Lessons for Today

from the Lives of

Women in the Bible

Thirty-Eight Women, Timeless Wisdom, and the God Who Sees

by Oludare Akinbo

"Then she called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, You-Are-the-God-Who-Sees." — Genesis 16:13 (NKJV)
"Strength and honor are her clothing; she shall rejoice in time to come." — Proverbs 31:25 (NKJV)



In loving memory of Oluwatohungbogbo Tolulope Akinbo (1977–2024), a truly remarkable, strong, and virtuous woman, and an Ezer Kenegdo in every sense of the word.

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Dedication



OLUWATOHUNGBOGBO TOLULOPE AKINBO
1977 – 2024

To the memory of my beloved wife: my best friend, my partner in life and in faith, and the truest Ezer Kenegdo I have ever known.

Her strength, wisdom, and quiet courage first opened my eyes to what God meant when He made woman a helper comparable to man. That understanding became A Woman Was Never Meant To Be Decorative. This book is its natural sequel, and in every way that matters, it is hers too.

She now sleeps in Christ, awaiting the sound of the last trumpet. Until that morning, may these pages carry something of her light.

"Many daughters have done well, But you excel them all."
— Proverbs 31:29 (NKJV)

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Introduction

Walk through any African market early in the morning and you will see who really holds the community together. The women arrived before the sun. They have already cooked for their households, dressed the children for school, and set out their wares with the quiet confidence of people who know exactly what they are doing. The market would not open without them. Yet if you read many history books, you might never know they were there.

The Bible is not like those history books. It names women, tells their stories honestly, and places some of them at the very turning points of God's plan.

Let me be clear from the outset about what this book is not. It is not an attempt to wade into the needless and unprofitable modern argument that pits men and women against each other, as though one must lose for the other to win. It is not about who is greater.

Rather, it is an attempt to acknowledge, and hopefully to recover, something that has been largely lost and misunderstood: that woman was created with great potential, and that her role as a helper, a strong pillar of support, the *Ezer Kenegdo* I treated fully in A *Woman Was Never Meant To Be Decorative*, is documented in Scripture far more than many realise. Rightly understood, that truth can encourage and strengthen both men and women today.

The idea for this book came as a natural extension of my earlier book, A *Woman Was Never Meant To Be Decorative*, written in honour of my late wife, Oluwatohungbogbo Tolulope Akinbo (1977–2024), a truly remarkable, strong, and virtuous woman and an *Ezer Kenegdo*, a help meet in every sense of the word.

I wanted to share the considerable edifying potential in these stories with everyone, men and women, but with women in particular, so that they can understand the true potential God placed within them, and not the narrow, weak version that society so often offers. There is much to gain from learning about the women of the Bible, because Scripture presents women whose experiences speak to challenges people still face: rejection, infertility, betrayal, grief, injustice, leadership, marriage, motherhood, singleness, courage, faith, forgiveness, and the search for purpose. Their stories can do more than recount ancient events; they can help us examine our own lives through the lens of Scripture.

How Each Chapter Is Arranged

The thirty-eight chapters follow the order of the biblical story, from Genesis to the Epistles, gathered into six Parts. Each chapter follows the same simple pattern, so that you can read the book straight through or use it for personal or group study:

- An opening reflection drawn from nature and everyday life, to help the lesson land where we live.
- The biblical account: her circumstances, struggles, choices, and relationship with God.
- The deeper lessons, with key Scriptures on the page and short Lesson for Today notes applying them to modern relationships, families, work, and society.
- A conclusion and Scripture for further study.
- Ten questions for self-examination, to be answered honestly before God, ideally with a notebook nearby.
- A final word, with a thought and a key Scripture to carry with you.

One Guiding Principle

I have refused to force every woman's story into a simple success narrative. Some biblical women experienced dramatic deliverance, while others endured suffering, injustice, or loss without an immediate resolution. Their lives can strengthen us through both God's acts of deliverance and the wisdom, courage, faithfulness, and hope they showed in difficult circumstances. We will neither romanticise their suffering nor invent motives that Scripture does not establish.

A Word About Our Hope

Several of the women in these pages buried husbands and children. Where their stories touch death, this book speaks as Scripture speaks. The dead do not drift off somewhere else; they sleep in the grave, awaiting the resurrection. When the last trumpet sounds, the dead in Christ will rise first, and those who are alive will be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye (1 Corinthians 15:51–52; 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17).

The angels told the disciples on the Mount of Olives that this same Jesus would come again in like manner as they had seen Him go (Acts 1:11). Zechariah tells us that in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives (Zechariah 14:4). Jude tells us that the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints (Jude 14). And Revelation shows the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, with the great announcement that the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them (Revelation 21:2–3).

That is why, throughout this book, the hope of believers is described as the Kingdom of God, God's reign established on a renewed earth, and not as an escape to somewhere far away. It is a hope that every woman in these pages who died in faith will one day share.

> “
>
> *And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God.”*
>
> **— Revelation 21:3 (NKJV)**

Read slowly. Answer the questions honestly. And may these women, so long overlooked by many, become your teachers, your companions, and your encouragement.

PART ONE

Women of the Beginnings

Genesis

Promises, waiting, family wounds, and the God who sees.

Sarah
Hagar
Rebekah
Leah
Tamar

CHAPTER ONE

Sarah

Learning to Trust God When the Wait Is Long

Watch a hen sitting on her eggs and you will learn something about patience. For about three weeks she hardly moves. She turns the eggs, she fluffs her feathers, she glares at anyone who comes near, and she waits. Nothing seems to be happening. The eggs look exactly the same on day nineteen as they did on day one.

Now imagine a hen that grows tired of waiting and decides to 'help' by pecking the shells open early. Village children who have tried this, out of curiosity, quickly learn the sad result. What was meant to be life becomes a mess. The waiting was not wasted time; it was the time the life inside needed.

Sarah waited for a promised child for so long that laughing at the promise seemed the only sensible response. At one point she tried to crack the shell herself. Her story shows us both the pain of a long wait and the danger of shortcuts taken when God seems slow.

KEY SCRIPTURES

Genesis 11:29–30; 12:1–5; 16:1–16; 17:15–21; 18:1–15; 21:1–7; Hebrews 11:11–12.

CENTRAL LESSON

A delayed promise is not a forgotten one. Faith waits patiently, and refuses the shortcuts that wisdom and godliness forbid.

A Promise Spoken to an Old Couple

When God called Abram out of Haran, He made him a promise that sounded wonderful on the day it was spoken.

> "*I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing.*
>
> **— Genesis 12:2 (NKJV)**

A great nation. There was only one small problem. Sarai, his wife, was barren. She was already past the age when most women give up hoping, and the years kept passing. Ten years in

Canaan. Still no child. Every new moon came and went with the same quiet disappointment.

Sarah's story is not about a woman with no faith. Hebrews names her among the heroes of faith. It is about a woman whose faith was stretched across a very long rope of years, and who, at one point, let go of the rope and tried to tie her own knot.

Delay Is Not Denial

Long waiting does something to the soul. At first you pray with confidence. Then you pray with tears. Then, if you are honest, you pray with a kind of tired politeness, the way you greet a neighbour you no longer expect anything from.

Sarah had every human reason to conclude that the promise had expired. Her body had passed the season of childbearing. Her husband was old. The neighbours, no doubt, had stopped asking.

But a delayed promise is not a forgotten promise. God is not bound by our calendars, and He does not explain His timetable in advance. The prophet Habakkuk, waiting for a very different promise, was told this:

> "*For the vision is yet for an appointed time; But at the end it will speak, and it will not lie. Though it tarries, wait for it; Because it will surely come, It will not tarry.*
>
> **— Habakkuk 2:3 (NKJV)**

Look at the honesty of that verse. *Though it tarries.* God does not pretend that waiting is short. He simply insists that what He has said will come.

At the same time, Sarah's story asks us a careful question. Is what I am waiting for something God actually promised, or something I deeply want and have dressed up as a promise? God promised Abraham a son. He has not promised every reader a spouse by thirty, a house by forty, or a particular child, career, or outcome. Wisdom learns to tell the difference, and faith learns to trust God's character even where He has made no specific promise.

The Shortcut Through Hagar's Tent

After ten years, Sarai came up with a plan. It was not a wicked plan by the standards of her culture. It was a perfectly legal one.

> "*So Sarai said to Abram, "See now, the LORD has restrained me from bearing children. Please, go in to my maid; perhaps I shall obtain children by her." And Abram heeded the voice of Sarai.*
>
> **— Genesis 16:2 (NKJV)**

Anyone who grew up in Africa will recognise this scene. A couple has waited for years without a child. The husband's mother starts dropping hints at family meetings. An uncle suggests, 'as a matter of wisdom', that a second wife might 'help'. Sometimes it is even the wife herself who, worn down by pressure and shame, proposes it, just to make the questions stop.

I know a woman who did exactly that. After eleven years of marriage and endless whispering, she told her husband to 'bring someone'. He did. Within two years the home that had once been quiet and sad was loud and bitter. The second wife had a child, and the first wife, who had suggested the arrangement, found that her pain had not left the house. It had simply been given a roommate.

That is Genesis 16. The plan worked, in a narrow sense. Hagar conceived. And immediately the household began to fall apart.

> "
>
> *Then Sarai said to Abram, "My wrong be upon you! I gave my maid into your embrace; and when she saw that she had conceived, I became despised in her eyes."*
>
> **— Genesis 16:5 (NKJV)**

Shortcuts rarely remove pain. They usually multiply it. And notice how quickly Sarai, who had designed the plan, blamed her husband for it. Abraham, for his part, shrugged and handed the whole matter back to her. Nobody in that tent covered themselves in glory.

> **LESSON FOR TODAY**
>
> When waiting becomes painful, be most careful of the solutions that look sensible, legal, and fast. Ask not only 'Will this work?' but 'Is this right, and who will pay for it?'

Our Pain Can Become Someone Else's Burden

It is easy to read Sarah's story only through Sarah's eyes. But there was another woman in that tent. Hagar was a slave. She did not choose this arrangement. She was used to solve somebody else's problem, and when the solution became inconvenient, she was mistreated until she ran away into the desert.

When we try to fix our own disappointment, we can easily trample people with less power than we have. A frustrated manager takes it out on junior staff. A childless aunty makes the house help's life miserable. A delayed businessman cuts corners that cost his workers their wages.

Sarah's story is a gentle but firm warning. Our pain is real, and God cares about it. But our pain never gives us the right to use other people as tools.

The Laugh Behind the Tent Door

Years later, three visitors came to Abraham's tent in the heat of the day. While Abraham served them, one of them repeated the promise: by this time next year, Sarah would have a son. Sarah was listening behind the tent door, as any sensible woman would.

> "*Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, "After I have grown old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?"*
>
> **— Genesis 18:12 (NKJV)**

It was not a loud laugh. It was the private, tired laugh of a woman who has heard too many sermons about miracles. And then came one of the gentlest moments of humour in all of Scripture.

> "*But Sarah denied it, saying, "I did not laugh," for she was afraid. And He said, "No, but you did laugh!"*
>
> **— Genesis 18:15 (NKJV)**

God did not strike her down. He did not cancel the promise. He simply refused to let her pretend. *No, but you did laugh.* It is the tone of a patient father who has caught a child with her hand in the groundnut tin.

Some of us need to hear that God already knows about our private laughter, our hidden doubt, our tired scepticism. He is not shocked by it. He invites us to stop hiding it, and to bring it into the open where He can deal with it.

God Is Faithful Even When We Are Weak

Then it happened. At ninety, Sarah held a baby boy. And the woman who had laughed in disbelief now laughed for a completely different reason.

> "*And Sarah said, "God has made me laugh, and all who hear will laugh with me."*
>
> **— Genesis 21:6 (NKJV)**

They named him Isaac, which means 'he laughs'. Every time Sarah called her son for supper, she was reminded that God has a sense of humour and a very long memory.

Sarah's story does not teach us that God rewards shortcuts. The consequences of the Hagar plan echoed for generations. But it does teach us that God's faithfulness is not destroyed by our weakness. He kept His word in spite of Sarah's impatience, Abraham's passivity, and both of

their doubts.

> *By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised.*
>
> **— Hebrews 11:11 (NKJV)**

That is a generous summary of a complicated life. The New Testament does not mention the laugh behind the door or the plan in Hagar's tent. It remembers that, in the end, Sarah judged God faithful. Grace often writes our obituary more kindly than our worst days deserve.

Wait Without Losing Your Wisdom

Waiting is hard. Scripture never pretends otherwise. But Sarah's life shows us that how we wait matters almost as much as what we are waiting for.

We can wait honestly, admitting our frustration to God. We can wait wisely, refusing shortcuts that compromise our integrity or crush the vulnerable. And we can wait hopefully, keeping our hands busy with today's faithfulness while leaving tomorrow's timing to God.

Scripture for Further Study

Genesis 16:1–16; Genesis 18:9–15; Genesis 21:1–7; Psalm 27:13–14; Hebrews 10:35–36; Hebrews 11:11–12.

Ten Questions for Self-Examination

Take your time. Answer honestly, before God, and write your answers down if you can.

1. What long disappointment is testing my patience right now?
2. Am I treating something I want as though God had promised it?
3. Who with less power than me is affected by the choices I make in my waiting?
4. Is there a shortcut I am tempted to take that would cost me my integrity?
5. What can I do faithfully today, while leaving the timing to God?
6. Where in my life am I tempted to peck the shell open before the time is right?
7. When God seems silent, do I fill the silence with my own plans and then ask Him to bless them?
8. Have I laughed, even privately, at something God has said because my circumstances made it look impossible?

9. Who has been hurt by a shortcut I took, and have I taken responsibility for it?
10. Can I honestly say that I trust God's character even if His timing remains a mystery to me?

Final Word

If you are still sitting on a promise, do not despise the waiting. Be honest with God about your frustration, but keep your hands off the shell. The shortcut always looks sensible in the dark; it rarely looks wise in the morning.

Some of God's promises are fulfilled in this life. The greatest of them will be fulfilled when Christ returns and the Kingdom of God fills the earth. Either way, the One who promised has never once broken His word. He may be slow by our clocks. He is never late by His.

> "*Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son.*
>
> **— Genesis 18:14 (NKJV)**

CHAPTER TWO

Hagar

The God Who Sees the Overlooked

Walk along any untarred road at the start of the rainy season and you will notice something. Tiny green shoots push up through the hard red earth at the roadside, right where feet, okadas, goats and wheelbarrows pass every day. Nobody planted them. Nobody waters them. Most people step on them without noticing they are there.

But the rain notices. When the first heavy shower comes, it does not skip the little plant by the roadside to fall only on the well-kept garden behind the fence. It soaks the forgotten corner just as generously as the admired one.

Hagar was a foreign slave woman in someone else's story. She was used, mistreated, and twice pushed into the wilderness. Yet she is the only person in Scripture who gave God a name, and the name she gave Him was 'the God who sees.' Her story is good news for every roadside plant.

KEY SCRIPTURES

Genesis 16:1–16; Genesis 21:8–21.

CENTRAL LESSON

Being overlooked, mistreated, or pushed to the margins never makes anyone invisible to God. Circumstances may limit our choices; they cannot erase our dignity.

A Woman With No Say in Her Own Story

Hagar enters the Bible as property. She is introduced not by her own name first, but as 'an Egyptian maidservant' belonging to Sarai. Many believe she was acquired during Abraham's time in Egypt. Either way, she was a foreigner, a woman, and a slave. Three reasons, in that world, to be overlooked.

When Sarai decided that Hagar would bear a child for Abram, nobody asked Hagar. The plan was made over her head. Her body became the solution to somebody else's problem.

And when the plan produced pregnancy, tension, and contempt, Hagar was handed back to her mistress like a returned item.

> *So Abram said to Sarai, "Indeed your maid is in your hand; do to her as you please." And when Sarai dealt harshly with her, she fled from her presence.*
>
> **— Genesis 16:6 (NKJV)**

Hagar did the only thing a powerless person can sometimes do. She ran.

Found by the Spring on the Road to Shur

Somewhere in the wilderness, by a spring of water on the way to Shur, a pregnant runaway slave sat alone. And Scripture says the Angel of the LORD found her.

Found her. She was not looking for God. God came looking for her.

> *And He said, "Hagar, Sarai's maid, where have you come from, and where are you going?"*
>
> **— Genesis 16:8 (NKJV)**

Notice the first word. *Hagar.* Abram and Sarai had spoken about her, around her, and over her. They never once used her name in the conversation. The first person in Scripture to call her by name was God.

And then He asked her two questions. Not commands. Questions. *Where have you come from, and where are you going?* The Creator of the universe asked a slave girl for her side of the story.

This is why Hagar did something no other person in Scripture does. She gave God a name: *You-Are-the-God-Who-Sees.* And the well was named after that encounter, Beer Lahai Roi, the well of the Living One who sees me.

When the Vulnerable Become Instruments

In many Nigerian homes there is a young girl, often brought from the village, who wakes before everyone else and sleeps after everyone else. She sweeps the compound, fetches water, washes the cars, cooks the stew, and takes the children to school. In the good homes she is treated as family, sent to school, and loved. In others, she eats last, from a separate plate, and is shouted at for the smallest mistake.

Picture a girl like that who has served one family for six years. When she finally leaves, the madam is genuinely surprised to discover that the girl has never once been given a birthday. Nobody ever asked.

That girl is a Hagar. And Hagar's story asks those of us with power some uncomfortable questions. Who in my house is invisible? Whose labour do I depend on but never really see?

Whose body, time, and strength are serving my plans without anyone asking what they want?

> *The LORD watches over the strangers; He relieves the fatherless and widow; But the way of the wicked He turns upside down.*
>
> **— Psalm 146:9 (NKJV)**

> **LESSON FOR TODAY**
>
> People are never tools. Treat those who serve you, whether house helps, drivers, cleaners, or junior staff, with the dignity God gives them, and ask about their lives, not just their work.

God Sees, but We Must Also Act

There is a danger in reading Hagar's story too quickly. We can rush to the comforting part, 'God sees you', and skip the uncomfortable part, which is that people around her were treating her badly.

God's seeing is not an excuse for our blindness. It is a rebuke to it.

When we tell someone who is being mistreated, 'Don't worry, God sees,' and then do nothing, we have used beautiful theology as a way of washing our hands. God saw Hagar. But He also expects His people to open their mouths for those who cannot.

> *Open your mouth for the speechless, In the cause of all who are appointed to die.*
>
> **— Proverbs 31:8 (NKJV)**

Spiritual comfort and practical justice belong together. Pray for the suffering, yes. But also ask what you can do: speak to the person causing harm, help the vulnerable person find safety, pay the fair wage, change the unjust practice in your own home.

A Second Wilderness

Hagar returned, bore Ishmael, and lived in Abraham's household for years. But the story did not settle into peace. After Isaac was born, tension rose again, and this time Hagar and her teenage son were sent away for good, with some bread and a skin of water.

The water ran out in the wilderness of Beersheba. Hagar put the boy under a shrub, walked a distance away, and sat down, because she could not bear to watch him die. And she wept.

> *And God heard the voice of the lad. Then the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said to her, "What ails you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the lad where he is."*
>
> **— Genesis 21:17 (NKJV)**

Where he is. Not where he should be. Not where he will be when things improve. God heard the boy right there, under a bush, in the middle of nowhere.

