israel was in what part of the cycle during Deborah’s lifetime (verses 1-3)?

2. Based on what you glean from the text, describe Deborah using as many adjectives as possible.

3. From our study of Miriam, what was the role of a prophetess? (See Lesson 2, Day 2.)
4. How did Deborah act as a prophetess in this narrative (verses 6-8;14)?

5. Compare Deborah and Barak regarding the response of each to God’s word and the courage to carry it out.

6. God commends Barak for his faith in Hebrews 11:32-34. How did Barak demonstrate it?

7. Considering Sisera’s primary military weapons (vs. 3), why did God want the Israelites to encamp on a mountain 1300 feet high?

8. How are you serving God using your gifts as Deborah served Him using hers? What, if anything, is holding you back?

**Think About It:**

God can use any of our skills and talents to His glory when we focus on what we have, not what we don’t have, and give it to Him. In fact, Ephesians 2:10 says that “we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” And, He gives us the ability to do the works He has created us to do.

**Historical insight:**

The Kenites were a tribe of nomads. The women typically lived in their own tents, rather than in their husband’s tents.
2. Read Judges 4:9 again. Was Jael doing God’s will? Explain.

3. What do you think the far-reaching effects of her actions might be? What risks did she take?
   • In her relationship with her husband —
   • In relation to their tribe —

4. How did she “do what was right and not give way to fear”?

5. Read Judges 5:1-31. What is revealed about the following:
   • courage and trust in God (2-5, 9-11) —
   • fear (6-8) —
   • Deborah and her role (7, 12-15) —
   • who helped and who didn’t (14-18, 23) —
   • the defeat of Sisera (19-21) —
   • Jael and her role (24-27) —
6. What does this narrative (Judges 4 and 5) tell us about God’s use of women in leadership in a society?

7. From the relationship between Deborah and Barak, what can we learn about men and women working together to accomplish God’s purpose?

8. How do Deborah and Jael encourage you as a woman? Think about how God used them as they functioned in their various roles as women with the resources available to them every day. Consider how your everyday womanly skills and resources have benefited others. Write about one specific time and share with your group.

DAY FOUR — THE WALK FROM FEAR TO FAITH

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

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

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

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

3. A courageous attitude begins long before you are ever called upon to use it. When was the last time you showed courage in living for Christ—such as testifying publicly about your faith, challenging others to do right, forgetting the opinion of the crowd, expressing love and appreciation for those in authority, etc.? Is there anything holding you back from total commitment to God? How can you show courage this week?
NAOMI & RUTH — MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS

Time: the Judges ~1400-1000 B.C.

Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior. HABAKKUK 3:17-18

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

DAY ONE — READ AND EXAMINE

Getting to Know Naomi and Ruth...

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

   • Naomi —
   • Ruth —

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

4. What relationship(s) is she giving up to pursue her new faith? Has your faith caused a separation between you and your natural family or someone formerly very close to you? Explain.
5. Naomi makes an emotional statement in 1:20-21. She was experiencing grief—a normal human emotion that often causes an aching heart and extended sadness. Write about a time in your life when you grieved over something or someone lost. What was it like? How long did it last? Did you, like Naomi, feel that God “dealt very bitterly with you” (1:20)? What got you through that to the other side where you didn’t bawl every time you thought about it? If you’re able, share with the group about your own struggles in that experience.

6. A good guess of ages would be that Naomi was in her late 40’s and Ruth was in her 20’s. As in-laws, how would you describe their relationship?

7. At this point, in what ways did they help each other?

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

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**Day Two — Read and Examine**

2. How did Ruth take care of Naomi—actions and attitude?

3. What emotions might each have been experiencing at this time?
   • Naomi —
   • Ruth —

4. What does Ruth 2:11-12 reveal? How did Naomi revealing her “story”, particularly in regards to Ruth, benefit both of them, especially the outsider Ruth?

5. Men generally owned property, not women. With no men left in the family, the women lacked any means of support. Read Deuteronomy 24:19-22; Lev. 19:9-10; 23:22. Unlike the cultures around them that made no societal provisions, what special provision does God make for the future care of women in Israel in this situation? How would this foster compassion in the community?