> *Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water. And she went and filled the skin with water, and gave the lad a drink.*
>
> **— Genesis 21:19 (NKJV)**

The well had been there all along. Hagar's grief had hidden it from her. Sometimes God's help is not a new miracle but opened eyes.

Your Hardest Chapter Is Not Your Whole Book

Hagar's life did not turn into a comfortable story. She remained a single mother in the desert. But she was not abandoned. God was with the boy as he grew. Ishmael became an archer, Hagar found him a wife from Egypt, and God kept His promise to make him a nation.

Being pushed to the margins is painful, and it is often unjust. But the margins are not outside God's map. People may decide where you stand in their story. They do not decide where you stand in His.

Scripture for Further Study

Genesis 16:1–16; Genesis 21:8–21; Deuteronomy 10:17–19; Psalm 146:7–9; Proverbs 31:8–9; James 1:27.

Ten Questions for Self-Examination

Take your time. Answer honestly, before God, and write your answers down if you can.

1. When have I felt invisible or powerless, and did I bring that to God?
2. Do I honour the dignity of people below me in rank, income, or status?
3. Is someone near me suffering because of choices made by more powerful people?
4. Do I use 'God sees you' as comfort, or as an excuse not to help?
5. What one practical thing can I do this week for someone vulnerable or overlooked?

6. Who in my community is ‘roadside’: present every day but hardly noticed?
7. Have I ever benefited from a decision that quietly placed a burden on someone with less power than me?
8. When I feel unseen, do I run from God or, like Hagar, allow Him to find me in the wilderness?
9. Do I treat house helps, drivers, cleaners, and junior staff with the same dignity I give to people who can reward me?
10. What would change in my week if I really believed that God sees me in the place where I feel most alone?

Final Word

If no one sees what you are carrying, take heart. You have not slipped outside God’s attention. The One who found Hagar by a spring in the desert knows your name and your road.

And if you are the one with power, in your home, your office, or your church, remember Hagar the next time you are tempted to treat someone as part of the furniture. The rain does not skip the roadside plant. Neither does God. Neither should we.

> “
>
> *Then she called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, You-Are-the-God-Who-Sees; for she said, “Have I also here seen Him who sees me?”*
>
> **— Genesis 16:13 (NKJV)**

CHAPTER THREE

Rebekah

When Good Intentions Lead Us in the Wrong Direction

There is an old African tale about a kind-hearted monkey who saw a fish in the river during a flood. 'Poor thing,' said the monkey, 'it is going to drown!' So he reached into the water, rescued the fish, and carefully placed it high up on a branch where it would be safe. He was very proud of himself, right up until the fish stopped moving.

We laugh at the monkey, but most of us have been him at some point. His motives were good. His love was sincere. His method was a disaster, because he decided what was best without asking what was true.

Rebekah began her story as a generous young woman watering a stranger's camels. She ended it disguising her favourite son to deceive her blind husband. She believed she was helping God's promise along. This chapter asks how good intentions can lead good people in the wrong direction.

KEY SCRIPTURES

Genesis 24:1–67; Genesis 25:19–34; Genesis 27:1–46.

CENTRAL LESSON

Sincere love and real faith still go wrong when they justify manipulation. God's purposes do not need our deception, and the methods we choose matter.

A Girl at the Well

When Abraham's servant arrived in Nahor with ten camels, he prayed a very specific prayer. Let the young woman to whom I say, 'Please let down your pitcher that I may drink,' answer, 'Drink, and I will also give your camels a drink.'

Rebekah came out, filled her pitcher, and gave the stranger water. Then she said the words.

> *And when she had finished giving him a drink, she said, "I will draw water for your camels also, until they have finished drinking."*
>
> **— Genesis 24:19 (NKJV)**

Camel herders will smile at this. A thirsty camel after a long journey can drink an astonishing amount of water. Ten of them? Rebekah was volunteering for an afternoon of hard labour, running up and down to the well, for a stranger she had never met and who had offered her nothing.

Small acts reveal large character. Rebekah's kindness was not performed for an audience. She had no idea she was being tested, no idea that a marriage proposal was coming. She was simply the kind of woman who did more than she was asked.

> **LESSON FOR TODAY**
> Character is revealed in ordinary moments when nobody is watching and nothing seems to be at stake. Be kind at the well. You never know what God is doing through it.

Two Parents, Two Favourites

Rebekah married Isaac, and after twenty years of waiting she conceived twins. The pregnancy was so turbulent that she went to inquire of the LORD, and He told her that two nations were in her womb, and that the older would serve the younger.

Esau was born red and hairy, and grew up an outdoor man who loved hunting. Jacob was quieter and stayed among the tents. And then Scripture gives us one of its saddest family summaries.

> "
> *And Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob.*
> **— Genesis 25:28 (NKJV)**

Every family knows this pattern. There is Daddy's girl and Mummy's boy. There is the child whose report card is pinned on the fridge and the child whose report card is quietly signed. There is the first son who carries the family's pride and the last-born who carries the family's shopping.

Parents may not intend it, but children always notice. And favouritism rarely stays inside the parent's heart. It shapes conversations, decisions, inheritances, and eventually alliances. In Isaac's tent, the home slowly divided into two camps, his and hers.

When 'For a Good Cause' Becomes a Lie

Years later, Isaac was old and nearly blind, and he decided to bless Esau. Rebekah overheard. She remembered the word from the LORD: the older would serve the younger. And she decided the promise needed her help.

Her plan was elaborate. Two goat kids cooked the way Isaac liked. Esau's best clothes for Jacob to wear. Goatskins on Jacob's hands and neck to imitate his brother's hairiness. When Jacob worried that he might be cursed instead of blessed, his mother answered without hesitation.

> "
>
> *But his mother said to him, "Let your curse be on me, my son; only obey my voice, and go, get them for me."*
>
> **— Genesis 27:13 (NKJV)**

This is the monkey and the fish. Rebekah's goal was not wicked. She believed she was serving God's purpose. But she decided that the end justified the means, and the means were deception, manipulation, and the exploitation of an old man's blindness.

We are not as far from Rebekah as we would like to think. The parent who 'arranges' examination results or university admission through unofficial channels, because 'my child is brilliant anyway'. The church worker who adjusts the attendance figures 'to encourage the brethren'. The family member who forges a signature on land documents because 'the land is ours by right'. Each one believes the outcome is good. Each one is building on a lie.

> "
>
> *Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD, But those who deal truthfully are His delight.*
>
> **— Proverbs 12:22 (NKJV)**

> **LESSON FOR TODAY**
>
> A good outcome does not sanctify a crooked method. God does not need our lies to fulfil His word.

The Cost of Controlling Everything

The plan worked. Jacob received the blessing. And within days, Rebekah learned what her success had cost.

Esau, furious, planned to kill his brother once their father died. Rebekah heard of it and arranged Jacob's escape to her brother Laban, telling him to stay 'a few days, until your brother's fury turns away.'

A few days became twenty years. As far as Scripture records, Rebekah never saw her beloved son again. The woman who tried to control the future lost the very thing she was trying to secure.

> “
> *There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death.*
> **— Proverbs 16:25 (NKJV)**

Control is a heavy load. When we try to manage every outcome, we begin to treat people as pieces on a draughts board. We stop asking what is right and start asking only what will work. And the more we control, the less we trust.

Wounds That Outlive Their Authors

Rebekah’s deception did not end with her. Jacob, the son she taught to deceive, was himself deceived by Laban on his wedding night. Later, Jacob’s sons deceived him about Joseph with a goat’s blood on a coat, the same animal Rebekah had used. Families pass down more than land and names. They also pass down methods.

This is not said to condemn Rebekah. She was a woman of courage and faith in many ways, and God’s purpose did go forward through Jacob. But it is a warning. The shortcuts we teach our children, they will one day use, sometimes on us.

Every family has a Rebekah moment somewhere in its history: a lie that ‘helped’, a manipulation that ‘worked’. The good news is that the pattern can be broken. It begins when one person decides to walk in truth, admit the wrong, and pursue honest reconciliation, even if it costs them.

Let Integrity Guide the Way

Rebekah teaches us that sincere love and real faith can still lead us astray when we decide we must take matters into our own hands. Kindness at the well is beautiful. Manipulation in the tent is not. The same woman was capable of both, and so are we.

Scripture for Further Study

Genesis 24:10–27; Genesis 25:19–34; Genesis 27:1–46; Proverbs 12:22; Proverbs 16:25; Ephesians 4:25–32; Colossians 3:12–15.

Ten Questions for Self-Examination

Take your time. Answer honestly, before God, and write your answers down if you can.

1. Am I kind in ordinary moments when nobody is watching?
2. Does favouritism affect how I treat my children, siblings, or colleagues?
3. Am I tempted to manipulate someone because I am sure I know what is best for them?
4. Have I excused a crooked method because I expected a good result?
5. Which family relationship needs more honesty or reconciliation from me?
6. Is there a 'fish on a tree' situation in my life, where I meant well but did harm because I did not stop to listen?
7. Do I have a favourite child, sibling, or colleague, and how has that favouritism shaped my choices?
8. Have I ever said, in effect, 'Let the consequences fall on me,' without understanding what those consequences would cost others?
9. Do I trust God to fulfil His word without my manipulation, or do I secretly believe He needs my scheming?
10. Who in my family is still paying the price of a deception, and what step towards honesty can I take?

Final Word

God does not need us to lie on His behalf. He is not the monkey's God, anxiously moving fish from river to tree. He is able to keep His promises in His own way and time.

Our part is simpler and harder: walk in truth, love our children equally, speak honestly in our homes, and leave the outcome in hands far safer than ours. Integrity may feel slower, but it never sends a son away for twenty years.

> "*Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him.*
>
> **— Colossians 3:9–10 (NKJV)**

CHAPTER FOUR

Leah

When You Are Unloved by People but Seen by God

Nobody takes wedding photographs under a baobab tree. It is not that kind of tree. Its trunk is thick and swollen, its bark is grey and wrinkled, and for much of the dry season its branches stand bare against the sky like roots that got lost and grew the wrong way. Travellers call it the upside-down tree, and they do not always mean it kindly.

Yet when the harmattan has dried every stream and the land is cracked and thirsty, it is the baobab that has been quietly storing water in its trunk. Its leaves become soup. Its fruit becomes a sour, refreshing drink. Its shade becomes the meeting place of a whole village. The tree nobody chose for its beauty turns out to be the tree nobody can live without.

Leah knew what it was to stand beside a sister everyone admired. Her story is not a fairy tale in which the overlooked girl finally wins the prince. It is something more honest, and far more useful: the story of a woman people undervalued, but whom God saw clearly from the very beginning.

KEY SCRIPTURES

Genesis 29:16–35; Genesis 30:9–21; Genesis 35:23; Genesis 49:29–31.

CENTRAL LESSON

Your worth is not set by the people who fail to appreciate you. God sees the pain others overlook, and your life can carry real purpose even while some longings remain unmet.

Two Sisters, One Husband, and a Long Night

Laban had two daughters. Scripture introduces them in a single sentence, and that sentence already tells us where the trouble will come from.

> “
>
> *Leah’s eyes were delicate, but Rachel was beautiful of form and appearance.*
>
> **— Genesis 29:17 (NKJV)**

Translators have argued for centuries about what ‘delicate’ eyes means. Weak? Tender? Soft? Whatever the precise meaning, the verse does what every village aunty does at a family

gathering: it compares. And in that comparison, Leah comes second.

Jacob loved Rachel. He worked seven years for her, and Scripture says those years seemed to him only a few days because of his love for her. Then came the wedding night. Laban, a man who could out-scheme a market tout, brought the elder daughter into the tent instead. Jacob, the same Jacob who once wore goatskin to deceive his blind father, was now deceived in the dark himself.

> "*So it came to pass in the morning, that behold, it was Leah. And he said to Laban, "What is this you have done to me?"*
>
> **— Genesis 29:25 (NKJV)**

Read that line slowly. *Behold, it was Leah.* It may be the most painful morning-after sentence ever written. Somewhere inside that tent was a woman who woke up married, and heard her husband's first words of the day: *What is this*?

Not who. What.

Jacob married Rachel a week later and worked another seven years for her. Leah remained his wife. But she now lived in a home where love was openly unequal, and where the rival for her husband's heart was her own younger sister.

Some of the people sitting next to you in church on Sabbath are Leah. Married, employed, respected, smiling for the photographs, and quietly wondering whether anyone would notice if they disappeared.

Her Worth Was Never Jacob's to Decide

Jacob's preference for Rachel was a fact. It was not a verdict.

His affection was his own choice, but it was never an objective measurement of Leah's value. That distinction sounds simple on paper. In real life it is one of the hardest things a rejected heart ever learns.

Rejection is a liar with a very persuasive voice. When someone we love repeatedly overlooks us, we begin to believe we are inadequate. We study the person they prefer. We change our hairstyle, our cooking, our personality, our convictions. We tolerate disrespect. We pour out more and more, hoping that this time it will finally be enough.

I know a woman who cooked her husband's favourite egusi soup every Friday for nearly twenty years. She ground the melon herself, picked the bitter leaf by hand, and made sure the stockfish was just right. In all those years she could count on one hand the times he said it was good. Yet at every family gathering he praised his mother's soup to anyone who would listen.

She told a friend, many years later, that she had not really been cooking soup at all. She had been cooking for a 'well done' that never came.

That is Leah's kitchen. And many women, and not a few men, are still standing in it.

> "
>
> *I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Marvelous are Your works, And that my soul knows very well.*
>
> **— Psalm 139:14 (NKJV)**

Your value was settled by your Maker long before anyone else formed an opinion. It rests on His creation, His knowledge of you, and His purpose for you. It does not rest on your ability to secure everybody's approval.

This is not a call to pretend that love does not matter. Love, companionship, and belonging are real human needs, and God Himself said it was not good for man to be alone. Nor is it a call to stay silent under neglect. It is a call to separate two things that rejection always tries to glue together: *I did not receive their love*, and *I am therefore unworthy of love*. The first may be true. The second never is.

> **LESSON FOR TODAY**
>
> Love people sincerely, speak honestly about your needs, and set healthy boundaries. But never make anyone's approval the condition for respecting the person God made.

The God Who Saw What Jacob Missed

Then Scripture turns the camera. Up to this point, we have seen Leah through Jacob's eyes. Now we see her through God's.

> "
>
> *When the LORD saw that Leah was unloved, He opened her womb; but Rachel was barren.*
>
> **— Genesis 29:31 (NKJV)**

Jacob did not see her. The LORD did.

Across much of Africa, names are not just labels. They are diaries. A Yoruba child may be called *Ayodele*, 'joy has come home', because of what the family was feeling on the day of birth. An Igbo child may carry a name that is a whole sentence of thanksgiving or complaint. Ask an elderly woman why she gave each of her children their names, and you may hear the story of her entire marriage.

Leah named her sons the same way. Listen to her diary.

> *So Leah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Reuben; for she said, "The LORD has surely looked on my affliction. Now therefore, my husband will love me."*
>
> **— Genesis 29:32 (NKJV)**

Then Simeon: *because the LORD has heard that I am unloved.* Then Levi: *now this time my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons.*

Three sons. Three birth certificates. Three prayers that Jacob would finally turn around and look at her.

Here is something the prosperity preachers rarely mention. Leah's circumstances changed, but her heart did not instantly heal. Motherhood did not cancel rejection. A full house did not fill an empty marriage.

And we must be careful not to turn Leah's story into a formula. Scripture does not promise that every lonely person will marry, every childless couple will conceive, or every injustice will be reversed in this present life. What it does promise is far deeper.

> *The LORD is near to those who have a broken heart, And saves such as have a contrite spirit.*
>
> **— Psalm 34:18 (NKJV)**

Suffering does not mean you have been forgotten. It means you are being seen by the only One whose seeing truly matters.

The Endless Audition

Look again at those first three names. Every one of them ends with Jacob. *Now my husband will love me. Now my husband will be attached to me.*

Leah's peace had become tied to the moods of one man. When he smiled, she lived. When he turned toward Rachel's tent, she died a little. That is not love. That is an audition that never ends.

Many of us are still auditioning. We work harder so the boss will notice. We give more so the family will appreciate us. We serve in church so the pastor will finally call our name from the pulpit. Even good works become exhausting when their hidden purpose is to purchase love.

> *For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a servant of Christ.*
>
> **— Galatians 1:10 (NKJV)**

There is a world of difference between serving someone because you love them and sacrificing yourself in the hope that they will finally decide you are worth loving. The first is the way of Christ. The second is a slow kind of bondage.

But Leah's story invites a searching question. Am I doing what is right because it is right? Or am I still trying to prove my worth to someone who may never give me the approval I am waiting for?

This Time, I Will Praise

Put a potted plant in a dark room with a single window, and come back in a week. Every leaf will be leaning towards the light. Nobody taught it to do that. It simply turned towards the source of its life.

With her fourth son, Leah turned.

> "
>
> *And she conceived again and bore a son, and said, "Now I will praise the LORD." Therefore she called his name Judah. Then she stopped bearing.*
>
> **— Genesis 29:35 (NKJV)**

No mention of Jacob this time. No 'now my husband will…'. Just: *Now I will praise the LORD.*

We must not overstate it. Scripture does not say Jacob suddenly began to love her equally, or that the tensions in that household disappeared. A chapter later, the two sisters are still competing. But something had shifted. Leah found a reason to praise God before her disappointment was resolved, and that is a far rarer and stronger kind of praise than the kind we offer after everything works out.

And look what God did with that son. Judah became the tribe of kings. From Judah came David. From the line of David came Jesus, the Messiah, whom Revelation calls the Lion of the tribe of Judah. The baby named in a moment of praise by an unloved wife became the ancestor of the King of kings.

Leah did not know any of that. She could not see it. She only knew that she would praise the LORD anyway.

> **LESSON FOR TODAY**
>
> Name your pain honestly, then find something to praise God for before your situation changes. Your present disappointment may be hiding a future you cannot yet see.

When Love Becomes a Competition

Leah's home was not only a marriage with unequal affection. It became a battlefield between two sisters. Rachel, loved but childless, cried out to Jacob, 'Give me children, or else I die!' Leah, fruitful but unloved, snapped at Rachel when she asked for some mandrakes:

> "*Is it a small matter that you have taken away my husband? Would you take away my son's mandrakes also?*
>
> **— Genesis 30:15 (NKJV)**

Two sisters. Each one had what the other wanted. Each one thought the other had the better life. Both were in pain.

Every December, many of us travel home to the village and walk straight into Genesis 30. An aunty greets you at the gate, looks you up and down, and asks with great concern why you are still not married, when your younger cousin already has two children. Another relative quietly compares salaries. Someone else asks why your house in Lagos is still not finished. By the second day, siblings who shared one bed as children are competing like rival traders in the same market.

Comparison rarely produces peace. It makes us resent people who never wronged us and ungrateful for what is already in our hands. And Leah's family carries a warning for parents and spouses too. Favouritism planted in one generation bore bitter fruit in the next. Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah. Years later he loved Rachel's son Joseph more than Leah's sons, and his other sons, Leah's among them, sold their brother into slavery. Unequal love is never a private matter. Children notice, and they remember.

> **LESSON FOR TODAY**
>
> Refuse to make anyone else's blessing the measuring stick for your life. Celebrate others without shrinking yourself, address unfair treatment honestly, and never treat love in your home as a limited prize for family members to fight over.

The Last Word on Leah

Rachel, the beloved, died on the road near Bethlehem while giving birth to Benjamin. Jacob buried her by the wayside and set a pillar on her grave.