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

8. Read the following references. Briefly tell what is redeemed in each case. Note: “avenger” and “kinsman-redeemer” are translations of the same Hebrew word goel.
   - Leviticus 25:25-28 —
   - Leviticus 25:47-49 —
   - Numbers 35:19-21 —
   - Deut. 25:5-10 —

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

10. What did Ruth learn about God’s faithfulness to her through the law of the “kinsman-redeemer”? 

**Scriptural insight:**

_The Kinsman-Redeemer_

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

—W.W. Wiersbe, With the Word, pg. 157

**DAY THREE — READ AND EXAMINE**

1. Read 4:13-22. What did God do for both Ruth and Naomi?

3. Ruth and Naomi both characterized loyalty. Use a dictionary to define “Loyalty.”

4. To whom and to what should we be loyal? Explain your answer.

5. Read Titus 2:3-5. In what ways is the older woman to counsel and encourage the younger woman?

6. What mindset must the younger woman have?

7. What are the potential benefits for both?

8. Christian women should be counseling and encouraging each other, especially in our society where women are so often uprooted and transplanted to places miles away from their families. Some things only another woman can understand.
   • Younger women—Is there someone in your small group or life whom you would trust for advice and encouragement? Go to her and let her know of your need and willingness.
   • Older women—Is there someone in your small group or life whom you could befriend and encourage? Go to her and let her know of your need and willingness.

Think About It:
Boaz’s mother was Rahab (Lesson 3)—an outsider who also experienced the kindness of the Lord and His people. Is this a coincidence?

Think About It:
God knows we need each other. He hasn’t left us alone. In the Body of Christ, we are all sisters.
9. If you are married or one of your children is married, evaluate your own mother-in-law / daughter-in-law relationship. How can you apply this lesson to your relationship? Ask someone in your small group to pray for you specifically as needed and hold you accountable for your commitment.

DAY FOUR — THE WALK FROM FEAR TO FAITH

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

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

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

2. List all the circumstances that could have terrified Ruth. Instead, how did she respond to God by faith?
3. Read Habakkuk 3:17-18, Daniel 3:16-18, and the lyrics to the song at right. What decision should we make when things are tough? Do you trust God enough to make that decision? If so, give an example from your life when you have done so.

I can count a million times people asking me how I can praise You with all that I've gone through

The question just amazes me. Can circumstances possibly change who I forever am in You

Maybe since my life was changed long before these rainy days

It's never really ever crossed my mind to turn my back on you, oh Lord, my only shelter from the storm

But instead I draw closer through these times

So I pray

Bring me joy, bring me peace, bring the chance to be free

Bring me anything that brings You glory

And I know there'll be days when this life brings me pain

But if that's what it takes to praise You, Jesus, bring the rain

—“Bring The Rain” by MercyMe
HANNAH & MRS. MANOAH — MOTHERING CHALLENGES

Time: the Judges ~1400-1000 B.C.

…and she said to him, “As surely as you live, my lord, I am the woman who stood here beside you praying to the LORD. I prayed for this child, and the LORD has granted me what I asked of him. So now I give him to the LORD. For his whole life he will be given over to the LORD.” And he worshiped the LORD there. 1 SAMUEL 1:26-28

Historical Insight: The faithful who lived in Israel during this time endured repeated cycles of enemy oppression followed by deliverance and a time of peace before Israel rebelled against God again. The women in this lesson lived in the last part of the time of the Judges. Mrs. Manoah’s son, Samson, was the “judge” (deliverer) during the time period when Hannah’s son, Samuel, was born so the two were contemporaries. Samuel was the last judge because during his life, Israel demanded a king. God gave them a king.

DAY ONE — READ AND EXAMINE

Getting to Know Mrs. Manoah...

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

2. What needs did the Lord notice and prepare to meet—personal and national? How did He communicate to her His plan?

3. What was God’s purpose for Samson? Nazirite is from a Hebrew word meaning “separated” or “dedicated”. Read Numbers 6:1-8. What 3 things did a Nazirite vow to do that distinguished him as being set apart to God?
4. What was her responsibility while pregnant? How does this scripture support the value of the life of an unborn child before birth?

5. What was Manoah’s response? What does he ask the Lord?


8. Before this, Manoah and his wife thought a “man of God” or prophet had appeared to her. When they realized an angel of the Lord had appeared to them (to her twice!), what were their individual responses to these appearances (verses 22-23)? What does this reveal about their faith?