Leah's death is not even described. But near the end of his life, Jacob gave instructions about where he himself was to be buried, in the cave of Machpelah, the family tomb of the patriarchs.

> *There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife, there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife, and there I buried Leah.*
>
> **— Genesis 49:31 (NKJV)**

And there I buried Leah. In the end, it was Leah who lay with Abraham and Sarah, with Isaac and Rebekah, and it was in that same cave, where Leah lay, that Jacob asked to be laid.

People love to define others by the worst thing that happened to them. The abandoned wife. The divorced brother. The one whose business failed. The aunty who never married. But people are always more than their disappointments. A difficult beginning does not write every chapter that follows.

And Leah's story is not finished yet. She sleeps in the cave of Machpelah, together with Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, and Rebekah, waiting for the same thing they all waited for.

> *These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.*
>
> **— Hebrews 11:13 (NKJV)**

When the last trumpet sounds and the dead in Christ rise first, Leah will rise. Not as the sister with delicate eyes. Not as the wife Jacob did not choose. She will rise as a daughter of God, into the Kingdom of God, where every tear is wiped away and no one is ever second choice again.

Scripture for Further Study

- Genesis 29:16–35: Leah's marriage, rejection, and the birth of her sons.
- Genesis 30:1–21: The rivalry between Leah and Rachel.
- Genesis 49:29–31: Leah's burial in the family tomb.
- Psalm 139:13–18: God's knowledge of and care for every human life.
- 1 Samuel 16:7: The LORD looks at the heart.
- Matthew 1:1–3; Revelation 5:5: Judah's place in the line of the Messiah.

Ten Questions for Self-Examination

Take your time. Answer honestly, before God, and write your answers down if you can.

1. Have I let someone's rejection decide how I see myself?
2. Am I wearing myself out trying to earn someone's love or a 'well done'?
3. Can I name my disappointments honestly and still thank God for what is good in my life?
4. Has comparison quietly poisoned any of my family relationships?
5. What one step could I take this month towards healthier relationships and a firmer sense of my worth in God?
6. When I describe myself, how much of that description comes from what God says about me and how much from how I have been treated?
7. Is there a 'Rachel' in my life whose blessings I keep measuring my own life against?
8. Have I, like Leah naming her sons, been hoping that one more achievement or sacrifice will finally make someone love me?
9. Have I ever made someone in my home or workplace feel like the less-preferred person, even without meaning to?
10. What would it look like for me to say, as Leah eventually did, 'This time I will praise the LORD,' while some longings are still unmet?

Final Word

Leah never became Jacob's favourite. Scripture does not pretend otherwise, and neither should we. But God never needed Jacob's permission to see her, honour her, or use her life.

You may not be anyone's first choice right now. That hurts, and you are allowed to say so. But the LORD saw Leah when Jacob did not, and He sees you. Stop auditioning. Lay down the exhausting need to earn somebody's 'well done'. Turn your face towards the light, the way the plant leans towards the window, and say with Leah, 'This time, I will praise the LORD.'

The baobab was never admired. It simply kept the village alive.

You cannot always choose how people treat you, but you can choose not to let their treatment determine your worth, your character, or the purpose you pursue.

> “
>
> *For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.*
>
> **— 1 Samuel 16:7 (NKJV)**

CHAPTER FIVE

Tamar

Dignity, Broken Promises, and the Courage to Survive Injustice

Towards the start of the rainy season, there are days when dark clouds gather over the village, the wind rises, the dust swirls, and everyone runs to bring in the washing and the drying pepper. Then the clouds simply move on. Not a drop falls. The farmers look up at the sky and shake their heads.

Scripture has a name for people like those clouds: those who promise and do not give.

Tamar was twice widowed in Judah's family and then sent home with a promise that she would be given his youngest son. Judah had no intention of keeping that promise. Tamar's story is uncomfortable, and Scripture does not ask us to copy her method. But it does ask us to see the injustice she suffered, and it records Judah's own verdict: she was more righteous than he.

KEY SCRIPTURES

Genesis 38:1–30; Matthew 1:3.

CENTRAL LESSON

God sees those who are neglected and denied what was promised them. Injustice must not be ignored, and a person's dignity is not erased by the failures of those with power over them.

A Widow Twice Over

Tamar's story is one of the most uncomfortable in the Bible. It interrupts the story of Joseph, as if Scripture wants us to see the dark side of Judah's family before Judah becomes a changed man.

Judah found a wife for his firstborn son, Er. Her name was Tamar. But Er was wicked, and he died. According to the custom of the time, the next brother, Onan, was to marry the widow and raise up a child to carry his dead brother's name. Onan went through the motions but deliberately made sure no child would be conceived. He wanted the benefits of the arrangement without the responsibility. And he died too.

Tamar had now been widowed twice. She had done nothing wrong. Yet Judah began to look at her as though she were the problem.

> *Then Judah said to Tamar his daughter-in-law, "Remain a widow in your father's house till my son Shelah is grown." For he said, "Lest he also die like his brothers."*
>
> **— Genesis 38:11 (NKJV)**

Look at the second half of that verse. Judah said one thing to Tamar and another thing in his heart. He had no intention of giving her to Shelah. He simply sent her home with a promise he did not mean.

An Unjust System and a Broken Promise

In that world, a childless widow had very few options. She could not easily remarry while she was bound to Judah's family. She had no inheritance. She had no son to care for her in old age. Judah's empty promise left her suspended: not free, not provided for, simply waiting.

This will sound painfully familiar in many parts of Africa. A husband dies. His family assures the widow that his brother will 'take care of her', or that she will be looked after 'in the family'. Sometimes that promise is kept with honour. Too often it fades away. The widow is sent back to her father's house, the property is shared among the brothers, and the promises evaporate like morning mist.

Tamar waited. Years passed. Shelah grew up.

> *For she saw that Shelah was grown, and she was not given to him as a wife.*
>
> **— Genesis 38:14 (NKJV)**

When Waiting Becomes Neglect

Patience is a virtue. But not all waiting is patience. Sometimes, waiting is simply what people with power demand of those without it, so that they never have to act.

Tamar's story does not tell us to copy her method, and we should be clear about that. What she did next was desperate and morally complicated. She disguised herself, sat by the road where Judah would pass, and Judah, now a widower himself, took her for a roadside prostitute. She asked for a pledge until he could send payment: his seal, his cord, and his staff. In our terms, his identity card, his signature, and his walking stick, all at once.

Scripture records this without approving every part of it. But it also does not let us look away from what drove a righteous widow to such a place: a powerful man's broken promise.

The Man Who Would Not See His Own Sin

Three months later, word came to Judah: 'Tamar your daughter-in-law has played the harlot; furthermore she is with child by harlotry.' Judah's response was instant and terrible.

> "
>
> *And Judah said, "Bring her out and let her be burned!"*
>
> **— Genesis 38:24 (NKJV)**

The same man who had visited a roadside prostitute without a second thought now demanded death for his daughter-in-law. The hypocrisy is breathtaking.

> "
>
> *And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye?*
>
> **— Matthew 7:3 (NKJV)**

It is always easier to condemn in others what we excuse in ourselves. Judah was quick to judge, and slow to examine his own responsibility. Many of us share his reflexes.

Truth That Power Could Not Hide

As they brought her out, Tamar sent a quiet message to her father-in-law.

> "
>
> *By the man to whom these belong, I am with child... Please determine whose these are—the signet and cord, and staff.*
>
> **— Genesis 38:25 (NKJV)**

She did not shout an accusation in public. She did not humiliate him before the crowd. She simply sent the evidence and gave him the opportunity to tell the truth himself.

> "
>
> *So Judah acknowledged them and said, "She has been more righteous than I, because I did not give her to Shelah my son."*
>
> **— Genesis 38:26 (NKJV)**

To his credit, Judah did not deny it. He confessed publicly, and he named the real wrong: the broken promise.

This moment seems to have changed Judah. Later in Genesis, it is Judah who offers himself as a slave in place of his brother Benjamin. The man who once sold Joseph and condemned Tamar learned, at last, to take responsibility.

LESSON FOR TODAY

Truth has a way of surfacing. When it does, the right response is not denial but confession, and the right question is not 'Who exposed me?' but 'Whom have I wronged?'

Dignity That Refused to Be Erased

Tamar refused to accept a future of invisibility. Her method was troubling, but her claim was just. She had a right to the future Judah had promised and withheld.

God sees those who are left waiting on broken promises. He sees the widow sent home, the worker whose wages are delayed, the in-law whose rights are ignored. People may forget. God does not.

Grace in a Broken Family Tree

Tamar gave birth to twins, Perez and Zerah. And then something astonishing happened in the story of redemption.

> "*Judah begot Perez and Zerah by Tamar, Perez begot Hezron, and Hezron begot Ram.*
>
> **— Matthew 1:3 (NKJV)**

Tamar is the first woman named in the genealogy of Jesus. Generations later, when the elders of Bethlehem blessed Boaz and Ruth, they prayed: 'May your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah.' Her name had become a blessing.

God's grace reaches into the most broken family histories. The Messiah did not come through a spotless family tree. He came through Judah's failures and Tamar's desperation, to redeem people exactly like them, and like us.

Scripture for Further Study

Genesis 38:1–30; Deuteronomy 10:17–18; Psalm 9:9–10; Psalm 34:18; Proverbs 31:8–9; Isaiah 61:1–3; Luke 4:18–19; James 1:27.

Ten Questions for Self-Examination

Take your time. Answer honestly, before God, and write your answers down if you can.

1. Have I made light of a broken promise that left someone insecure?
2. Do I judge too quickly without listening to the more vulnerable person?
3. Is there an injustice in my life that needs wise counsel and a responsible next step?
4. Have I let someone's treatment of me define my worth?
5. How can I help make my church or family safer for people who have been betrayed or exploited?
6. How can I pursue truth without putting myself in needless danger?
7. Is there a promise I made to someone vulnerable that I have quietly decided not to keep?
8. Do I judge others harshly for sins that I commit privately, as Judah did?
9. Am I quick to condemn a desperate person without asking what drove them to desperation?
10. When I am exposed, will I admit my wrong as plainly as Judah finally did?

Final Word

God sees those who are left waiting on broken promises. If you have made promises to a widow, an orphan, a junior staff member, or an in-law, keep them. Do not be a cloud without rain.

And if you have been the one left waiting, know that God keeps a record no human court can erase. He wrote Tamar's name into the line of the Messiah. He has not forgotten yours.

God does not overlook the dignity of those whom others have neglected.

> "*Whoever falsely boasts of giving Is like clouds and wind without rain.*
>
> **— Proverbs 25:14 (NKJV)**

PART TWO

Women of the Exodus and the Wilderness

Exodus and Numbers

Courage under Pharaoh and faithfulness on the long road to the promise.

Jochebed
Shiphrah and Puah
Miriam
Zipporah
The Daughters of Zelophehad

CHAPTER SIX

Jochebed

Courageous Motherhood and the Wisdom of Letting Go

The Nile crocodile is not most people's idea of a tender mother. Yet when her eggs hatch in the riverbank sand, the mother crocodile does something surprising. She digs out the squeaking hatchlings and gently carries them in her massive jaws, the same jaws that can crush a goat, down to the water's edge. She guards them in the shallows until they can manage on their own.

It is a strange sight: the most dangerous mouth on the river carrying the most fragile lives to the place where they must eventually live.

Jochebed lived under a Pharaoh who had ordered every Hebrew baby boy thrown into that same Nile. She hid her son for three months, then built a little ark of bulrushes, placed him in the river, and let go. Her story is about courageous love and the painful wisdom of entrusting our children to God.

KEY SCRIPTURES

Exodus 1:15–22; Exodus 2:1–10; Numbers 26:59; Hebrews 11:23

CENTRAL LESSON

Love sometimes means protecting with courage, preparing with wisdom, and finally entrusting those we cherish into the hands of God.

A Mother Under a Death Decree

Jochebed gave birth in the worst possible year to have a son. Pharaoh had already tried forced labour and secret murder at birth. Both had failed. So he made his genocide public.

> *So Pharaoh commanded all his people, saying, "Every son who is born you shall cast into the river, and every daughter you shall save alive."*
>
> **— Exodus 1:22 (NKJV)**

Every Egyptian was now a potential informer. Every crying baby was a danger. And into that world, a Levite woman bore a son.

> *So the woman conceived and bore a son. And when she saw that he was a beautiful child, she hid him three months.*
>
> **— Exodus 2:2 (NKJV)**

Every mother thinks her baby is beautiful. Jochebed's love was ordinary. What she did with it was extraordinary.

Faithfulness in a Hostile World

Hiding a baby for three months is not easy. Babies cry at the worst moments. They cry when the neighbour visits. They cry when soldiers pass. Jochebed spent three months holding her breath.

The New Testament tells us what drove her.

> *By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's command.*
>
> **— Hebrews 11:23 (NKJV)**

They were not afraid of the king's command. Not because they were careless, but because they feared God more than Pharaoh. Faithfulness does not depend on a friendly environment. Sometimes it grows strongest when the world around it is most hostile.

Courage Is Not Recklessness

Eventually, the baby grew too big and too loud to hide. Jochebed faced an impossible choice. And she chose a plan.

> *But when she could no longer hide him, she took an ark of bulrushes for him, daubed it with asphalt and pitch, put the child in it, and laid it in the reeds by the river's bank.*
>
> **— Exodus 2:3 (NKJV)**

The Hebrew word for this little basket is the same word used for Noah's ark. Only twice in the Old Testament does it appear, and both times God preserves life through a waterproof box floating on water that was meant for judgment.

Notice the care. Bulrushes, which grew strong in the Nile. Asphalt and pitch to seal it. A place among the reeds, not in the open current. And, quietly, her daughter stationed nearby to watch. Jochebed did not throw her son to fate and call it faith. She prepared, she planned, and then she trusted.

LESSON FOR TODAY

Trust God, and also do your part well. Faith is not the opposite of planning; it is the courage to plan and then release the result to God.

Mother and Daughter, Working Together

Jochebed could not do this alone, and she did not try. Miriam stood at a distance, watching. When Pharaoh's daughter came down to bathe and found the crying child, Miriam stepped forward with her offer to find a Hebrew nurse.

Jochebed's wisdom and Miriam's initiative worked together. In many African homes, the older sister is practically a second mother, carrying the baby on her back while Mama trades in the market. Miriam was exactly that kind of daughter.

And so Jochebed received her own son back, with wages from the very palace that had ordered his death. God has a sense of humour, and Pharaoh was paying for the education of the man who would bring Egypt to its knees.

Preparing a Child for a World Beyond Home

Jochebed had her son for only a few years. Then she had to let go again.

> "*And the child grew, and she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. So she called his name Moses, saying, "Because I drew him out of the water."*
>
> **— Exodus 2:10 (NKJV)**

Think about what she must have taught him in those few years. Who he was. Whose he was. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. She knew she was preparing him to live in a palace full of idols.

Every parent eventually stands where Jochebed stood. Many Nigerian mothers know the departure hall at the airport very well: the hug, the instructions, the tears hidden until the child disappears through security. Japa, as we now call it. The child is going to study, to work, to live in a world the parent cannot control. All the parent can do is make sure the basket is well sealed.

> "*Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it.*
>
> **— Proverbs 22:6 (NKJV)**

Jochebed's training held. Decades later, surrounded by Egyptian wealth and power, Moses made a choice.

> *By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin.*
>
> **— Hebrews 11:24–25 (NKJV)**

That choice was planted by a slave mother in a few short years.

Protection Without Possession

Love must learn the difference between protecting a child and possessing one. Jochebed's love was fierce enough to defy Pharaoh, yet humble enough to release her son to a purpose larger than her own desires.

Some parents never let go. They choose their children's courses, careers, spouses, and church, long after those children are grown. They mean well. But a child kept forever in the basket never learns to walk on the riverbank.

One Life Beyond Prediction

Jochebed is named only twice in Scripture, both times in genealogies. Yet her three children were Miriam the prophetess, Aaron the first high priest, and Moses the deliverer and lawgiver. Few mothers in history have shaped a nation so deeply.

She could not have predicted it. She was simply trying to keep her baby alive.

Scripture for Further Study

Deuteronomy 6:6–7; Psalm 127:3–5; Proverbs 22:6; Hebrews 11:23–26; 2 Timothy 1:5.

Ten Questions for Self-Examination

Take your time. Answer honestly, before God, and write your answers down if you can.

1. Where do I need courage to protect someone vulnerable?
2. Am I holding on to an approach that no longer works simply because it once did?
3. Do I value the help other family members give in raising our children?
4. Am I preparing the young people in my care to stand on their own feet?
5. Can I keep doing my part faithfully when the outcome is out of my hands?
6. Am I protecting the young people in my care, or merely controlling them?
7. What 'basket' of preparation am I building for my children so they can survive when I can no longer carry them?
8. Have I learned to let go of what I cannot keep, while trusting God with what happens next?
9. Do I honour the 'Miriams', the siblings, aunties, and helpers, who watch over my children when I cannot?
10. Can I keep doing my part faithfully even when someone else, like Pharaoh's daughter, gets the public credit?

Final Word

Every parent eventually has to set the basket on the water. Prepare it well. Seal it with prayer and teaching. Station a Miriam nearby if you can. Then trust the God who rules the river.

Your children belong to Him more than they belong to you, and He loves them more than you do. What you plant in the few years you have them may grow into choices you will never see, in palaces you will never visit.

> "*Then Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child away and nurse him for me, and I will give you your wages." So the woman took the child and nursed him.*
>
> **— Exodus 2:9 (NKJV)**

CHAPTER SEVEN

Shiphrah and Puah

Integrity, Moral Courage, and the Responsibility to Resist Wrongdoing

Look closely at an acacia thorn tree in the savannah and you will often see small birds' nests hanging among the sharpest branches. The birds are not foolish. A snake or a hungry monkey that tries to reach those eggs must push through long, painful thorns first. The thorns that make the tree unfriendly to predators make it a safe home for the vulnerable.

Sometimes being 'difficult' in the eyes of the powerful is exactly what protects the weak.

Shiphrah and Puah were Hebrew midwives in Egypt. The most powerful man in the world told them to kill baby boys at birth. They simply refused. Their names are recorded in Scripture, while the name of that Pharaoh is not even mentioned. Their story is about integrity and the courage to say no.

KEY SCRIPTURES

Exodus 1:15–21

CENTRAL LESSON

Sometimes courage means saying no to powerful people. Fear God more than Pharaoh, protect the vulnerable, and act with wisdom.

Two Midwives and a King

When Pharaoh's policy of forced labour failed to stop the Hebrews from multiplying, he tried something more sinister. He summoned two women.

> "*Then the king of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives, of whom the name of one was Shiphrah and the name of the other Puah; and he said, "When you do the duties of a midwife for the Hebrew women, and see them on the birthstools, if it is a son, then you shall kill him; but if it is a daughter, then she shall live."*
>
> **— Exodus 1:15–16 (NKJV)**

Pharaoh wanted his genocide done quietly, in the delivery room, where a baby's death could be blamed on a difficult birth. He chose the people trusted to bring life into the world and ordered them to take it.

Ordinary People, Extraordinary Choices

Shiphrah and Puah were not queens, prophets, or generals. They were midwives: skilled, respected, working women. Yet they found themselves facing one of the gravest moral decisions in the Bible.

That is how it usually happens. Most of us will never stand before a Pharaoh. But we will stand before a manager, an official, or a relative who asks us to do something wrong. And it will often happen on an ordinary working day.

I know a nurse who was asked by a senior doctor to change the time recorded on a patient's chart, to hide a delay that had contributed to a death. 'Everyone does it,' she was told. 'Do you want to keep your job?' She went home that night and could not eat. In the morning, she refused. It cost her that job. She found another. She has never regretted it.

Fearing God More Than Pharaoh

Scripture explains the midwives' choice in one phrase: they feared God.

The fear of the LORD is not terror. It is a holy reverence that puts God's opinion above everyone else's. When that fear is in place, the fear of man loses its grip.

> "
>
> *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.*
>
> **— Proverbs 9:10 (NKJV)**

Centuries later, the apostles faced their own version of Pharaoh: the Jewish council ordering them to stop preaching. Peter's answer could have been spoken by Shiphrah and Puah.

> "
>
> *We ought to obey God rather than men.*
>
> **— Acts 5:29 (NKJV)**

> **LESSON FOR TODAY**
>
> Decide in advance whom you will obey when human authority demands wrongdoing. Settle it before the pressure comes.

Integrity Revealed by Refusal

We usually measure goodness by what people do. Shiphrah and Puah are remembered for what they refused to do.

Integrity is often invisible. It is the bribe not taken, the figures not adjusted, the gossip not repeated, the order not obeyed. Nobody throws a party for the contract you did not inflate. But God sees.

Protecting the Powerless

The babies these women saved could not thank them. They could not vote, pay, or speak up. The midwives risked their lives for people with no power at all.

That is the purest kind of courage. Defending people who can reward you is easy. Defending the powerless, at personal cost, reflects the heart of God.

Wise as Serpents

Pharaoh noticed that Hebrew boys were still being born. He summoned the midwives again.

> “*So the king of Egypt called for the midwives and said to them, “Why have you done this thing, and saved the male children alive?” And the midwives said to Pharaoh, “Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for they are lively and give birth before the midwives come to them.”*
>
> **— Exodus 1:18–19 (NKJV)**

You can almost see the midwives keeping a straight face. ‘These Hebrew women, eh! By the time we arrive, the baby is already crying.’ Pharaoh, who probably had never attended a birth in his life, had no way to argue.

Believers have long discussed whether their answer was a lie or a carefully chosen half-truth. Scripture does not dwell on it. What it commends is their fear of God and their protection of life. Their wisdom kept them alive to keep saving babies.

> “*Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.*
>
> **— Matthew 10:16 (NKJV)**

Courage without wisdom can get people killed without saving anyone. Moral courage needs a clear head.

God Sees What Pharaoh Ignored

> *Therefore God dealt well with the midwives, and the people multiplied and grew very mighty. And so it was, because the midwives feared God, that He provided households for them.*
>
> **— Exodus 1:20–21 (NKJV)**

The women who protected other families were given families of their own. God noticed. He always does.

Names Worth Preserving

Here is one of the quiet ironies of Scripture. The most powerful man in the world in Exodus 1 is never named. We do not know for certain which Pharaoh he was. Historians still argue.

But two working women are named: Shiphrah and Puah. God made sure we would remember them. In His book, integrity outlasts power.

Scripture for Further Study

Proverbs 31:8–9; Micah 6:8; Acts 5:27–29; Romans 12:21; James 4:17.

Ten Questions for Self-Examination

Take your time. Answer honestly, before God, and write your answers down if you can.

1. Have I ever been pressured to do what I knew was wrong, and what did I do?
2. What will guide me when an instruction collides with my conscience?
3. How can I protect vulnerable people in my home, office, or church?
4. Do I know how to report wrongdoing safely and responsibly?
5. Whose quiet integrity should I recognise and encourage today?
6. When my boss, leader, or elder asks me to do something wrong, what will I say?
7. Am I willing to be a ‘thorn’ to wrongdoing, even if it makes me unpopular?
8. Do I fear God more than I fear losing my job, my position, or my reputation?
9. Do I know how to refuse wrongdoing wisely, without needless provocation, as the midwives did?
10. Who in my workplace or community is quietly refusing to do evil, and how can I support them?

Final Word

You may never face a Pharaoh. But you will face a manager who wants figures adjusted, an official who wants a 'settlement', or a relative who wants you to look away.

When that day comes, remember two ordinary working women whose names God wrote in His book, while the king's name was left out. Fear God more than Pharaoh. He still deals well with those who do.

> "
>
> *But the midwives feared God, and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the male children alive.*
>
> **— Exodus 1:17 (NKJV)**

CHAPTER EIGHT

Miriam

Courage, Influence, and the Humility to Accept Correction

Every village has a cockerel that takes his job very seriously. Long before dawn he climbs onto the highest fence, throws back his head, and announces the morning to everybody whether they want it or not. Some cockerels, if they could talk, would probably tell you that the sun only rises because they crowed.

Of course, the sun would rise if every cockerel in Africa lost its voice tomorrow. The cockerel's gift is real and useful. His mistake would be to confuse his announcement with his authority.

Miriam was a gifted woman. As a girl she watched over her baby brother in the reeds. As a prophetess she led the women of Israel in song after the Red Sea crossing. But later she spoke against Moses and had to be corrected publicly by God. Her life shows us both the beauty of influence and the danger of forgetting who gave it.

KEY SCRIPTURES

Exodus 2:1–10; Exodus 15:20–21; Numbers 12:1–15; Micah 6:4.

CENTRAL LESSON

Influence is a responsibility, not a trophy. The gifts that make us useful must travel with humility and a willingness to be corrected.

A Girl Among the Reeds

Miriam's first appearance in Scripture is as a nameless big sister, standing at a safe distance by the Nile, watching a basket float among the reeds.

> *And his sister stood afar off, to know what would be done to him.*
>
> **— Exodus 2:4 (NKJV)**

She could not have been very old. Yet when Pharaoh's daughter found the baby and her heart was moved, this young girl stepped out of hiding and spoke to an Egyptian princess.

> *Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and call a nurse for you from the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for you?"*
>
> **— Exodus 2:7 (NKJV)**

That was a bold sentence for a slave girl to say to royalty. It was also brilliant. In one question, Miriam arranged for her baby brother to be raised by his own mother, with wages paid by the palace.

Courage rarely waits until we feel ready. Miriam did not have a title, a platform, or a microphone. She had a moment, and she used it.

Influence Used Well

Decades later, Miriam stood on the far shore of the Red Sea. Egypt's army had disappeared beneath the waters. And the little girl from the reeds was now a prophetess.

> *Then Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took the timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances.*
>
> **— Exodus 15:20 (NKJV)**

All the women went out after her. That is influence. Miriam did not merely sing; she led a nation of women in worship. Generations later, the prophet Micah would remember her as one of the three leaders God sent to Israel.

> *For I brought you up from the land of Egypt, I redeemed you from the house of bondage; And I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.*
>
> **— Micah 6:4 (NKJV)**

That is a remarkable verse. God Himself lists Miriam alongside Moses and Aaron. Her leadership was not an accident or a footnote. She was sent.

Every one of us has some influence: in a family, an office, a church group, a WhatsApp group with two hundred aunties. Miriam challenges us to use it to lift others, to lead people towards God and not merely towards ourselves.

LESSON FOR TODAY

Use whatever influence you have, however small, to strengthen others and point them towards God.

When Yesterday's Faithfulness Becomes Today's Pride

Then comes Numbers 12, and the story takes a sad turn.

> "
>
> *Then Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married; for he had married an Ethiopian woman. So they said, "Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us also?" And the LORD heard it.*
>
> **— Numbers 12:1–2 (NKJV)**

African readers should pause here. Moses had married a Cushite, an Ethiopian, a woman from our continent. And the complaint began with her.

We know this scene well. A son brings home a wife from another tribe, and suddenly the family discovers many 'concerns'. Her cooking is wrong. Her language is strange. Her people are 'not like us'. Very often the complaint about the wife is really a complaint about something else: status, control, and who gets to speak for the family. So it was with Miriam. The conversation started with Moses' wife and quickly moved to the real issue: *Has the LORD spoken only through Moses?*

Miriam had been faithful for decades. She had real gifts and a real calling. But past faithfulness is no vaccine against pride. Sometimes it is the very thing that makes us think we have earned the right to criticise.

And then Scripture inserts a quiet sentence in brackets.

> "
>
> *(Now the man Moses was very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth.)*
>
> **— Numbers 12:3 (NKJV)**

Moses did not defend himself. He did not need to. *And the LORD heard it.*

Correction That Leads Home

God called all three to the tabernacle, rebuked Miriam and Aaron, and when the cloud lifted, Miriam was leprous, white as snow. Many readers have noticed the painful irony: the woman who objected to a dark-skinned sister-in-law was herself turned white as snow.

Aaron immediately pleaded with Moses. And the man they had criticised became the man who prayed for them.

> "
>
> *So Moses cried out to the LORD, saying, "Please heal her, O God, I pray!"*
>
> **— Numbers 12:13 (NKJV)**

God's answer was that Miriam should be shut outside the camp for seven days, then received again. Discipline, but not destruction. A boundary, followed by a homecoming.

> *So Miriam was shut out of the camp seven days, and the people did not journey till Miriam was brought in again.*
>
> **— Numbers 12:15 (NKJV)**

I love that last line. An entire nation waited a week in the desert for one woman to be restored. Nobody said, 'Let us move on without her; she embarrassed herself.' The community did not gloat over her humiliation. It waited for her return.

That is what correction is meant to do. It is not meant to destroy us, and it is not meant to give others a chance to enjoy our fall. It is meant to bring us home.

> *Whoever loves instruction loves knowledge, But he who hates correction is stupid.*
>
> **— Proverbs 12:1 (NKJV)**

Solomon does not soften it. Refusing correction is not a sign of strength. It is a sign of foolishness. The mature person, however gifted, keeps a teachable heart.

> **LESSON FOR TODAY**
>
> When you are corrected, resist the urge to defend yourself first. Listen, learn, and let correction bring you home. When someone else is corrected, wait for them; do not celebrate their fall.

Courage Matched by Humility

Miriam's life holds both the beauty and the danger of influence. The girl who bravely spoke to a princess, the prophetess who led a nation in song, also needed to learn that her gifts came from God and did not place her above correction.

Scripture records her death briefly, at Kadesh, before Israel entered the land. But it never removes her from the list of those whom God sent. Her failure was real. So was her restoration.

Scripture for Further Study

Exodus 2:1–10; Exodus 15:20–21; Numbers 12:1–15; Micah 6:4; Proverbs 11:2; Proverbs 15:31–33; Galatians 6:1–2.

Ten Questions for Self-Examination

Take your time. Answer honestly, before God, and write your answers down if you can.

1. Where could I step out of the reeds and help someone today?
2. How am I using my influence at home, at work, and in church?
3. When I am corrected, is my first reaction humility or self-defence?
4. Have my past achievements made me less willing to listen?
5. When someone else is corrected, do I wait for their restoration or enjoy their fall?
6. Have I begun to believe, like the cockerel, that things only happen because of me?
7. When someone else is given a role I think I deserve, what do I say about them in private?
8. Is there a correction I received years ago that I still resent instead of learning from?
9. Do the people closest to me feel safe enough to tell me when I am wrong?
10. When I have been restored after a failure, do I extend the same patience to others who fail?

Final Word

If God has given you a voice, use it. Sing, lead, encourage, protect. Step out of the reeds when your moment comes. But hold your gift with open hands.

The morning does not belong to the cockerel; it belongs to the One who commands the sun. Influence is safest in the hands of those who can still be corrected. And when someone in your community falls and is disciplined, be like Israel in the desert: wait for them to come home.

> “*And Miriam answered them: “Sing to the LORD, For He has triumphed gloriously! The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea!”*
>
> **— Exodus 15:21 (NKJV)**

CHAPTER NINE

Zipporah

Crisis Intervention, Decisive Action, and Standing in the Gap

You know the scene. Dark clouds roll in fast, the wind starts lifting the dust, and there is cassava, pepper, and washing spread out to dry all over the compound. The men are still discussing whether it will really rain. Meanwhile, a woman has already tied her wrapper tight and is gathering everything in at top speed. By the time the first heavy drops hit the zinc roof, it is all safely inside.

There is a time to discuss, and there is a time to move.

Zipporah, the Midianite wife of Moses, appears in one of the strangest passages in the Bible. On the way to Egypt, God confronted Moses because his son had not been circumcised. Moses, it seems, could not act. Zipporah took a flint, did what had been neglected, and the crisis passed. Her story is about decisive action when leadership falters.

KEY SCRIPTURES

Exodus 2:15–22; Exodus 4:18–26; Exodus 18:1–12.

CENTRAL LESSON

Faithfulness sometimes means stepping in decisively when leadership falters or vital duties are neglected, even with shaking hands.

A Shepherd Girl From Midian

Zipporah first appears at a well, which, in the Bible, usually means something important is about to happen. She and her six sisters were watering their father's flock when some shepherds came and drove them away. Then a stranger stepped in.

> *Then the shepherds came and drove them away; but Moses stood up and helped them, and watered their flock.*
>
> **— Exodus 2:17 (NKJV)**

Moses was a fugitive from Egypt, a man with a price on his head. The girls ran home and told their father an Egyptian had rescued them. Reuel, also called Jethro, the priest of Midian, asked

the obvious question: 'Why is it that you have left the man? Call him, that he may eat bread.' You can almost hear an African father scolding his daughters for leaving a helpful stranger at the well without inviting him home to eat.

> "
>
> *Then Moses was content to live with the man, and he gave Zipporah his daughter to Moses.*
>
> **— Exodus 2:21 (NKJV)**

A Marriage Across Cultures

Zipporah was a Midianite, not an Israelite. Moses was a Hebrew raised in an Egyptian palace. Their marriage crossed language, culture, and religion. They had a son, and Moses named him Gershom, saying, 'I have been a stranger in a foreign land.'

Marriages like this are common today: a Yoruba man and an Igbo woman, a Ghanaian and a Kenyan, families with different foods, festivals, and expectations. Such marriages can be beautiful. They also require deep respect and patience on both sides.

For about forty years, Zipporah lived quietly with Moses in Midian. Then God spoke from a burning bush, and everything changed.

A Neglected Covenant Duty

God sent Moses back to Egypt to confront Pharaoh. Moses packed up his wife and sons and set out. And then, on the road, something shocking happened.

> "
>
> *And it came to pass on the way, at the encampment, that the LORD met him and sought to kill him.*
>
> **— Exodus 4:24 (NKJV)**

This is one of the most puzzling passages in the Old Testament. But the context gives us the reason. Moses had not circumcised his son. Circumcision was the sign of God's covenant with Abraham's descendants, required of every male child. The man God was sending to lead Israel under the covenant had neglected the covenant sign in his own home.

Neglecting sacred responsibilities is never a small matter. We can be busy with public ministry while ignoring what God requires in our own household.

> "
>
> *For if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?*
>
> **— 1 Timothy 3:5 (NKJV)**

Many pastors' wives will recognise this scene. Her husband is out at programmes almost every night: deliverance services, vigils, counselling, building committees. His congregation adores him. His own teenage son barely knows him. Until one night she sits him down and says, 'You are pastoring the whole city and losing your own son.' If he is wise, he listens. It may be the most important sermon he ever hears.

Decisive Action in a Crisis

Moses, it seems, was incapacitated. And Zipporah acted.

> *Then Zipporah took a sharp stone and cut off the foreskin of her son and cast it at Moses' feet, and said, "Surely you are a husband of blood to me!"*
>
> **— Exodus 4:25 (NKJV)**

> *So He let him go. Then she said, "You are a husband of blood!"—because of the circumcision.*
>
> **— Exodus 4:26 (NKJV)**

There was no time for a family meeting. No time to wait for the leader to recover. A covenant duty had been neglected, and the consequences were deadly. Zipporah did what had to be done.

LESSON FOR TODAY

When those responsible freeze or fail, do not wait for someone else. If God has given you the understanding and the ability, act.

Honest Emotion, Faithful Obedience

Zipporah was not calm. Her words were sharp and raw. 'A husband of blood!' She did what was right while visibly upset.

Faithfulness does not always look serene. Sometimes we obey with shaking hands and tears in our eyes, frustrated with the people around us and with the situation itself. God does not require us to feel peaceful before we act faithfully. Emotional honesty does not cancel obedience.

Carrying the Cost of Another's Calling

Some time after this, it appears Moses sent Zipporah and the boys back to her father's house. We are not told why. Perhaps it was for their safety during the confrontation with Pharaoh.

Zipporah carried the cost of her husband's calling. While Moses stood before Pharaoh and led a nation through the sea, she raised their sons far away. Spouses of leaders often bear burdens that nobody sees: long absences, public criticism, and the loneliness of sharing a husband or wife with an entire community.

Reunion and Restoration

After the exodus, Jethro brought Zipporah and her two sons to Moses in the wilderness.

> "
>
> *Then Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, took Zipporah, Moses' wife, after he had sent her back, with her two sons.*
>
> **— Exodus 18:2–3 (NKJV)**

Moses went out to meet his father-in-law, bowed, kissed him, and they asked after each other's welfare. The family was restored. And it was Jethro who then gave Moses the wise counsel to share his leadership load with others, advice that may have saved Moses from burnout, and perhaps saved his marriage too.

Scripture for Further Study

Exodus 2:15–22; Exodus 4:18–26; Exodus 18:1–12; Genesis 17:9–14; Joshua 5:2–9; Proverbs 31:10–12; 1 Corinthians 7:12–16; Galatians 6:9.

Ten Questions for Self-Examination

Take your time. Answer honestly, before God, and write your answers down if you can.

1. Have I neglected duties at home while pursuing public work?
2. How do I respond when a leader near me freezes or fails to act?
3. Am I waiting for someone else to fix what God has equipped me to fix?
4. Do I let distress paralyse me, or can I act faithfully while overwhelmed?
5. How can I honour the hidden sacrifices of family members who support my work?
6. After a crisis, how can I pursue healing and healthy boundaries in my family?

7. Is there an important duty in my home that has been neglected while 'bigger' work goes on?
8. When the leader beside me freezes, do I criticise, or do I calmly do what must be done?
9. Can I act faithfully even when I am upset and the situation is far from ideal?
10. Do I appreciate the people who have saved my household in moments I barely remember?

Final Word

If you see the storm coming and the duty undone, do not wait for a committee. Move. Bring in what must be brought in, even with shaking hands.

And if you are a leader, be humble enough to admit when someone else, perhaps your own spouse, saw what you missed. Public ministry never excuses private neglect.

True courage does not wait for permission to save a life when duty has been dangerously neglected.

> "
> *She watches over the ways of her household, And does not eat the bread of idleness.*
> **— Proverbs 31:27 (NKJV)**

CHAPTER TEN

The Daughters of Zelophehad

Courage to Seek Justice with Wisdom

Pick up a single broomstick from a local broom and you can snap it between two fingers. Tie fifty of them together and even a strong man will struggle to break the bundle. Every African child has heard that lesson, usually while being told to stop quarrelling with their siblings.

Five sticks standing together can stand where one would break.

The five daughters of Zelophehad, Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah, faced a quiet injustice. Their father had died without sons, and under the existing practice his name and land would disappear. They did not riot, and they did not stay silent. They went together to the door of the tabernacle and respectfully presented their case before Moses and the whole leadership.

KEY SCRIPTURES

Numbers 26:33; Numbers 27:1–11; Numbers 36:1–12; Joshua 17:3–6.