**From the Hebrew:**

When the angel says that his name is “beyond understanding” (Judges 13:18), the Hebrew for this phrase is translated in Isaiah 9:6 as “Wonderful”, applying to One who would come as “Mighty God.”

**For Further Study:**

Do a study on the “angel of the Lord” appearing in the Old Testament. Who was this? To whom did he appear and on what occasions?
9. Read 13:24-14:9. From the previous verses, we discovered that Manoah and his wife were a faithful, God-honoring couple. Their son had a life purpose to follow from birth. What kind of a son did Samson turn out to be? Do you think they were disappointed?

10. God gave Samson godly parents and special abilities to do the work that God had prepared for him to do. Yet, Samson made the choice to follow his own instincts rather than adhere to his family’s faith and humility before God. If you are a parent or relative of a “prodigal” son or daughter, how do you feel about it? If you are a parent of a young child, are you afraid he will become a prodigal? Are you afraid that you will do something wrong? Although no parent is perfect, we must remember that every person makes his own decision whether or not to act on the knowledge of God he has received. Faith is an act of the will. Share with your group any fears or feelings of guilt and disappointment. Commit that loved one to the Lord, praying for the “prodigal” to return to his or her God.

**DAY TWO — READ AND EXAMINE**

**Getting to Know Hannah…**

1. Read Deuteronomy 28:9-11; Psalm 127:3-5. In ancient Israel, children specifically were an indication of what?

2. Read 1 Samuel 1:1-19. How would you describe Hannah if you were there watching her?

3. Discuss everything that was causing Hannah distress.

**From the Hebrew:**
The name “Samson” is derived from a Hebrew word meaning sun or brightness.

**Scriptural Insight:**
“This was from the Lord” (verse 4) is evidence that the Lord uses even the sinful weaknesses of men to accomplish His purposes and bring praise to His name. Other instances are in Joshua 11:20 and 1 Kings 12:15.

**For Further Study:**
Read the rest of Samson’s story in Judges 14:9-16:31. How many Nazirite vows did Samson break? By the way, Mrs. Manoah had several more children after Samson. There is no indication that she had to follow the same dietary restraints for them.
4. Discuss Elkanah’s response to his wife’s distress.

5. Elkanah’s response does not seem to acknowledge Hannah’s emotional needs. Does your husband or closest friend ever misunderstand your feelings? How do you react?

6. How did Hannah grow spiritually because of her barrenness? What did she learn about God?

7. God uses prayer to get us into partnership with Him, then we recognize His blessing. Hannah had a fallible High Priest interceding for her. We have far more available to us as believers. Read the following verses and discuss who is helping us in our prayer and how?
   - Hebrews 4:14-16 —
   - Hebrews 7:24-25 —
   - Romans 8:26-28; 31-34 —

8. Hannah had to endure her barrenness for some time because Peninah had at least 4 children. Sarah endured hers for at least 30 years! Do you consider yourself barren? Like Hannah, is it making you very sad? What should you do about your feelings/attitude? Is there some opportunity available today where you can use your time to minister to someone else with your built-in mothering instincts? Ask someone to pray with you about this.
Lesson 6: Hannah & Mrs. Manoah

Day Three — Read and Examine

1. Read 1 Samuel 1:20-2:11. God gave Hannah a son. What did she do then?

2. Hannah’s prayer is her psalm of praise and thanksgiving. What emotions does she express, and what truths does she affirm about her God?
   - Emotions —

   - Truths —

3. Read 2:12-26. How did God continue to answer Hannah’s prayer even after she completed her vow?

4. In what kind of “home” did Hannah leave her boy?


From the Hebrew:
Hannah’s prayer song is prophetic, anticipating the establishment of kingship in Israel. Her son Samuel crowns the first king, Saul, as well as the second king, David. It also contains the first reference in the Bible to the Lord’s anointed (1 Samuel 2:10). "Anointed" is the Hebrew word "mashiyach" from which “Messiah” is derived. The Greek translation of this Hebrew term is “Christos”, from which comes the English word “Christ.”
6. Read 3:1-4:1. Hannah’s trust in the Lord was rewarded through His faithfulness to her son. List all the verses in 2:12-4:1 that reveal God’s faithfulness to Samuel as he grew up as well as Samuel’s response. Discuss how much God was involved in raising this boy.