CENTRAL LESSON

When something is unjust, respectful courage and wise advocacy can bring change. Silence is not required just because a system has always ignored a real need.

Five Sisters and a Missing Name

As Israel prepared to enter the Promised Land, a census was taken and the land was to be divided among the families of each tribe. But there was a problem in the family of Zelophehad, of the tribe of Manasseh. He had died in the wilderness. He had five daughters. And he had no sons.

Under the existing practice, land passed through sons. No son meant no inheritance. Zelophehad's name and portion would simply disappear from Israel.

Their names were Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah. Scripture lists all five by name four times. God clearly wanted us to remember them.

Recognising a Real Injustice

The sisters saw that something was wrong. Not merely disappointing for them personally, but genuinely unjust: a family could be erased from the land God had promised to all Israel simply because no sons had been born.

This is not a distant problem. In many parts of Africa, customs of inheritance have long excluded daughters and widows. When a man dies, his brothers may take the house, the farm, and everything in it, while his wife and daughters are left with nothing. In 2014, Nigeria's Supreme Court ruled that a customary practice denying daughters a share in their father's estate was discriminatory and could not stand. The daughters of Zelophehad would have recognised that case immediately.

But wisdom also distinguishes between real injustice and personal disappointment. Not every outcome we dislike is unjust. The sisters' case was strong because it touched something deeper than their own preference.

Speaking in the Right Place

The sisters did not stir up a protest in the camp. They did not gossip in the tents. They went to the proper place, the door of the tabernacle, and stood before Moses, Eleazar the priest, the leaders, and the whole congregation.

Courage often begins with choosing the right door. Complaining to people who cannot change anything feels good for a moment. Bringing a matter respectfully to those who have the authority to address it is harder, and far more effective.

Facts, Not Accusations

Listen to how carefully they presented their case.

> "*Our father died in the wilderness; but he was not in the company of those who gathered together against the LORD, in company with Korah, but he died in his own sin; and he had no sons. Why should the name of our father be removed from among his family because he had no son? Give us a possession among our father's brothers.*
>
> **— Numbers 27:3–4 (NKJV)**

They anticipated objections. Their father had not been a rebel. He had not joined Korah's uprising. His death was not a special judgment. They stated the facts, asked a reasonable question, and made a clear request.

No insults. No threats. No dramatic accusations against Moses. Just a well-prepared, respectful, compelling case.

> **LESSON FOR TODAY**
> When you raise a concern, prepare it carefully. Use facts, anticipate objections, and make a clear request. Respect makes it easier for others to listen.

A Leader Who Took It to God

> "
> *So Moses brought their case before the LORD.*
> **— Numbers 27:5 (NKJV)**

Moses could have dismissed them. 'This is how it has always been done.' 'Do not disturb the process.' Instead, he admitted that he did not have the answer and took the case to God.

Good leaders are not threatened by honest questions. They listen, and when they do not know, they seek God.

God's reply was clear: the daughters were right. And He went further, establishing a law for all Israel.

> "
> *If a man dies and has no son, then you shall cause his inheritance to pass to his daughter.*
> **— Numbers 27:8 (NKJV)**

Five women's courage changed the law of the nation, protecting countless families for generations.

Principle Joined With Practical Wisdom

Later, the leaders of their tribe raised a practical concern. If the daughters married men from other tribes, the land would pass out of Manasseh. Moses brought that concern to God as well, and a balanced solution was given.

> "
> *Let them marry whom they think best, but they may marry only within the family of their father's tribe.*
> **— Numbers 36:6 (NKJV)**

The sisters accepted it. Justice for them did not require injustice to their tribe. Real justice considers the whole community.

> *Just as the LORD commanded Moses, so did the daughters of Zelophehad.*
>
> **— Numbers 36:10 (NKJV)**

Following Through

Years later, when Joshua was dividing the land, the sisters appeared again. They went to Eleazar and Joshua and reminded them: 'The LORD commanded Moses to give us an inheritance among our brothers.' And they received it.

A decision on paper is not the same as land in hand. Advocacy often requires patience and follow-through. The daughters of Zelophehad did not stop until the promise was fulfilled.

> *He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God?*
>
> **— Micah 6:8 (NKJV)**

Scripture for Further Study

Numbers 26:33; Numbers 27:1–11; Numbers 36:1–12; Deuteronomy 16:18–20; Proverbs 31:8–9; Isaiah 1:17; Micah 6:8; James 2:1–9.

Ten Questions for Self-Examination

Take your time. Answer honestly, before God, and write your answers down if you can.

1. Is there a legitimate concern I have avoided raising for fear of being misunderstood?
2. Can I tell the difference between real injustice and personal disappointment?
3. How can I present my concerns more clearly, honestly, and respectfully?
4. Will I listen when someone's experience exposes a weakness in a system I have accepted?
5. How can I pursue fairness while caring for the wider community?
6. What support or wisdom do I need before I act?
7. When I face injustice, do I gossip and complain, or do I go to the right 'door' and present my case?
8. Am I standing with my sisters and brothers in a just cause, or leaving them to fight alone?

9. Have I ever been part of a system that was unfair to someone simply because 'that is how it has always been done'?
10. Do I accept wise limits that protect the wider community, as the daughters later did, after winning my case?

Final Word

God is not offended when we bring Him honest, respectful appeals for justice. Stand together. Prepare your case. Speak clearly. Go through the right doors.

And when you win, use your victory to protect others, not to take revenge. Then follow through until the promise on paper becomes land in hand.

Courage speaks clearly when silence would allow injustice to continue.

> "*The daughters of Zelophehad speak what is right; you shall surely give them a possession of inheritance among their father's brothers.*
>
> **— Numbers 27:7 (NKJV)**

PART THREE

Women of the Conquest and the Judges

Joshua, Judges, Ruth, and 1 Samuel

New beginnings, bold leadership, and prayers poured out in hard times.

Rahab
Deborah
Ruth
Hannah

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Rahab

Your Past Does Not Have to Define Your Future

If you have ever walked past a stagnant pond at the edge of town, you know it is not a place anyone visits on purpose. The water is brown, the mud is thick, and the mosquitoes hold their meetings there. Yet in that same pond you may find a water lily opening in the morning, clean, white, and beautiful, its roots buried in the very mud everyone avoids.

The lily does not deny where it grows. Its roots are still in the mud. But its face is turned toward the light, and what it becomes is entirely different from what surrounds it.

Rahab's name in Scripture almost always comes with a label attached: 'Rahab the harlot.' Even the New Testament keeps the label. But it also places her in the line of the Messiah and in the great chapter of faith in Hebrews. Her story asks whether a person's past must have the final word.

KEY SCRIPTURES

Joshua 2:1–24; Joshua 6:22–25; Hebrews 11:31; James 2:25; Matthew 1:5.

CENTRAL LESSON

Your past does not have to write your future. Real faith acts, and a changed direction is proved by what we do next.

The Woman in the Wall

Jericho was a city of walls, and Rahab lived inside one. Her house was built into the city wall, a convenient location for a woman whose trade Scripture names without embarrassment: she was a harlot.

When two Israelite spies slipped into the city, they ended up at her house. Perhaps it was the one place in Jericho where strangers coming and going would not attract attention. But the king heard of it, and sent men to her door.

Rahab hid the spies under stalks of flax drying on her roof and sent the king's men off on a false trail. Then she climbed up to the roof and made one of the most surprising confessions of faith in the Old Testament.

> *I know that the LORD has given you the land, that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land are fainthearted because of you.*
>
> **— Joshua 2:9 (NKJV)**

> *For the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath.*
>
> **— Joshua 2:11 (NKJV)**

A Canaanite prostitute had worked out what the king of Jericho had not. The God of Israel was not a local deity. He was God over everything. She had heard about the Red Sea and the defeat of the Amorite kings, and she believed.

Not Reduced to Her Worst Chapter

It is worth noticing that Scripture never hides Rahab's past. Joshua calls her 'Rahab the harlot'. So does Hebrews. So does James. The label follows her into the New Testament.

But notice what the label is attached to. Not to her shame. To her faith. 'By faith the harlot Rahab.' 'Was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works?' The Bible remembers where she came from precisely in order to celebrate how far grace had carried her.

I know a man who spent his youth as one of the toughest 'area boys' in his part of town. He was the one people crossed the road to avoid. Today he is a respected elder who visits prisons every month. Yet at family gatherings, an old uncle still calls him by his street nickname, laughs, and says, 'We know you.' The uncle does not mean harm. But every time, the man feels the old chains rattle.

We do this to one another. We freeze people at their worst moment and refuse to let them move on. Rahab's story challenges that habit. A person is more than their history, and grace is more than a theory.

> *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.*
>
> **— 2 Corinthians 5:17 (NKJV)**

LESSON FOR TODAY

Do not judge people only by their past. Look honestly for evidence of change, and when you see it, let them walk in their new name.

Faith That Moves the Feet

Rahab's faith was not a private feeling. It changed what she did. She risked her life to hide the spies. She negotiated for her family's safety. And when the spies gave her a sign, she did not delay.

> *Unless, when we come into the land, you bind this line of scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down.*
>
> — Joshua 2:18 (NKJV)

> *And she bound the scarlet cord in the window.*
>
> — Joshua 2:21 (NKJV)

She tied the cord immediately, long before the army arrived. Faith does not wait until the walls are falling to prepare.

> *Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way?*
>
> — James 2:25 (NKJV)

James puts Rahab beside Abraham as an example of faith that works. It is a startling pairing: the father of the faithful and a Canaanite prostitute, standing side by side.

We should be honest that Rahab also lied to the king's men. Scripture records the lie but commends her faith, not her falsehood, and believers have discussed that tension for centuries. Rahab knew very little of God's law. What she knew, she acted on. The rest God would teach her later, among His people.

Courage Before the Outcome Is Clear

When Rahab chose to hide the spies, nothing was certain. Israel had not yet crossed the Jordan. The walls of Jericho were still standing. If the spies were caught, she would be executed as a traitor. If Israel failed, she would have gambled everything on the losing side.

Many of the most important decisions of faith are like that. We must choose before we can see how it will turn out. Leave the corrupt deal before the next job is confirmed. Return to God before the family approves. Tell the truth before we know the consequences.

Rahab's story does not promise that every risky step will be rewarded the way hers was. But it does show us that faith sometimes means committing ourselves to God before the walls fall.

Thinking Beyond Herself

Listen to what Rahab asked for. Not only her own life, but her father, her mother, her brothers, her sisters, and all that they had. She thought about her whole household.

That is a deeply African instinct. When one member of a family rises, the whole family expects to rise with them. Sometimes that expectation is a burden. But at its best, it reflects something biblical: our choices never affect only ourselves. Rahab's faith became a shelter for everyone under her roof.

> "*And Joshua spared Rahab the harlot, her father's household, and all that she had. So she dwells in Israel to this day.*
>
> — **Joshua 6:25 (NKJV)**

A New Name Built Over Time

Rahab did not become a respected woman in Israel overnight. She lived 'outside the camp of Israel' at first. She had to learn new ways, a new law, a new people. Reputations are rebuilt slowly, one faithful choice after another.

And look where that slow faithfulness led.

> "*Salmon begot Boaz by Rahab, Boaz begot Obed by Ruth, Obed begot Jesse.*
>
> — **Matthew 1:5 (NKJV)**

Rahab became the mother of Boaz, the great-great-grandmother of King David, and an ancestor of the Messiah. The woman who lived in the wall became part of the foundation of the house of David.

If you have turned toward God, do not be discouraged that people still remember your past. Keep tying the scarlet cord. Keep making the next faithful choice. Over time, your life will tell a new story louder than the old one.

Scripture for Further Study

Joshua 2:1–24; Joshua 6:22–25; Hebrews 11:31; James 2:14–26; Matthew 1:1–6; Ephesians 4:22–32.

Ten Questions for Self-Examination

Take your time. Answer honestly, before God, and write your answers down if you can.

1. Do I keep people frozen at their worst moment, or do I recognise real change?
2. Do my actions match the faith I profess?
3. Is there a right decision I am avoiding because I cannot see how it will turn out?
4. How will my choices this year affect the people under my roof?
5. What daily habit would show that I am truly moving in a new direction?
6. Is there a label from my past that I still answer to, even though God has given me a new direction?
7. Do I quietly keep a list of other people's past sins, ready to remind them when they disagree with me?
8. What evidence of genuine change am I willing to accept in someone whose past I know?
9. Like Rahab and the scarlet cord, what visible step of faith have I taken that shows where my loyalty now lies?
10. Who in my family will be affected, for better or worse, by the direction I choose this year?

Final Word

Your past is part of your story, but it does not have to be the title. If you have turned toward God, keep your face toward the light and keep making the next faithful decision. Tie the scarlet cord, and do not take it down.

And when you meet someone climbing out of the mud, do not throw their old name at them. Scripture kept Rahab's label only to show how far grace had carried her. Let us use people's pasts the same way: as testimony, never as a weapon.

> "*By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace.*
>
> **— Hebrews 11:31 (NKJV)**

CHAPTER TWELVE

Deborah

Courageous Leadership and the Responsibility to Act

When an elephant herd crosses the savannah, the one in front is usually not the biggest bull with the longest tusks. It is the oldest female, the matriarch. She remembers where the water holes were during the last great drought. She knows which paths are safe and which are dangerous. When lions appear, the herd looks to her.

Her leadership is not loud. It is built on years of memory, wisdom, and attention to the welfare of the herd. The others follow her, not because she shouts, but because she has proved she knows the way to water.

Deborah led Israel at a time when the nation had been crushed for twenty years. She judged disputes under a palm tree, carried God's word to a hesitant commander, and went with him into the battle. Her life tells us a great deal about what real leadership is.

KEY SCRIPTURES

Judges 4:1–24; Judges 5:1–31.

CENTRAL LESSON

Godly leadership is the courage to carry responsibility, the wisdom to help others rise, and the humility to give God the glory.

Twenty Years Under Iron Wheels

The book of Judges runs in a painful circle. Israel forgets God. Israel is oppressed. Israel cries out. God raises a deliverer. Israel rests. And then the circle begins again.

By the time we meet Deborah, Israel had been trapped in the oppression stage for a long time.

> "*And the children of Israel cried out to the LORD; for Jabin had nine hundred chariots of iron, and for twenty years he had harshly oppressed the children of Israel.*
>
> **— Judges 4:3 (NKJV)**

Nine hundred chariots of iron. In that age, that was the equivalent of a modern armoured division. Israel had farmers with sickles. Twenty years is long enough for a whole generation to

grow up believing that oppression is simply how life is.

A Judge Beneath a Palm Tree

> *Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, was judging Israel at that time. And she would sit under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the mountains of Ephraim. And the children of Israel came up to her for judgment.*
>
> **— Judges 4:4–5 (NKJV)**

Picture the scene. No palace. No throne room. A woman sitting under a palm tree in the hill country, and people walking for days to bring her their disputes. Land quarrels. Family conflicts. Matters too difficult for the village elders.

That will feel familiar to many African readers. In countless villages, justice was administered under a great tree, where the elders sat and listened. Deborah was doing exactly that, and the whole nation came.

Scripture presents her leadership without apology or explanation. She was a prophetess, a judge, and a wife. She heard from God, settled disputes, and carried public responsibility. Nobody in the text asks whether she should be there. They simply come to her because she is wise.

Leadership is not about the seat; it is about responsibility. Deborah did not need a palace to lead. She needed wisdom, the fear of God, and the willingness to carry other people's problems.

> **LESSON FOR TODAY**
>
> Measure leadership by the burdens it carries and the people it helps, not by its title, its office, or its car.

Refusing to Normalise the Unacceptable

After twenty years, people stop expecting change. It is like living with a leaking roof so long that you no longer hear the drip, or putting up with a bad road until you forget it was ever meant to be tarred.

Deborah refused to accept that Jabin's oppression was permanent. She sent for Barak and delivered God's instruction.

> *Has not the LORD God of Israel commanded, "Go and deploy troops at Mount Tabor; take with you ten thousand men of the sons of Naphtali and of the sons of Zebulun."*

> — Judges 4:6 (NKJV)

Real leaders ask the question everyone else has stopped asking: does it have to be this way? Some problems in our families, churches, and communities have lasted so long that we treat them like the weather. Deborah reminds us that God may be waiting for someone to stand up and say, 'Enough.'

Courage Shared With a Hesitant Man

Barak's response is famous.

> "*And Barak said to her, "If you will go with me, then I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go!"*
>
> — Judges 4:8 (NKJV)

Many preachers have been hard on Barak. But consider his position. He was being asked to lead farmers against nine hundred iron chariots. His request was not cowardice so much as a confession: I need the prophetess of God beside me.

Deborah did not mock him. She did not lecture him about manhood. She simply agreed, and then told him the truth about the consequences.

> "*So she said, "I will surely go with you; nevertheless there will be no glory for you in the journey you are taking, for the LORD will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman."*
>
> — Judges 4:9 (NKJV)

Good leaders help others rise to their responsibilities. Sometimes that means walking beside someone whose confidence is smaller than his calling. Barak still went. He still fought. And Hebrews 11 lists his name among the heroes of faith. Shared courage is still courage.

When the Rain Fought for Israel

On the day of battle, Deborah spoke the word.

> "*Then Deborah said to Barak, "Up! For this is the day in which the LORD has delivered Sisera into your hand. Has not the LORD gone out before you?"*
>
> — Judges 4:14 (NKJV)

Deborah's song tells us what happened next. The skies opened. The river Kishon flooded. And nine hundred chariots of iron sank into the mud.

Anyone who has seen a heavy vehicle stuck in a flooded road during the rainy season will understand. Iron wheels that terrified Israel for twenty years became useless in an afternoon. The weapon of the oppressor became his trap.

> "
> *They fought from the heavens; The stars from their courses fought against Sisera.*
> **— Judges 5:20 (NKJV)**

Honour From Unexpected Places

Sisera fled on foot and sought refuge in the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite. She was not an Israelite commander. She was a tent-dwelling woman from a clan at peace with Jabin. Yet she ended Sisera's life, and Deborah's prophecy came true.

Deborah did not resent that another woman received the decisive honour. She celebrated it.

> "
> *Most blessed among women is Jael, The wife of Heber the Kenite; Blessed is she among women in tents.*
> **— Judges 5:24 (NKJV)**

Wise leaders recognise contributions from people they did not expect. They do not need every victory to carry their own name.

Remember Who Won the Battle

Deborah's song begins not with herself but with the people and with God.

> "
> *When leaders lead in Israel, When the people willingly offer themselves, Bless the LORD!*
> **— Judges 5:2 (NKJV)**

She honoured the tribes who came, rebuked those who stayed home, thanked Jael, and gave the glory to the LORD. And the song ends with a simple summary: the land had rest for forty years.

That is the fruit of godly leadership. Not fame. Rest. Peace for ordinary people to farm, trade, marry, and raise children without fear.

Scripture for Further Study

Judges 4:1–24; Judges 5:1–31; Proverbs 11:14; Proverbs 31:8–9; Mark 10:42–45; Romans 12:3–8; Hebrews 11:32–34.

Ten Questions for Self-Examination

Take your time. Answer honestly, before God, and write your answers down if you can.