7. How did Hannah continue to mother her boy?

8. Are you in a situation where you have to be a mother from a distance? How does it make you feel? Have you talked to the Lord about it? Are you able to trust Him? Scripture says that Samuel grew up to be the most respected Judge that Israel had.

DAY FOUR — THE WALK FROM FEAR TO FAITH

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

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

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

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

3. Read Psalm 107:1-43. Notice the different kinds of people who call out to God and how He responds to them. Verse 43 says “Whoever is wise, let him heed these things and consider the great love of the Lord.” Both of these women, Mrs. Manoah and Hannah, experienced God’s love as He took care of them in specific situations. Jot down your thoughts about the great love of the Lord for you and how He took care of you in 1 or 2 specific situations.
ABIGAIL & BATHSHEBA — TWO WIVES

Time: United Kingdom ~1000-900 B.C.

But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. 2 CORINTHIANS 12:9-10

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

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

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

DAY ONE — READ AND EXAMINE

Background Information…

1. Read Genesis 49:10; Deuteronomy 17:14-20. What does God say about Israel’s future king?

2. Read 1 Samuel 8:1-22; 9:15-16; 10:9-25. Relate these verses to the prophecies mentioned above.
3. Read 1 Samuel 13:13-14; 16:1-13, 18. What information is given about God’s choice of David and anointing him as king?

**Getting to Know Abigail...**

   - Nabal —
   - Abigail —

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

6. Compare David’s request to Nabal’s response. NOTE: Nabal’s pasture land was about a mile away from his home.

**For Further Study:**

For more insight into the character of David, read the rest of 1 Samuel 16 through chapter 24. This section sets the stage for our lesson on Abigail.

**Scriptural Insight:**

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

**DAY TWO — READ AND EXAMINE**

1. Read 1 Sam. 25:14-35. From information in these verses, add to your description of Abigail’s qualities.
2. Abigail didn’t panic. Perhaps she was accustomed to such calamities given her husband’s character! (See her opinion of Nabal in verse 25.) Would you have panicked? Have you ever been in such a dangerous (or perceived dangerous) situation? How did you get through it? Write a short description of this in the space below.

3. Why didn’t Abigail tell her husband what she was going to do?

4. Abigail provides us with a successful pattern for dealing with confrontation. Discuss her strategy in appeasing David and her conversation with him.

5. Read I Samuel 25:36-44. Once the danger was thwarted, how did Abigail deal with her husband, and what was Nabal’s response?
6. How did she do what was right on behalf of both her husband and David and “not give way to fear”?

7. How did the Lord deal with Nabal?

8. What signs do you see of spiritual growth in Abigail’s life in spite of living in such a difficult situation?

9. Read 2 Corinthians 12:1-10. How does God use difficulties to shape us?

10. Abigail probably lived in danger of violence and the constant stress of unresolved conflict. How might that have affected her attitudes and feelings?

11. Someone in your small group, perhaps yourself, may live in this kind of relationship. Fear and wrong attitudes can be as harmful as the abuse itself. When we react wrongly to people who mistreat us, we really let them control us.

   • How should you counsel a woman in such a situation? See 1 Corinthians 10:13; 1 Peter 5:6-10; 2 Timothy 1:7

   • If it is yourself in such a situation, reach out to someone in your small group and let her pray for the situation as well as for your attitudes and responses.

Scriptural Insight:
Within two weeks, Abigail’s life was totally changed. David married Abigail and traveled with her (and his first wife Ahinoam) for two years. Abigail had one son as David’s wife—Chileab. Nothing more is known of Abigail beyond this.
DAY THREE — READ AND EXAMINE

Getting to Know Bathsheba...

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

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

3. Read Deuteronomy 22:22. What was the penalty for adultery?


5. Why do you think Bathsheba succumbed to this affair? What did it cost her?

6. Read 1 Corinthians 10:13. Remembering how Abigail prevented an angry David from doing evil, how could Bathsheba have responded differently to David?

Historical Insight:
Jerusalem is one of the most important cities in history. Canaanites settled there soon after the dispersion from Babel in the third millennium B.C. It held an especially strategic location, controlling the primary north-south trade routes through Canaan as well as providing a military stronghold. Jerusalem became Israel’s capital during the time of David.

7. Read 2 Samuel 11:26-12:25. How did God view Bathsheba’s affair with David?

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

9. Perhaps you, like Bathsheba, had an immoral relationship with your husband (or other person) before marriage or caused a first marriage to be broken up by your relationship to each other, and you are feeling guilty or fearful of the consequences. Agree with God that you have sinned. Accept the forgiveness He provided through His Son Jesus for all your sins—past, present, and future—then forgive yourself and forgive your husband. Ask the other person to forgive your part in the past.

Read Psalm 103:10-14. God has already removed your sins from you as far as the east is from the west. You will still have to deal with the consequences of your actions, but, thanks be to Christ, not the guilt!! Romans 8:1 says, “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” Are you able to trust God to help you even through the consequences of sin? If not, ask someone you trust in your small group to pray for you regarding this.

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**Scriptural Insight:**
Read Psalm 51 for David’s heartfelt repentance (agreement with God about his sin and decision to change his behavior).

**For Further Study:**
Read the rest of 2 Samuel to see how Nathan’s prophecy came true.

**Scriptural Insight:**
In spite of their sin, God still loved Bathsheba. That’s His unconditional love. Of all David’s wives, He chose Bathsheba to bear David’s successor, Solomon. She joined two other women with marred reputations, Tamar and Rahab, in the genealogy of Jesus Christ (Matthew 1: 6-17).

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**DAY FOUR — THE WALK FROM FEAR TO FAITH**

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

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

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

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

3. Scripture describes both Abigail and Bathsheba as being beautiful women. In his commentary, Matthew Henry wrote, “The fear of God reigning in the heart is the beauty of the soul.” What does the Bible say of the role that physical beauty should have in a person’s character? See Proverbs 31:10, 30; 1 Peter 3:1-6, and any other verses you can find to support your answer.
Historical Insight: David reigned on the throne of Israel for 40 years. Solomon, who was God’s choice to inherit his father’s throne, strengthened Israel’s defenses, conducted trade throughout the known world, and engaged in numerous building operations including a magnificent temple for God and a massive palace for himself. Famed for his wisdom, which he requested and received from God, Solomon wrote the books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon. But tempted by his foreign wives, Solomon unwisely turned his heart away from God. As a result God promised judgment upon Solomon’s death—the kingdom would be divided.

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

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

Day One — Read and Examine

1. Read 1 Kings 16:25-33. Ahab ruled Israel in the middle 800’s B.C. He was the 6th king after Jeroboam. His name may already be familiar to you. What does the Scripture say about Ahab’s kingship?

2. An idol is any human-created God substitute. Idolatry is giving glory to something else that belongs only to God. Read Exodus 20:2-6 and Deuteronomy 11:13-17. What did God demand of His people? What did He promise to Israel if they set up idol worship?
3. Generally, what human-created God substitutes do we have in our culture today?

4. Personally, what tends to take God’s place in your life—possessions, family members, position, power, fitness, appearance? What behavior suggests that something has become an idol to us? Ask Jesus to reveal to you what you love more than Him. Through the Holy Spirit’s power within you, ask Him to release you from that idol’s power in your life. Write out your prayer here.

5. The prophet Elijah lived during this time. Elijah’s name (meaning “The LORD is my God”) was the essence of his message. Since a prophet spoke the very Word of God, it was necessary that Israel distinguish between true and false prophets. Read Deuteronomy 13:1-5 and 18:14-22. What characteristics distinguish God’s true prophets?

The spiritual condition of God’s people under the rule of Omri and then Ahab was one of idolatry, especially worship of a god called Baal. Read the information about this idol in the margin at left.

6. Read James 5:17 and 1 Kings 17:1. Elijah prayed according to God’s promise (Deut. 11:16-17), then he told Ahab about it. What do you think was God’s point by Elijah’s message in 1 Kings 17:1? According to James 5:17, how did God answer Elijah’s prayers?