1. Am I more concerned with my responsibilities or with my title?
2. Which long-standing problem have I simply accepted as permanent?
3. Do I build up others, or do I make everything depend on me?
4. Whom can I walk beside as they face a frightening responsibility?
5. When I succeed, do I honour the people who stood with me?
6. Do the people I lead follow me because of my title, or because I have shown them the way to water?
7. Am I so comfortable with a problem that has lasted 'twenty years' that I have stopped asking God to change it?
8. When someone like Barak hesitates, do I mock their fear or walk with them into the challenge?
9. Have I been reluctant to recognise God-given ability in someone because of their gender, age, or background?
10. After a victory, do my songs, like Deborah's, give credit to God and to the people who stood with me?

Final Word

Whatever responsibility God has placed in your hands, in your home, church, business, or community, carry it like the matriarch carries the herd. Remember the way to water. Walk in front when it is dangerous. Walk beside those who are afraid.

And when victory comes, sing like Deborah: honour those who stood with you, celebrate those who surprised you, and give the glory to God. The land has rest only when He is the One who goes before His people.

> "
> *Village life ceased, it ceased in Israel, Until I, Deborah, arose, Arose a mother in Israel.*
>
> **— Judges 5:7 (NKJV)**

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Ruth

Loyalty, Resilience, and the Courage to Begin Again

When a plantain plant has borne its bunch, it is cut down. That is simply how plantain works; each stem fruits only once. But if you look at the base of the fallen plant, you will find small suckers already growing beside it. They were there all along, staying close to the mother plant, drawing from the same roots. When the old stem falls, one of them grows up in its place and carries on the life of the family.

It would be a strange sucker that wandered off to look for different soil the moment the mother plant was cut down. Its strength lies in staying close.

Ruth lost her husband, her home, and her future in Moab. She could have gone back to her own people. Instead she clung to her grieving mother-in-law and walked into a land where she would be a foreigner and a widow. Her story is about loyalty, hard work, and the courage to begin again.

KEY SCRIPTURES

Ruth 1:1–22; Ruth 2:1–23; Ruth 3:1–18; Ruth 4:1–22.

CENTRAL LESSON

When life takes away what we expected, loyalty, diligence, and faith can carry us into a future we could never have planned.

Three Funerals in Moab

The book of Ruth begins with a famine and a funeral, and then two more funerals. Elimelech took his wife Naomi and their two sons from Bethlehem to Moab to escape hunger. There he died. The sons married Moabite women, Orpah and Ruth. Then, within about ten years, both sons died too.

Three women were left standing in a foreign land: an Israelite widow with no sons and two Moabite widows with no children. In that world, a woman without a husband or son had very little protection. They had lost not only the men they loved, but their security and their future.

When Naomi heard that the LORD had visited His people with bread, she decided to go home. Her daughters-in-law set out with her.

Loyalty When It Costs Something

On the road, Naomi stopped and urged them both to go back. She had nothing to offer them, she said. No more sons. No hope of a husband. Go home to your mothers.

> "
>
> *Then they lifted up their voices and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.*
>
> **— Ruth 1:14 (NKJV)**

Orpah is not the villain of this story. She did what was sensible and what Naomi asked. But Ruth did something more. She clung.

Across Africa there are painful stories of what sometimes happens to widows. In some places, when a husband dies, his relatives arrive not to comfort his wife but to collect his property. The widow may be blamed for his death, stripped of the house, and sent away. Ruth's story is the exact opposite. Here, the in-law refuses to abandon the widow.

And her words went far beyond affection. Ruth bound herself to Naomi with an oath.

> "
>
> *Where you die, I will die, And there will I be buried. The LORD do so to me, and more also, If anything but death parts you and me.*
>
> **— Ruth 1:17 (NKJV)**

Loyalty is easy when it is convenient. Ruth's loyalty cost her a homeland, a family, a culture, and any realistic hope of remarriage among her own people. That is when loyalty is truly revealed.

> **LESSON FOR TODAY**
>
> Be dependable when supporting others becomes inconvenient. Faithfulness is proved in the seasons when walking away would be easier.

Grief Is Real, but It Is Not the End

When the two women arrived in Bethlehem, the whole town buzzed. 'Is this Naomi?' And Naomi answered with raw honesty.

> "
>
> *Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the LORD has brought me home again empty.*
>
> **— Ruth 1:20–21 (NKJV)**

Naomi means 'pleasant'. Mara means 'bitter'. She was renaming herself after her pain.

Scripture does not rebuke her. God allows His children to grieve honestly. But notice too that Naomi was not quite right. She said she came home empty. She came home with Ruth. Grief has a way of blinding us to the people God has left beside us.

Diligence in an Uncertain Season

Ruth did not sit at home waiting for a miracle. She went to work.

> "*Please let me go to the field, and glean heads of grain after him in whose sight I may find favor.*"
>
> **— Ruth 2:2 (NKJV)**

Gleaning was the welfare system of ancient Israel. The law instructed landowners to leave the edges of their fields and the dropped stalks for the poor, the widow, and the foreigner. It was humble, hot, back-breaking work, picking up what others had left behind.

I know a woman who lost her husband suddenly and was left with three children and no savings. She started frying akara by the roadside at five in the morning. Her neighbours, who had known her as the wife of a manager, were embarrassed for her. She was not embarrassed. Ten years later, she runs a small canteen and all three children have graduated.

Diligence does not guarantee every outcome. But it keeps us moving, and it often places us where God's providence can find us. Ruth 'happened' to glean in a field belonging to Boaz, a relative of Elimelech.

Kindness With Its Sleeves Rolled Up

Boaz noticed Ruth. He had already heard what she had done for Naomi. And he blessed her with words that are among the most beautiful in the Old Testament.

> "*The LORD repay your work, and a full reward be given you by the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge.*"
>
> **— Ruth 2:12 (NKJV)**

But Boaz did not stop at a blessing. He told her to stay in his fields, to drink from his water, to eat with his workers. He instructed his young men not to touch her. And then he quietly arranged extra help.

> "*Also let grain from the bundles fall purposely for her; leave it that she may glean, and do not rebuke her.*"
>
> **— Ruth 2:16 (NKJV)**

That is kindness with its sleeves rolled up. Generous, practical, and careful to protect Ruth's dignity. She still gleaned. She was never made to feel like a beggar.

> **LESSON FOR TODAY**
> Let your kindness be practical, and give in a way that protects the dignity of the person receiving it.

Wisdom, Reputation, and the Threshing Floor

When harvest ended, Naomi devised a plan for Ruth to approach Boaz at the threshing floor and ask him to act as kinsman-redeemer. It was a bold, culturally specific request, and it could easily have been misread.

Boaz responded with honour. He protected her reputation, sent her home before anyone could recognise her, and promised to settle the matter properly at the city gate. And he said something remarkable about this foreign widow.

> "
> *For all the people of my town know that you are a virtuous woman.*
> **— Ruth 3:11 (NKJV)**

A virtuous woman. The same description found in Proverbs 31. And in some Hebrew arrangements of the books, Ruth is placed right after Proverbs, as though Scripture says: you have read about the virtuous woman; now meet one. She was not an Israelite by birth. She was a Moabite gleaner. Her virtue was built from loyalty, hard work, and integrity.

A New Beginning That Honours the Past

Boaz redeemed the land and married Ruth. She bore a son, Obed. And the women of Bethlehem, who had once heard Naomi call herself bitter, now spoke to her with joy.

> "
> *Blessed be the LORD, who has not left you this day without a close relative… for your daughter-in-law, who loves you, who is better to you than seven sons, has borne him.*
> **— Ruth 4:14–15 (NKJV)**

Better than seven sons. In a culture that valued sons above almost everything, that was the highest praise imaginable.

Ruth's new beginning did not erase Mahlon, or Moab, or the years of grief. Those things remained part of her story. But they were not the end of it.

> *They called his name Obed. He is the father of Jesse, the father of David.*
>
> **— Ruth 4:17 (NKJV)**

Scripture for Further Study

Ruth 1:1–22; Ruth 2:1–23; Ruth 3:1–18; Ruth 4:1–22; Leviticus 19:9–10; Deuteronomy 24:19–22; Psalm 34:18; Matthew 1:1–6.

Ten Questions for Self-Examination

Take your time. Answer honestly, before God, and write your answers down if you can.

1. How do I respond when life takes away something I deeply valued?
2. Am I still dependable when supporting someone becomes costly?
3. What humble, practical step could improve my situation now?
4. Do I use what I have to protect the dignity of people in need?
5. Can I stay open to a good future without pretending my losses do not matter?
6. When my plans were cut down, did I run away from the people who needed me, or did I stay close?
7. Am I willing to do humble, sweaty work, like gleaning, while I wait for my situation to change?
8. How do I treat foreigners, newcomers, or people from a different tribe in my church or workplace?
9. Like Boaz, do I let some grain fall 'purposely' for people who are struggling, without humiliating them?
10. Is there a Naomi in my life, bitter and grieving, who needs my patient loyalty more than my advice?

Final Word

If your plantain has been cut down, do not wander off into bitterness. Stay close to the roots: to God, to faithful people, to honest work. New life often grows right beside the place of loss.

Ruth's story points beyond itself to a greater Redeemer. Boaz redeemed a field and a family name. Christ will redeem the whole earth when He returns, and every faithful widow, foreigner, and grieving mother-in-law will find a home in His Kingdom.

> "*Entreat me not to leave you, Or to turn back from following after you; For wherever you go, I will go; And wherever you lodge, I will lodge; Your people shall be my people, And your God, my God.*
>
> **— Ruth 1:16 (NKJV)**

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Hannah

When Your Heart Is Heavy, Keep Bringing It Before God

At the end of a long dry season, the ground is so hard that you could break a hoe on it. Wide cracks run across farms and compounds. Then the first heavy rain arrives. Interestingly, the cracked ground does not pretend to be fine. Those very cracks become the channels through which the rain goes deep. The open wounds of the earth are where the water enters.

Hannah came to the house of the LORD year after year with a cracked heart. Her rival provoked her, her husband did not understand her, and the priest thought she was drunk. But she did not pretend. She poured out her soul before the LORD.

This chapter is for anyone who has prayed the same prayer so many times that they are embarrassed to pray it again.

KEY SCRIPTURES

1 Samuel 1:1–28; 1 Samuel 2:1–10.

CENTRAL LESSON

Deep disappointment does not have to destroy faith. Pour out your heart honestly to God, refuse to measure your worth by what you lack, and keep living faithfully.

A Good Man, a Cruel Rival, and an Empty Arm

Hannah was married to Elkanah, a devout man who loved her deeply. But Elkanah had a second wife, Peninnah, and Peninnah had children. Hannah had none.

Every year the family went up to Shiloh to worship. And every year, at the very place where they should have found joy, Hannah found torment.

> *And her rival also provoked her severely, to make her miserable, because the LORD had closed her womb.*
>
> **— 1 Samuel 1:6 (NKJV)**

Severely. To make her miserable. Year after year. Some cruelty is loud; Peninnah's was persistent. A remark at the meal. A child pushed forward to be admired. A knowing look.

These days, Peninnah does not need a festival. She has a family WhatsApp group. Every naming ceremony photograph, every 'God has done it again!' post, every aunty's voice note asking 'What is your own plan?' lands in the phone of a woman who is quietly waiting.

Pain That Persists Is Not Proof of Weak Faith

Hannah was not childless because she lacked faith. The text says plainly that the LORD had closed her womb. We are not told why. And we must be very careful not to fill that silence with accusations.

Many people suffer twice: once from their pain, and again from the people who explain it. 'Maybe there is a sin.' 'Maybe your faith is small.' 'Maybe you need deliverance.' Hannah's story stands against that kind of careless theology. Persistent suffering is not automatic evidence of spiritual failure.

Even her loving husband did not quite understand.

> "
>
> *Then Elkanah her husband said to her, "Hannah, why do you weep? Why do you not eat? And why is your heart grieved? Am I not better to you than ten sons?"*
>
> **— 1 Samuel 1:8 (NKJV)**

Bless him. Elkanah meant well. But it is the kind of comfort a good husband gives when he is trying to fix something he cannot feel. Wise husbands, and wise friends, eventually learn that sometimes the best answer to a grieving heart is not a clever question but a quiet presence.

She Took It to the Right Place

After the meal, Hannah rose and went to the house of the LORD.

> "
>
> *And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed to the LORD and wept in anguish.*
>
> **— 1 Samuel 1:10 (NKJV)**

She did not go to Peninnah to argue. She did not go to Elkanah to complain again. She took her pain to the One who could actually do something about it.

And she prayed so intensely that only her lips moved. The old priest Eli, watching from his seat by the doorpost, came to the worst possible conclusion.

> *Now Hannah spoke in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard. Therefore Eli thought she was drunk. So Eli said to her, "How long will you be drunk? Put your wine away from you!"*
>
> **— 1 Samuel 1:13–14 (NKJV)**

Of all the things to be accused of in the middle of the most desperate prayer of your life. A priest, of all people, mistook anguish for alcohol. Church people can be very quick to misread what they do not understand.

> *No, my lord, I am a woman of sorrowful spirit. I have drunk neither wine nor intoxicating drink, but have poured out my soul before the LORD.*
>
> **— 1 Samuel 1:15 (NKJV)**

Poured out my soul. Not a polite request. Not a carefully worded prayer point. A complete emptying of her heart before God.

LESSON FOR TODAY

Bring your pain honestly before God, as many times as you need to. And be slow to judge the person whose prayer looks strange to you; you do not know what they are carrying.

Facing Reality With God, Not Instead of God

When Eli understood, he blessed her: 'Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant your petition.' And Hannah went away, ate, and was no longer downcast.

Nothing had changed yet. She was still childless when she walked out. But she had placed her burden where it belonged, and she found that she could eat again.

Prayer does not always change our circumstances immediately. It often changes the way we carry them. Hannah did not pretend her longing had disappeared. She simply stopped carrying it alone.

> *Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.*
>
> **— Philippians 4:6 (NKJV)**

Remembering God When the Answer Comes

Samuel was born. And Hannah did something very few of us would find easy. When the child was weaned, she brought him back to Shiloh and gave him to the LORD, as she had vowed.

Many of us pray fervently in the dry season and forget God completely when the rain comes. The job arrives, and we stop attending the vigil. The baby arrives, and we stop coming to church because 'the child is still small'. Hannah's gratitude was stronger than her grip.

Then she sang. Her song in 1 Samuel 2 is one of the great songs of Scripture, and it is not about herself. It is about God turning the world upside down.

> "
>
> *He raises the poor from the dust And lifts the beggar from the ash heap, To set them among princes And make them inherit the throne of glory.*
>
> **— 1 Samuel 2:8 (NKJV)**

Mary would echo this song centuries later in her own Magnificat. Hannah's private pain became a public prophecy about the kind of God we serve.

Celebrating Beyond Our Own Story

God did not forget Hannah after Samuel.

> "
>
> *And the LORD visited Hannah, so that she conceived and bore three sons and two daughters.*
>
> **— 1 Samuel 2:21 (NKJV)**

We rejoice with her. And yet we must handle her story with care. Not every Hannah receives a Samuel. Some faithful women pray for years and never conceive. Their faith is no smaller, and their worth is no less. Hannah's story is not a guarantee of a specific outcome. It is a picture of the kind of God to whom we can pour out our souls.

And if you are someone whose prayer has been answered, let Hannah teach you compassion. Do not become a Peninnah. Remember what the waiting felt like, and be gentle with those still standing where you once stood.

Scripture for Further Study

1 Samuel 1:1–28; 1 Samuel 2:1–10; Psalm 13:1–6; Psalm 34:17–18; Philippians 4:6–9; James 1:19–20.

Ten Questions for Self-Examination

Take your time. Answer honestly, before God, and write your answers down if you can.

1. What disappointment have I been carrying without telling God the honest truth about it?
2. Do I listen with compassion when others share a pain I have never felt?
3. Have I let someone's cruelty decide how I see myself?
4. Alongside prayer, what practical step can I take about my situation?
5. Have my answered prayers made me gentler with those still waiting?
6. Is there a prayer I have stopped praying because I am tired of hearing myself say it?
7. Do I pretend to be 'fine' in church while my heart is cracked open at home?
8. Is there a Peninnah in my life whose words I need to stop carrying around?
9. Have I ever, like Eli, misjudged someone whose pain I did not understand?
10. If God answers my prayer, am I willing, like Hannah, to give the answer back to Him?

Final Word

Keep bringing your heavy heart to God. He is not tired of hearing it. Let the cracks become channels. Pour it out, and then, like Hannah, get up and eat.

Whether He answers as you hope or in a way you do not yet understand, He is the God who lifts the lowly from the dust. In His Kingdom, the barren, the mocked, and the misunderstood will sing louder than anyone.

> "*For this child I prayed, and the LORD has granted me my petition which I asked of Him.*
>
> **— 1 Samuel 1:27 (NKJV)**

PART FOUR

Women of the Kings, the Prophets, and the Exile

1 Samuel to Esther

Wisdom, protection, and truth spoken in the shadow of thrones.

Abigail
Bathsheba
The Wise Woman of Abel Beth Maachah
Rizpah
The Widow of Zarephath
The Shunammite Woman
The Captive Little Maid
Jehosheba
Huldah
Esther

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Abigail

The Wisdom to Stop a Conflict Before It Destroys Lives

In the harmattan, bush fires are a constant danger. The grass is brown and brittle, the wind is dry, and a single careless spark from a cigarette or a cooking fire can race across a hillside in minutes. Village people know that a fire is easiest to stop at the very beginning, when a few people with green branches can beat it out. Wait an hour, and the whole community may lose its farms.

Wise farmers also cut firebreaks, clearing strips of land before trouble comes so that the fire has nothing to feed on when it arrives.

Abigail's husband Nabal lit a spark with foolish, insulting words. David, offended and armed, was already marching with four hundred men to burn the whole household down. Abigail ran towards the fire with bread, raisins, and wise words. Her story is about stopping conflict before it destroys lives.

KEY SCRIPTURES

1 Samuel 25:1–42.

CENTRAL LESSON

Wisdom sees where anger is heading before it is too late. A gentle, courageous word can stop a fire that pride has already lit.

A Wise Wife and a Foolish Husband

Scripture introduces Abigail and her husband in a single verse, and the contrast could not be sharper.

> *The name of the man was Nabal, and the name of his wife Abigail. And she was a woman of good understanding and beautiful appearance; but the man was harsh and evil in his doings.*
>
> **— 1 Samuel 25:3 (NKJV)**

Nabal was very rich. Three thousand sheep, a thousand goats. But his name, in Hebrew, means 'fool', and he lived up to it every day.

David and his six hundred men had been living in the wilderness near Nabal's flocks. They had protected his shepherds from raiders. At sheep-shearing time, the traditional season of feasting and generosity, David sent ten young men to greet Nabal respectfully and ask for whatever provisions he could spare.

Nabal's answer was an insult wrapped in a sneer.

> "
>
> *Who is David, and who is the son of Jesse? There are many servants nowadays who break away each one from his master.*
>
> **— 1 Samuel 25:10 (NKJV)**

In other words: who does this runaway think he is? It was a spark thrown onto dry harmattan grass. And David, offended and armed, did not hesitate.

> "
>
> *Then David said to his men, "Every man gird on his sword."*
>
> **— 1 Samuel 25:13 (NKJV)**

Four hundred men began to march. By morning, every male in Nabal's household would be dead.

Wisdom Sees the Fire Coming

One of Nabal's young servants ran to Abigail. Notice that he did not go to his master. Everyone in the household knew where wisdom lived.