Historical Insight:
The Hebrew Prophet—Besides godless kings, Israel’s history also featured religious apostasy characterized by an ineffective or nonexistent priesthood. God called men to become His mouthpiece, that is, receiving a message directly from God and proclaiming it to God’s people. Unlike the priest or the king, the prophet did not inherit his office. He received his calling directly from God. Some examples are Jeremiah before birth (Jer. 1:5), Samuel as a young boy (I Sam. 3), and Amos as a farmer (Amos 1:1). The prophet’s life was usually difficult, sometimes involving grave physical abuse. Jeremiah was held captive in a muddy pit, and according to tradition Isaiah was sawn in half.

Historical Insight:
One of the leading Canaanite gods was Baal, whose name meant simply “lord.” He was considered the god of storms and thus of fertility, for the rain he supposedly sent watered the crops and provided a bountiful harvest. What did God’s judgment reveal about Baal?
7. Imagine that kind of drought. What effects did God’s answer to Elijah’s prayer have on the land and people in Israel and surrounding nations as well as on himself? See also 1 Kings 18:4.

8. Read 1 Kings 17:1-6. What did Elijah learn about God’s creative provision in a tough time?

9. Read 2 Corinthians 8:13-15 and Philippians 4:10-20. What do you learn about God’s provision from these verses?

10. Was there a time in your life when God creatively provided for you as things looked hopeless—whether it was physical, emotional, or spiritual provision? Write a short paragraph describing what it was like to trust Him for that. Share with your group.

Think about it:
Sometimes when we pray for the Lord to draw unbelievers to Him, the believers have to suffer the consequences as well. Is it worth it?
DAY TWO — READ AND EXAMINE

Getting to Know the Widow of Zarephath...

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

2. What was her problem, and how was she trying to deal with it?

3. What might have been her emotions at this time?

4. Read Psalm 146:5-10. How does this apply to our story?

5. What was her responsibility? Refer to Psalm 56:3,4.

6. List the many ways that her faith and obedience were rewarded.
7. Elijah stayed with the widow and her son, eating flour and oil cakes twice a day for almost 3 years. Imagine that. A modern day equivalent could be peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. How long could you stay grateful while eating those twice a day for 3 years?

8. Reflect on the words of the song to the right. How grateful are you for what the Lord has already done in your life? Do you thank Him for the times He says, “No”? See Colossians 1:11-12; 2:7; 3:15-17. If an attitude change is necessary, ask someone in your small group to pray for you to be more thankful. Share with her the results of “joyously giving thanks” to Him.

9. Read 1 Kings 17:17-24. Now, what was her problem? What was her response to the problem?

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

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

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God | Baal
---|---
2 points | 0 points
Only a true God can provide flour and oil in a drought!

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

—“Things You Never Gave Me” by David Meece
11. Have you ever experienced anger at or distrust of God when something bad happened? If so, how did you get over it?

12. Discuss Elijah’s response and how God answered Elijah’s prayer.

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

14. Read Matthew 6:31-34. Apply this passage to today’s lesson.

15. Through a near tragedy, this woman came to know the living God in a personal way. Do you know of someone who turned to the Lord only after exhausting all her/his other resources? Share the results with your group. When might it be good to pray for someone to reach desperate circumstances? Discuss with your small group.

For Further Study:
I Kings 18 and 19 are interesting accounts of the further ministry of Elijah to the nation of Israel. They contain stories made familiar through children’s Sunday School lessons. Read them and gain terrific insights into both God’s and Elijah’s characters.
DAY THREE — READ AND EXAMINE

Getting to Know the Prophet’s Widow...

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

1. Read 2 Kings 4:1-7. The widow’s husband had been a faithful prophet, part of the company of prophets. Read 1 Kings 20:35; 2 Kings 2:3,5,7,15; 4:1,38; 5:22; 6:1; 9:1. What do you learn about the company/sons of the prophets? Who were they? What did they do? Who were their leaders?

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


4. Read Isaiah 1:17, 23; 10:1-2. How effective and persistent was Israel at carrying out this responsibility?

5. Read Deuteronomy 10:17-18; Psalm 68:4-5. What does God promise to do then?

Scriptural Insight:
The company of prophets can be considered similar to modern seminaries where men and women learn from distinguished God-gifted teachers.

Think About It:
One community of prophets was located at Bethel, just north of Jerusalem. Originally established as a holy place to worship God, particularly during the time of the patriarchs and the judges, especially Samuel’s ministry, it later became a center of Baal worship instead. Can you think of any modern day equivalents?
6. Back to 2 Kings 4, what was this woman’s crisis situation, and how did she deal with it?