> "
>
> *For he is such a scoundrel that one cannot speak to him.*
>
> **— 1 Samuel 25:17 (NKJV)**

There is gentle humour in that line. Even Nabal's own staff had given up trying to reason with him. Every office has a Nabal. Every family has one too: the uncle whose temper makes everybody tiptoe, the boss to whom bad news can never be delivered.

Abigail did not waste time in a committee meeting. She did not wait to 'discuss it with my husband first'. She understood immediately that this was a fire that had to be beaten out now, or the whole hillside would burn.

She loaded donkeys with two hundred loaves, two skins of wine, five dressed sheep, roasted grain, raisins, and figs, and rode out to meet an angry army.

LESSON FOR TODAY

Learn to recognise when a disagreement is becoming dangerous. Some fires must be put out early, before pride and anger make them impossible to stop.

Courage in a Soft Voice

When Abigail saw David, she got off her donkey and bowed to the ground. Then she spoke. Her speech is one of the longest by a woman in the Old Testament, and it is a masterpiece of wisdom.

She took responsibility without excusing wrong. She was honest about her husband.

> *Please, let not my lord regard this scoundrel Nabal. For as his name is, so is he: Nabal is his name, and folly is with him!*
>
> **— 1 Samuel 25:25 (NKJV)**

She did not flatter David into pride, and she did not shame him into defensiveness. She reminded him of who he was: a man whom God would make king, a man who fought the LORD's battles. And she gently pointed out that one day, when he sat on the throne, he would not want innocent blood on his conscience.

Courage is not always loud. Abigail did not shout at four hundred armed men. She knelt, she spoke respectfully, and she appealed to the best in the man standing before her.

> *By long forbearance a ruler is persuaded, And a gentle tongue breaks a bone.*
>
> **— Proverbs 25:15 (NKJV)**

A gentle tongue breaks a bone. It sounds like a contradiction until you have watched a wise woman settle a quarrel that three loud men had made worse.

It happens in villages everywhere. Two brothers are about to come to blows over a boundary between their farms, and machetes have already been mentioned. Then an elderly aunty arrives with a pot of pepper soup, sits them down on the same bench, and speaks quietly for an hour about their late father. By evening the boundary is agreed. Nobody remembers exactly what she said. Everyone remembers that nobody died.

Refusing to Be an Accomplice

Some will ask whether Abigail undermined her husband. But Nabal's decision was about to get everyone in his household killed. Loyalty to a person never requires us to join him in destruction.

There is a kind of 'respect' that is really cowardice: staying quiet while someone we are close to harms others, because confronting them is uncomfortable. Abigail refused that. She protected the innocent, including her husband, who had no idea how close he had come to death.

> "
>
> *Make no friendship with an angry man, And with a furious man do not go.*
>
> **— Proverbs 22:24 (NKJV)**

The Gift of Good Counsel

David's response shows us why he would become a great king. He did not insist on his right to vengeance. He listened.

> "
>
> *Then David said to Abigail: "Blessed is the LORD God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me!"*
>
> **— 1 Samuel 25:32 (NKJV)**

Every powerful person needs an Abigail: someone with the courage to say, 'Wait. This is not who you are.' And every wise person needs the humility to listen when an Abigail speaks.

When Abigail returned home, Nabal was drunk at a feast fit for a king. She waited until morning, when he was sober, and told him everything. His heart died within him, and about ten days later the LORD struck him, and he died. Vengeance had been left in God's hands, where it belonged.

Words That Clarify, Not Words That Win

Nabal used words to belittle. David almost used swords to avenge. Abigail used words to heal.

> "
>
> *There is one who speaks like the piercing of a sword, But the tongue of the wise promotes health.*
>
> **— Proverbs 12:18 (NKJV)**

In conflict, most of us want to win the argument. Abigail wanted to save lives. That changes everything about how we speak: what we admit, what we leave out, how we address the other

person, and whether we leave them room to step back with their dignity intact.

Character Over Wealth

Nabal had sheep. Abigail had sense. In the end, David sent for Abigail and she became his wife. The wealth of the fool passed away; the wisdom of the woman was remembered for three thousand years.

Scripture for Further Study

1 Samuel 25:1–42; Proverbs 15:1; Proverbs 15:22; Proverbs 16:32; Proverbs 19:11; James 1:19–20; Romans 12:17–21.

Ten Questions for Self-Examination

Take your time. Answer honestly, before God, and write your answers down if you can.

1. Can I tell when a disagreement is turning dangerous?
2. When I am angry, do I pause and think, or strike back at once?
3. Have I excused someone's harmful behaviour because they are close to me?
4. Who has permission to tell me the truth when my emotions are running hot?
5. Which conversation could I handle differently this week to prevent a needless fight?
6. Am I the person who lights sparks with careless words, or the person who runs with green branches?
7. When I am angry, do I give myself time to hear an 'Abigail' before I act?
8. Is there a Nabal in my family or workplace whose behaviour I keep excusing because confronting it is uncomfortable?
9. What 'firebreaks' can I build in my relationships before the next dry season of conflict comes?
10. Do I know how to speak to an angry person with respect, so that my words cool the situation rather than inflame it?

Final Word

Your words today can either feed a fire or starve it. Speak gently. Act early. Do not wait until the whole hillside is burning.

And when someone is wise enough to stop you from doing something foolish, be humble enough, like David, to thank them. A good king is not the one who never gets angry. It is the one who listens to Abigail.

> "
>
> *A soft answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger.*
>
> **— Proverbs 15:1 (NKJV)**

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Bathsheba

Power, Injustice, and the Possibility of Life After Tragedy

After a violent rainstorm, a village wakes up to damage. A big tree has fallen across the road, zinc roofs have been torn away, and the stream has overflowed its banks and swept away a farm. Nobody in their right mind would blame the farm for the flood. The damage came from a force far stronger than it.

And yet, weeks later, something green begins to grow on that same riverbank. The flood did real harm, and no one should pretend otherwise, but it did not have the final word over the land.

Bathsheba's story is often told carelessly, as if she were a seductress. Scripture places the responsibility squarely on David, the king who saw, sent, took, and then arranged her husband's death. This chapter handles her story with the honesty and gentleness it deserves.

KEY SCRIPTURES

2 Samuel 11:1–27; 2 Samuel 12:1–25; 1 Kings 1:11–31; 1 Kings 2:13–25; Matthew 1:6.

CENTRAL LESSON

Power misused does terrible harm, and the powerful must answer for it. Suffering caused by another's sin is not the victim's guilt, and a painful history need not be the final chapter.

The King Who Stayed Home

Some of the darkest chapters in Scripture begin with a very ordinary sentence.

> *It happened in the spring of the year, at the time when kings go out to battle, that David sent Joab and his servants with him, and all Israel… But David remained at Jerusalem.*
>
> **— 2 Samuel 11:1 (NKJV)**

The king was not where he was supposed to be. One evening he rose from his bed, walked on the roof of his palace, and saw a woman bathing. He asked who she was. He was told: Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite.

That information should have ended the matter. She was married. Her husband was one of David's own mighty men, fighting the king's war at that very moment.

> *Then David sent messengers, and took her; and she came to him, and he lay with her.*
>
> **— 2 Samuel 11:4 (NKJV)**

Read the verbs carefully. David saw. David inquired. David sent. David took. The text places the initiative, and the power, entirely with the king.

Power Does Not Excuse Exploitation

For centuries, preachers have told this story as though Bathsheba were a seductress who planned to catch a king's eye. The text does not say that. She was bathing, as the law required, in what she presumably thought was the privacy of her home. The man who looked, and kept looking, and then sent soldiers to fetch her, was the most powerful man in the nation.

When a king summons you, what exactly does 'no' look like? Bathsheba's ability to refuse was severely limited by David's position. That is what makes abuse of power so wicked. It takes away the other person's real freedom to choose.

The same pattern plays out today. The manager who makes a young graduate's promotion depend on 'cooperation'. The lecturer who ties grades to favours. The pastor who uses spiritual authority to take what is not his. The landlord, the employer, the 'big man'. Their power does not give them rights over other people's bodies.

> *For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required.*
>
> **— Luke 12:48 (NKJV)**

LESSON FOR TODAY

Authority is a trust, never a licence. The greater your power over others, the greater your responsibility to protect them.

One Sin Hiding Another

Bathsheba sent word: 'I am with child.' And David, instead of facing what he had done, began a cover-up.

He called Uriah home from the battle and encouraged him to go to his wife, so the child would appear to be his. But Uriah, a foreigner, a Hittite, showed more integrity than Israel's king.

> *The ark and Israel and Judah are dwelling in tents… Shall I then go to my house to eat and drink, and to lie with my wife? As you live, and as your soul lives, I will not do this thing.*
>
> **— 2 Samuel 11:11 (NKJV)**

So David made him drunk. When that failed, he sent Uriah back to the front carrying a sealed letter to Joab. The letter contained Uriah's own death sentence: put him in the fiercest part of the battle and withdraw. Uriah carried his own execution order without opening it. That is how much he trusted his king.

Concealment rarely contains wrong. It multiplies it. A lie needs another lie. A cover-up needs accomplices. David's single night of lust became adultery, deception, and murder, and it drew Joab and others into his guilt.

> *But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD.*
>
> **— 2 Samuel 11:27 (NKJV)**

Do Not Blame the Woman

Bathsheba mourned for her husband. Then David brought her into his house as his wife. Everything looked tidy. But God sent Nathan, and Nathan went to the king, not to Bathsheba.

> *Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man!"*
>
> **— 2 Samuel 12:7 (NKJV)**

God's verdict was aimed at the powerful man. Nathan's parable described David as a rich man who stole a poor man's only lamb. In that story, Bathsheba was the lamb, not the thief.

Consider how often this happens. A young woman reports a senior manager for harassment. Before the company even investigates, the office gossip has already decided the matter. 'Look at how she dresses.' 'She wanted promotion.' 'Why did she wait so long to speak?' The manager keeps his job. She is gone within six months.

When we hear stories of abuse, our instinct is often to question the person with less power. Bathsheba's story calls us to look first at the one who held the power, as God did.

Accountability That Is Real

To his credit, David did not argue with Nathan. He confessed. Psalm 51 is the prayer of his repentance.

> "*Against You, You only, have I sinned, And done this evil in Your sight.*
>
> **— Psalm 51:4 (NKJV)**

Yet forgiveness did not erase consequences. The child born to Bathsheba became ill and died. The sword, Nathan said, would never depart from David's house, and the rest of 2 Samuel shows how true that was: rape, murder, and rebellion among David's own children.

Real repentance does not demand that consequences disappear. It accepts responsibility, makes what restitution it can, and changes behaviour. Saying 'sorry' in church while leaving the victim to carry the cost is not repentance. It is public relations.

Suffering Is Not Always Guilt

Bathsheba lost her husband and then her child. She suffered because of another man's sin. We must never interpret her grief as her punishment.

When the disciples once asked Jesus whose sin had caused a man's blindness, He gave an answer that should silence a great deal of careless religious talk.

> "*Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him.*
>
> **— John 9:3 (NKJV)**

Some suffering comes from our own choices. Much of it comes from the choices of others, or simply from living in a broken world. Compassion asks, 'How can I help?' before it ever asks, 'What did you do?'

Not the Final Chapter

Bathsheba's story did not end in that grief. David comforted her, and she bore another son, Solomon, whom the LORD loved. Years later, when David was old and the succession was in danger, it was Bathsheba, with Nathan, who acted decisively to secure the throne for Solomon. She was no longer a woman summoned by a king. She was a woman who spoke to one, and was heard.

> *And the king rose up to meet her and bowed down to her, and sat down on his throne and had a throne set for the king's mother; so she sat at his right hand.*
>
> **— 1 Kings 2:19 (NKJV)**

The woman who was once taken now sat at the king's right hand, and the king bowed to her.

Power is not the same as character. David had power and misused it. Uriah had little power and much character. Bathsheba suffered under one man's power and lived to see a measure of dignity restored. God saw all three, and He judged rightly.

Scripture for Further Study

2 Samuel 11:1–27; 2 Samuel 12:1–25; 1 Kings 1:11–31; Psalm 51:1–17; John 9:1–3; Matthew 1:6; Ephesians 4:25–32.

Ten Questions for Self-Examination

Take your time. Answer honestly, before God, and write your answers down if you can.

1. Do I understand the limits that come with whatever authority I hold?
2. Have I tried to hide a wrong instead of owning it?
3. Do I judge vulnerable people without considering the power others held over them?
4. How do I respond when someone suffers a tragedy I do not understand?
5. Am I letting one painful experience define my whole identity or future?
6. When I hear stories of abuse of power, is my first instinct to question the victim or to examine the powerful?
7. Is there any area of my life where I am using position or money to take what is not rightly mine?
8. Have I, like David, tried to hide one wrong with another, and am I ready to stop?
9. Who around me is carrying grief from someone else's sin, and how can I stand with them?
10. Do I believe that God can bring purpose and dignity into a life that has been deeply wounded by others?

Final Word

If you have been harmed by someone more powerful than you, hear this clearly: the wrong was theirs. God sees, and He holds the powerful to account. Your wound is real, but it need not be the last chapter.

If you hold power, remember that God sent Nathan to the palace, not to the victim. Use your authority to protect, never to take. And if you have already sinned, confess it plainly, as David finally did, and accept the cost.

> “
> *So David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the LORD.” And Nathan said to David, “The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die.”*
>
> **— 2 Samuel 12:13 (NKJV)**

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

The Wise Woman of Abel Beth Maachah

Diplomacy, Civic Courage, and Preventing Collective Catastrophe

Our elders have a saying: you do not burn down the house to kill a rat. Anyone who has chased a rat around a kitchen at midnight, broom in hand, understands the temptation. You are angry, the rat is fast, and for a moment burning the whole kitchen seems almost reasonable. Then sense returns.

Anger is very good at making a small problem look like a reason for total destruction.

Joab and the army of King David had surrounded the town of Abel Beth Maachah and were battering down its wall to catch one rebel, Sheba son of Bichri, who had hidden inside. A wise woman called out from the wall, asked to speak with Joab, and solved the whole problem with one conversation and one hard decision.

KEY SCRIPTURES

2 Samuel 20:14–22.

CENTRAL LESSON

When anger threatens to destroy the many for the sake of the few, one calm, courageous, wise voice can preserve a whole community.

A City Under Siege for One Man

After Absalom's rebellion was crushed, another troublemaker arose. Sheba the son of Bichri blew a trumpet and declared, 'We have no share in David.' Israel was still fragile after civil war, and David feared this new revolt could do even more damage.

Joab, David's ruthless commander, pursued Sheba to a fortified town in the far north.

> *Then they came and besieged him in Abel of Beth Maachah; and they cast up a siege mound against the city, and it stood by the rampart. And all the people who were with Joab battered the wall to throw it down.*
>
> **— 2 Samuel 20:15 (NKJV)**

One rebel was hiding inside. An entire town was about to be destroyed to get him.

The Threat of Collective Punishment

This is the logic of collective punishment: the guilty one is among you, so all of you will pay. It is as old as war, and sadly it is not only ancient history. Across our continent, there have been reprisals in which whole villages were flattened because of the actions of a few. Homes burned, families scattered, and the guilty usually long gone.

It also happens on a smaller scale. A whole department punished for one person's misconduct. A whole tribe blamed for one politician's corruption. A whole family shunned because one member brought shame. You do not burn down the house to kill a rat.

A Clear Voice Above the Noise of War

As the battering rams pounded the wall, someone shouted from the top.

> "
>
> *Then a wise woman cried out from the city, "Hear, Hear! Please say to Joab, 'Come nearby, that I may speak with you.'"*
>
> **— 2 Samuel 20:16 (NKJV)**

Imagine the noise. Soldiers shouting, wood crashing against stone, people screaming inside the city. And one woman's voice, cutting through it all, asking for a conversation.

> "
>
> *When he had come near to her, the woman said, "Are you Joab?" He answered, "I am." Then she said to him, "Hear the words of your maidservant." And he answered, "I am listening."*
>
> **— 2 Samuel 20:17 (NKJV)**

I am listening. Three of the most powerful words in any conflict. Wars have been prevented by them, and marriages saved.

An Appeal to Shared Values

The woman did not begin with an insult or a plea for mercy. She began with heritage.

> "
>
> *They used to talk in former times, saying, "They shall surely seek guidance at Abel," and so they would end disputes.*
>
> **— 2 Samuel 20:18 (NKJV)**

In other words: our town is famous for settling quarrels, not starting them. People come here for wisdom. Why would you destroy the very place Israel goes for counsel?

Then she reminded Joab that Abel was a 'mother in Israel', part of the LORD's inheritance. Israel's own law required that a city be offered terms of peace before it was attacked. She was appealing to the values Joab claimed to serve.

When resolving a conflict, the wisest approach is often to remind both sides of what they share. Our faith. Our family. Our history. Our children's future.

> **LESSON FOR TODAY**
> In conflict, appeal to shared values before you argue about differences. Calm words can open doors that force has slammed shut.

Separating the Real Problem From the Innocent

Joab's reply showed that he too was willing to step back from total destruction.

> "*Far be it, far be it from me, that I should swallow up or destroy! That is not so. But a man from the mountains of Ephraim, Sheba the son of Bichri by name, has raised his hand against the king, against David. Deliver him only, and I will depart from the city.*"
>
> **— 2 Samuel 20:20–21 (NKJV)**

Now the problem was clearly defined. Not the city. One man.

> "*And the woman said to Joab, "Watch, his head will be thrown to you over the wall."*"
>
> **— 2 Samuel 20:21 (NKJV)**

A Hard Decision, Honestly Made

> "*Then the woman in her wisdom went to all the people.*"
>
> **— 2 Samuel 20:22 (NKJV)**

This part of the story is not gentle, and we should not pretend it is. Sheba was an armed rebel against the king, under the law of the time, and the people of Abel executed him. The Bible records it as the price of peace for a whole city.

We should not use this passage to justify mob justice today. But it does show us something important. Wisdom is not softness. Real peacemaking sometimes requires hard decisions about

the real source of trouble, decisions that protect the many from the destruction one person is bringing on them.

And notice that she kept her word. Her promise to Joab was fulfilled. Civic leadership that delivers on its commitments earns trust. Joab blew the trumpet, and the army withdrew.

The Lasting Power of Everyday Wisdom

We do not know her name. She held no office that we know of. Yet one woman's voice saved an entire city. The Preacher in Ecclesiastes wrote of a poor wise man who delivered a besieged city by his wisdom, and then added a sad line: nobody remembered him.

> "
> *Wisdom is better than weapons of war; But one sinner destroys much good.*
> **— Ecclesiastes 9:18 (NKJV)**

> "
> *Blessed are the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God.*
> **— Matthew 5:9 (NKJV)**

Scripture for Further Study

2 Samuel 20:14–22; Judges 5:7; Proverbs 15:1; Proverbs 16:14; Proverbs 21:22; Proverbs 24:3–6; Ecclesiastes 9:13–18; James 3:13–18.

Ten Questions for Self-Examination

Take your time. Answer honestly, before God, and write your answers down if you can.

1. In a conflict, do I add to the panic or bring calm?
2. Have I blamed a whole group for the wrong of one person?
3. Am I building the kind of trust now that will make my voice heard in a crisis?
4. What shared values can I appeal to in a heated disagreement?
5. Will I speak to powerful people when innocent people are at risk?
6. Is there a hard but necessary decision I have been avoiding?
7. Have I ever been ready to 'burn the house', a marriage, a friendship, a church, to deal with one problem inside it?
8. When a crisis begins, am I the one who calls for calm conversation from the wall?