7. List all the things that Elisha as God’s representative commanded her to do.

8. What was this woman’s responsibility? Did she do her part?

9. When Elisha told the woman to ask her neighbors for jars, what could have been the benefits of doing so—to them and to her?

10. How do you think this incident impacted her sons? In what practical ways can you show your children what God is like?

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

**Historical Insight:**

Olive oil was expensive and time-consuming to make. It was used for cooking, lighting lamps, dressing wounds, and as a deodorant when water wasn’t available for bathing. The wealthy used it for bathing and as a skin softener. It was also used for anointing kings and the dead for burial as well as ritual offerings.
12. Read 1 Timothy 5:3-8,16; James 1:27; and Romans 12:9-16. As followers of Christ, what does God expect of us as women in our homes, church, and community? In today’s society, who would be considered widows? What do they need besides material provisions? Study these passages and ask God to reveal a specific area where He wants you to be obedient to Him as you reach out to meet the need of someone in your sphere of influence. Share this with your small group and ask them to pray for opportunities.

**DAY FOUR — THE WALK FROM FEAR TO FAITH**

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

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

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

2. What could have terrified the prophet’s Widow? How did she demonstrate faith?
3. Often, we overlook what God has already provided for us and concentrate instead on what we don’t have. What do you deduce from the fact that God used what both women already had as a resource? Read Exodus 4:1-5 and Mark 6:35-44. What principle can you derive from these verses? Reflecting upon your own life, either now or in the past, describe a specific application of this principle in the space below.
Everyday Women, Ever Faithful God

Lesson 9: Shunnamite Woman

WOMAN OF SHUNEM — A STORY TO TELL

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

The king was talking to Gehazi, the servant of the man of God, and had said, “Tell me about all the great things Elisha has done.” Just as Gehazi was telling the king how Elisha had restored the dead to life, the woman whose son Elisha had brought back to life came to beg the king for her house and land. Gehazi said, “This is the woman, my lord the king, and this is her son whom Elisha restored to life.” The king asked the woman about it, and she told him. 2 Kings 8:4-6

Historical Insight: God’s concern for women and their special needs is clearly seen in the scriptures we’ve studied so far. Whereas women were regarded as inferior to men in most ancient Near Eastern societies, God demonstrated His compassion for them in many different ways. (For history of the times, see Lesson 8.)

Elisha, God’s prophet to Israel, ministered in and around Mt. Carmel on the western edge of the Plain of Jezreel—a strategic area of Israel and a fruitful farming valley. Shunem was a little town in this valley about ~20 miles away from Mt. Carmel.

DAY ONE—READ AND EXAMINE

Getting to Know the Woman of Shunem...

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

2. How did she approach her husband with her idea? What does this reveal about their marriage?

3. How did Elisha respond to their generosity?

4. What, if anything, did this woman request of Elisha? What does this tell us about her view of her life?
5. What need did she withhold, and why do you think she withheld it?

6. How does Elisha find out about her unexpressed need? What does he, as God’s representative, do about it?

7. What did she learn about God?

8. Homemaking is a ministry. For her, it all started with a meal—extending hospitality—and thus supporting Elisha’s ministry. Home is wherever you live. Whether your career is that of “homemaker” or not, women are particularly gifted by God to establish the warmth of a home—emotional and otherwise. Read the “Scriptural Insight” in the margin. Do you consider your “homemaking” as a ministry and your “home” as a ministry tool? Share a time when God has given you opportunity to use your home to minister to someone else.

Scriptural Insight:

God says in 1 Tim. 5:14 that women are to be “house despot” (NIV “managers”) meaning to have authority. In Titus 2:3, women are encouraged to be “reverent,” a word that described a priestess serving in the temple of her God. The world is God’s temple, and we are God’s servants in it. That perspective removes any sacred/secular division from our lives. It is just as spiritual for you to teach a Sunday school class as it is for you to prepare nutritious meals for your family or to work with integrity for your employer. For the believer, all of life is set apart for the Lord, and every act is an act of ministry.

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

**DAY TWO — READ AND EXAMINE**

About 5 or more years later…

1. Read 2 Kings 4:18-37. What crisis was this faithful woman facing? How did she respond to the crisis?

2. What might be the reasons for not telling her husband or Elisha’s servant Gehazi?

3. Who, alone, was she seeking? Elisha represented God to her at this time. While there are times when family and friends can help us, God wants us to bring our deepest needs to Him alone. Read Hebrews 4:14-16 and 10:19-23. What confidence do we have?

4. Describe the last time when you faced a crisis that only God could handle. Were you able to trust Him with the outcome? Why or why not? Share with your small group.

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

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

**Historical Insight:**

Many farmers lived in town and went out to the country daily to work.

God poured out miracles through Elijah and Elisha to Israel during their lifetimes. Why at this particular time? (Review the historical insights and purpose of miracles in the Lesson 8.)
7. Though living in the midst of wicked, unfaithful Israel, this woman and her husband chose to remain faithful to God. God honored their faith by giving them opportunity to respond to His word through Elisha whenever he came to their town. We live in a culture that finds Christianity, as well as God’s standards of moral law, repulsive—choosing instead its own self-gratification as a substitute for worship of the true God. We are surrounded by idolatry and corrupt teaching. What steps do we need to take to remain faithful to God alone? How are you doing this?

8. After reading today’s selection, what other adjectives would you add in your description of this woman? Add them to the list you started in Day One.

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**Day Three — Read and Examine**

At least 7 years later...

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

2. Now, what challenge was she facing (verse 3)? How did she respond to the problem?

3. In what ways has God shown His faithfulness to this woman in her past, in her present and for her future? In good times and bad?
4. After reading this passage, why do you think God allowed the family in Shunem to experience the crisis in 2 Kings 4?

5. We don’t even know her name. But, God does. And, He included her story in His written Word for our benefit. What inspires you about this woman? Do you know any women today like this? How do they inspire you?

6. Do you believe the woman’s sudden appearance before the king was a coincidence? If not, what does it tell you about our God?

Day Four — The Walk from Fear to Faith

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

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

1. What situations could have brought fear into this woman’s life?
2. How did she respond to God by faith? Give specific instances and verse references.

3. God gave this woman a story of His faithfulness to her, and He gave her opportunity to share it with an ungodly king! God has given you a story to tell of His faithfulness to you. Are you telling it? Why or why not? Take time now to write some of your story using the guide below. Share with your small group next week. Why not ask God to give you other opportunities to share your STORY!

MY STORY TO SHARE

Review the various parts of your STORY that you have already written in the previous lessons (see margin). Choose one or two to expand into your STORY to share of your faith walk with God.

Lessons, Questions:
1 — DAY 2, Question 10
2 — DAY 2, Question 9
3 — DAY 4, Question 3
4 — DAY 3, Question 8
5 — DAY 1, Question 5
6 — DAY 4, Question 3
7 — DAY 2, Question 2
8 — DAY 1, Question 10
APPLYING FAITH TO FEAR

The information below is a great tool to use whenever you are afraid. It will lead you to apply faith to your fear.

1. **Confront** it. What fears do you have right now? Think about them. The worst ones, the real ones, and the imaginary ones.

2. **Ask** about each one: What is my worst-case scenario? Consider just one of those fears. What is the worst that could happen? Think realistically.

3. **Consider**: If the worst I can imagine happens, could I handle it through the presence and power of Jesus Christ? Believers have the power of the One who created the Universe living inside of us. Can He help me get through anything? Remember Romans 8:26—the Spirit Himself is praying for us in our weakness when we don’t even know what to ask for.

4. **Remember** the four truths:
   - God loves me. *John 3:16; Romans 5:5*
   - God knows what is going on in my life. *Matthew 6:31-32*
   - God can do something about it. *Luke 1:37; Mark 10:27*
   - I can trust His goodness in whatever He chooses to do. *Proverbs 3:5*

5. **Pray**: Prayer is simply talking to God about anything and everything.
   - Thank the Lord for His presence and His goodness.
   - Ask Him for the courage and peace to ride out the storm. Where the Bible is clear, you can claim God’s promises by faith.
   - Anytime, you can ask for deliverance and protection—but you cannot hold God to promises He hasn’t made. He hasn’t promised immunity from natural calamities, illness, and troubles.

6. **Live** life securely in Him:
   - Take common sense precautions. Be wise in the world.
   - Trust God to show you what to do and give you strength when you are weak.

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