9. Do I punish a whole group for the wrong of one person?
10. Is there a hard but necessary decision I keep postponing because it is uncomfortable?

Final Word

Anger always wants to burn the whole house to catch one rat. Wisdom asks for a conversation from the wall.

Seek peace. Speak calmly. Appeal to what you share. Find the real problem and deal with it honestly. Then you will not need to burn down any houses, and many who would have been destroyed will live to thank you.

Wisdom can accomplish through a single calm conversation what weapons of war cannot achieve through force.

> “
> *I am among the peaceable and faithful in Israel. You seek to destroy a city and a mother in Israel. Why would you swallow up the inheritance of the LORD?*
>
> **— 2 Samuel 20:19 (NKJV)**

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Rizpah

Maternal Grief, Silent Resistance, and Restoring Human Dignity

Wildlife researchers have often observed elephants behaving in a way that moves even hardened rangers. When a member of the herd dies, the others gather around the body. They touch it gently with their trunks, stand over it for hours, and drive away scavengers. Months later, passing the place again, some elephants stop to touch the bones.

Nobody needs to explain to an elephant that the one who has died still matters.

Rizpah was a concubine of Saul. Seven men of Saul's house, two of them her own sons, were executed and their bodies left exposed. Rizpah spread sackcloth on a rock and, from the beginning of harvest until the rain came, she kept the birds away by day and the wild animals by night. Her silent vigil eventually moved King David to give them all an honourable burial.

KEY SCRIPTURES

2 Samuel 3:7; 2 Samuel 21:1–14.

CENTRAL LESSON

When the vulnerable are stripped of dignity, quiet, persistent love can stir consciences and remind a nation that every life matters to God.

A Woman Caught in Men's Power Games

Rizpah first appears in Scripture as a pawn. She was a concubine of King Saul. After Saul's death, his son Ish-bosheth accused the army commander Abner of sleeping with her, a political act in that culture, because taking a king's concubine was a way of claiming his throne.

Whether the accusation was true or not, Rizpah had no voice in the matter. Two powerful men quarrelled over her, and the quarrel helped bring down Saul's dynasty. She was treated as an instrument, not a person.

When the Past Demands an Innocent Price

Years later, during David's reign, a famine struck.

> *Now there was a famine in the days of David for three years, year after year; and David inquired of the LORD. And the LORD answered, "It is because of Saul and his bloodthirsty house, because he killed the Gibeonites."*
>
> **— 2 Samuel 21:1 (NKJV)**

Israel had made a sworn covenant with the Gibeonites in Joshua's day. Saul, in misguided zeal, had broken it and slaughtered them. Now the Gibeonites demanded justice: seven of Saul's descendants to be put to death.

David agreed. Among the seven were Armoni and Mephibosheth, the two sons of Rizpah. They were executed and their bodies were left exposed on a hill at Gibeah, at the beginning of the barley harvest.

This is one of the hardest passages in the Old Testament. Sons died for their father's sin. Scripture records it honestly, without pretending it is comfortable. And in the middle of that darkness, it places a mother.

A Vigil of Defiant Love

> *Now Rizpah the daughter of Aiah took sackcloth and spread it for herself on the rock, from the beginning of harvest until the late rains poured on them from heaven. And she did not allow the birds of the air to rest on them by day nor the beasts of the field by night.*
>
> **— 2 Samuel 21:10 (NKJV)**

From the barley harvest until the rains. That may have been several months. Day after day she waved off the vultures and the crows. Night after night she drove away the jackals and the hyenas. She slept on a rock beside the bodies of her sons and of five other mothers' sons.

She could not bring them back. She could not reverse the decision of a king. But she could refuse to let them be treated as rubbish.

In 2014, after the Chibok schoolgirls were abducted, a group of parents and supporters gathered at the Unity Fountain in Abuja, day after day, for month after month, simply to keep the girls from being forgotten. They were told to go home. They kept coming. Rizpah would have understood them perfectly.

> *You number my wanderings; Put my tears into Your bottle; Are they not in Your book?*
>
> **— Psalm 56:8 (NKJV)**

Silence That Pierced a King's Conscience

Rizpah never made a speech. She never confronted David. She simply stayed. And eventually, the story of her vigil reached the palace.

David was moved. He went and gathered the bones of Saul and Jonathan from Jabesh Gilead, and the bones of the seven men who had been hanged, and buried them all honourably in the family tomb in the land of Benjamin.

Silent faithfulness can be more powerful than loud protest. Rizpah's quiet presence did what argument might never have achieved: it awakened the conscience of a king.

> **LESSON FOR TODAY**
>
> When you cannot change a situation, you can still refuse to let it be treated as if it does not matter. Faithful presence can move hearts that arguments cannot.

Dignity, Burial, and Healing

Then Scripture adds a significant line.

> *And after that God heeded the prayer for the land.*
>
> **— 2 Samuel 21:14 (NKJV)**

The order matters. The rain did not come merely when the men were executed. It came after the dead had been honourably buried. God's law itself said that a body hanged on a tree was not to remain there overnight. Rizpah's vigil exposed what had been neglected, and when dignity was restored, healing came to the land.

God cares about how we treat the dead and the grieving. In many African cultures, a proper burial is one of the most sacred duties a family can perform. Rizpah's story affirms that instinct. The bodies of those who die are not worthless. They will rise again.

The Legacy of a Mother's Love

Rizpah's name appears only a few times in Scripture. She had no throne, no army, no title. She had a piece of sackcloth, a rock, and a mother's love that would not quit.

Her sons sleep now, as do all the dead, until the day of resurrection. Whatever their story, God has not forgotten them. And He has not forgotten the woman who kept watch beside them in the dark.

> "
> *Precious in the sight of the LORD Is the death of His saints.*
>
> **— Psalm 116:15 (NKJV)**

Scripture for Further Study

2 Samuel 3:6–11; 2 Samuel 21:1–14; Deuteronomy 21:22–23; Joshua 9:1–27; Psalm 34:18; Proverbs 31:8–9; Matthew 5:4; 1 Corinthians 13:4–8.

A Thought to Carry With You: Love never abandons dignity, even on the darkest rocks of human grief.

Ten Questions for Self-Examination

Take your time. Answer honestly, before God, and write your answers down if you can.

1. Have I ever treated people as tools for my own goals?
2. How do I respond when the weak are made to pay for the failures of the powerful?
3. Do I stay beside the grieving, or move on when it becomes uncomfortable?
4. How can I resist callousness in a cynical world?
5. Has someone's quiet faithfulness ever awakened my conscience?
6. What vigil of love, prayer, or service is God asking me to keep?
7. Do I treat people as tools to be used or discarded when it suits a larger plan?
8. Am I willing to stay beside someone whose grief has gone on longer than is comfortable?
9. How do I respond when the powerless are made to pay for the failures of the powerful?
10. Is there a quiet, faithful vigil of prayer or love that God is calling me to keep?

Final Word

If you are grieving a loss that cannot be reversed in this life, Scripture does not ask you to pretend. Spread your sackcloth if you must. God numbers your tears.

Those who have fallen asleep are not forgotten by Him. They rest until the voice of the archangel and the trumpet of God, when the dead in Christ will rise first. On that day, every vigil will be over, and every tear will be wiped away.

> “
> *For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.*
>
> **— 1 Thessalonians 4:16 (NKJV)**

CHAPTER NINETEEN

The Widow of Zarephath

Faith, Hospitality, and Hope in a Season of Scarcity

In the dry season, when the river shrinks to a bed of sand, women and children in many places dig small holes in the riverbed and wait. Slowly, patiently, a little water seeps into the hole. It is not much. It is barely enough for a pot. But it is enough for today, and tomorrow they come back and dig again.

Nobody calls that a flood. But a family has survived another day on it.

The widow of Zarephath was gathering two sticks to cook a final meal for herself and her son when a stranger asked her to feed him first. She was not living in abundance. She had a handful of flour and a little oil. Her story is about faith in scarcity, hospitality with very little, and hope when sorrow returns.

KEY SCRIPTURES

1 Kings 17:8–24

CENTRAL LESSON

Faith can act honestly in desperate times, give generously from little, and hold on to God when a new sorrow follows relief.

A Widow at the Edge of Starvation

There was a terrible drought in Israel. Elijah had declared it, and for a while God fed him by a brook, with ravens bringing bread and meat. Then the brook dried up. And God gave Elijah a surprising instruction.

> "*Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. See, I have commanded a widow there to provide for you.*"
>
> **— 1 Kings 17:9 (NKJV)**

Zarephath was in Sidon. Gentile territory. The homeland of Jezebel, the queen who was hunting Elijah. The heartland of Baal worship. God sent His prophet to be fed by a foreign widow in enemy country.

When Elijah arrived at the city gate, he saw a woman gathering sticks.

Faith That Faces Reality

> "
>
> *Please bring me a little water in a cup, that I may drink.*
>
> **— 1 Kings 17:10 (NKJV)**

In a drought, water was precious. Yet she went to get it. Then Elijah called after her: and bring me a piece of bread too. And she stopped.

> "
>
> *As the LORD your God lives, I do not have bread, only a handful of flour in a bin, and a little oil in a jar; and see, I am gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die.*
>
> **— 1 Kings 17:12 (NKJV)**

That is one of the most honest sentences in the Bible. She did not pretend. She did not confess positively. She described her situation exactly as it was: a last meal, then death.

Faith does not require us to deny reality. God can work with honesty. What He cannot work with is pretence.

Generosity From an Almost Empty Jar

> "
>
> *Do not fear; go and do as you have said, but make me a small cake from it first, and bring it to me; and afterward make some for yourself and your son.*
>
> **— 1 Kings 17:13 (NKJV)**

From the outside, this looks outrageous. A stranger asking a starving mother to feed him first. But Elijah was not being greedy. He was delivering a word from God, with a promise attached: the flour and oil would not run out until the rain came.

She had to decide whether to believe it. And she did.

We must be careful here. This passage has been badly abused by preachers who tell poor widows to give their last money to the church and wait for a miracle. Elijah was not raising funds. He was a prophet carrying a specific word from God, in a specific crisis. The lesson is not 'give everything to the man of God'. It is that God can provide through obedience even when resources are almost gone, and that generosity is not reserved for the rich.

Many of our mothers lived this story. A widow in a hard season has one small bag of garri left in her room. Her neighbour's children have not eaten in two days. She soaks some for them, then some for her own children. And more often than we might expect, help arrives from an unexpected direction: a relative not heard from in a year, a church member, a stranger. Generosity from little has a way of finding God's provision.

> **LESSON FOR TODAY**
> Generosity is not only for those with plenty. Practise it wisely, responsibly, and from whatever God has placed in your hand.

Provision Through Unexpected People

Day after day, the widow went to the bin, and there was flour. She went to the jar, and there was oil. Never a surplus. Never a storeroom. Just enough for today.

Jesus later used this woman to shock His hometown synagogue.

> "*But I tell you truly, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah… but to none of them was Elijah sent except to Zarephath, in the region of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow.*
> **— Luke 4:25–26 (NKJV)**

The people of Nazareth were so angry they tried to throw Him off a cliff. They did not like being reminded that God's mercy reaches foreigners, and that sometimes outsiders receive His word more readily than insiders.

When Crisis Follows Relief

Then, after the miracle of the flour and oil, the widow's son fell sick, and grew worse until there was no breath left in him.

Some of the hardest blows come right after God has helped us. We think the worst is over. And then a new trouble arrives.

> "*What have I to do with you, O man of God? Have you come to me to bring my sin to remembrance, and to kill my son?*
> **— 1 Kings 17:18 (NKJV)**

Grief made her reach for the oldest explanation in the world: I am being punished. Many of us still reach for it. 'What did I do wrong?' Elijah did not argue with her theology. He took the boy from her arms, carried him upstairs, and cried out to God. And God answered. The child

revived.

Take your questions and pain seriously. God does. But do not assume every tragedy is a punishment for some forgotten sin.

More Than a Full Jar

When Elijah carried the boy downstairs alive, the widow said something that went beyond gratitude for food.

> "*Now by this I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is the truth.*
>
> **— 1 Kings 17:24 (NKJV)**

The flour fed her body. The resurrection of her son settled her faith. She had trusted God's word for survival; now she knew it was true.

This foreign widow's story points us toward the day when God will restore far more than bread and oil, when the dead in Christ rise and death itself is no more.

Scripture for Further Study

Deuteronomy 15:7–11; Psalm 34:18; Matthew 6:31–34; 2 Corinthians 9:7–8; 1 Corinthians 15:20–26.

Ten Questions for Self-Examination

Take your time. Answer honestly, before God, and write your answers down if you can.

1. Do I admit my struggles honestly, or hide them out of pride?
2. How can I be generous while still meeting my family's real needs?
3. Am I open to help arriving through unexpected people?
4. How do I respond when a new hardship follows a season of relief?
5. Can I sit with someone in grief without blaming them or making promises I cannot keep?
6. Have I convinced myself that I can only be generous when I have plenty?
7. Am I honest with God and with others about my scarcity, or do I hide it out of shame?
8. Do I trust God for 'enough for today', or do I demand to see the full storeroom before I believe?

9. When a new trouble comes after a season of provision, do I conclude that God was never really with me?
10. What ‘handful of flour’ do I have that God could use if I placed it in His hands?

Final Word

God’s provision often looks like water seeping into a hole in the dry riverbed: enough for today. Trust Him for today. Share from what you have, wisely and generously.

And if a new sorrow follows a season of relief, do not conclude that God has turned against you. Bring the pain upstairs to Him. The God who raised this widow’s son has promised a greater raising, when the trumpet sounds and the dead in Christ rise to live in His Kingdom.

> “*The bin of flour was not used up, nor did the jar of oil run dry, according to the word of the LORD which He spoke by Elijah.*
>
> **— 1 Kings 17:16 (NKJV)**

CHAPTER TWENTY

The Shunammite Woman

Generosity, Discernment, and Resilience in the Face of Loss

In front of many compounds stands a big shade tree, often a mango or a neem, with a wooden bench beneath it. Nobody remembers putting up a sign, but travellers know it is a place to rest. Hawkers stop there in the afternoon sun. Elders hold meetings there. The tree does not ask who deserves its shade; it simply spreads its branches and makes room.

When the storms come, that same tree bends in the wind but does not easily fall, because its roots go deep.

The Shunammite woman noticed a travelling prophet and made room for him, literally building him a small room with a bed, a table, a chair, and a lamp. Later she faced the death of her only son, a seven-year famine, and the loss of her land. Her story combines generosity, discernment, and remarkable resilience.

KEY SCRIPTURES

2 Kings 4:8–37; 2 Kings 8:1–6

CENTRAL LESSON

A life of faith joins generosity with discernment, honest grief with persistent hope, and preparation for tomorrow with trust in God today.

A Notable Woman of Shunem

The Bible never tells us her name. It simply calls her ‘a notable woman’, a woman of standing and wealth in the town of Shunem.

> “*Now it happened one day that Elisha went to Shunem, where there was a notable woman, and she persuaded him to eat some food. So it was, as often as he passed by, he would turn in there to eat some food.*
>
> **— 2 Kings 4:8 (NKJV)**

She persuaded him. Every community has that kind of woman: the one who will not let a visitor leave without eating, who insists, who simply will not take ‘I am fine, thank you’ for an answer.

Generosity That Sees Ahead

Soon, feeding Elisha was not enough for her.

> *And she said to her husband, "Look now, I know that this is a holy man of God, who passes by us regularly. Please, let us make a small upper room on the wall; and let us put a bed for him there, and a table and a chair and a lampstand; so it will be, whenever he comes to us, he can turn in there."*
>
> **— 2 Kings 4:9–10 (NKJV)**

Look at the details. A bed for rest. A table for meals or study. A chair for comfort. A lamp for evening work. She was not just being polite. She had thought carefully about what a travelling prophet actually needed.

In some African homes, there is a room that everybody calls 'the visitors' room' or 'the pastor's room'. It is kept clean, the bedsheet is always fresh, and nobody else sleeps there. Generations of travelling ministers, students, and relatives in transit have rested in rooms like that. The Shunammite woman would recognise them immediately.

> *Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels.*
>
> **— Hebrews 13:2 (NKJV)**

Kindness Without a Price Tag

Elisha wanted to repay her. He offered to speak to the king or the army commander on her behalf. Her answer was simple and dignified.

> *I dwell among my own people.*
>
> **— 2 Kings 4:13 (NKJV)**

In other words: I do not need connections. I am content. I did not do this to get something.

That is rare. Much of what passes for generosity is really an investment. We give to the pastor hoping for a special prayer. We help a relative expecting loyalty later. We host the influential guest because of what they can do for us. The Shunammite simply gave.

Elisha's servant Gehazi noticed what she would never have said: she had no son, and her husband was old. Elisha promised that by this time next year she would embrace a son. Her reaction tells us how deeply she had buried that hope.

> “
> *No, my lord. Man of God, do not lie to your maidservant!*
>
> **— 2 Kings 4:16 (NKJV)**

Some disappointments go so deep that hope itself becomes frightening. But she conceived, and a son was born, as Elisha had said.

> **LESSON FOR TODAY**
> Give without making every kindness a transaction. Contentment frees us to be truly generous.

When Blessing Is Followed by Grief

The boy grew. One day, in the harvest field with his father, he cried out, ‘My head, my head!’ A servant carried him to his mother.

> “
> *When he had taken him and brought him to his mother, he sat on her knees till noon, and then died.*
>
> **— 2 Kings 4:20 (NKJV)**

It is one of the most heartbreaking sentences in Scripture. The promised child, the unexpected gift, died on his mother’s lap.

Faith does not prevent pain. The Shunammite was generous, discerning, and godly. Her son still died. Anyone who preaches that faithful people are protected from every tragedy has not read 2 Kings 4.

Going Straight to the Source

What she did next shows the strength of this woman. She laid the boy on the prophet’s bed, shut the door, saddled a donkey, and rode hard to Mount Carmel. To everyone who asked along the way, including her husband and Gehazi, she said only, ‘It is well.’

When she reached Elisha, she fell and caught hold of his feet. Gehazi tried to push her away. Elisha stopped him.

> “
> *Let her alone; for her soul is in deep distress, and the LORD has hidden it from me, and has not told me.*
>
> **— 2 Kings 4:27 (NKJV)**

> *Did I ask a son of my lord? Did I not say, "Do not deceive me"?*
>
> — 2 Kings 4:28 (NKJV)

She did not pretend. She did not use polite religious language. She told the prophet exactly how she felt. And when Elisha sent Gehazi ahead with his staff, she refused to leave without the man himself.

> *As the LORD lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you.*
>
> — 2 Kings 4:30 (NKJV)

Elisha went. He prayed, stretched himself over the child, and the boy sneezed seven times and opened his eyes.

> *So she went in, fell at his feet, and bowed to the ground; then she picked up her son and went out.*
>
> — 2 Kings 4:37 (NKJV)

No speech. No song. Just worship, and a mother picking up her son.

One Story, Not a Universal Promise

We rejoice with her. But we must handle this miracle carefully. Not every grieving parent receives their child back in this life. Scripture does not promise that, and we must never use this story to shame those whose children were not restored.

What this story does show us is the God who has power over death. The same God who woke the Shunammite's son will wake all who sleep in Christ when the last trumpet sounds. Our hope does not rest on every story ending like this one. It rests on the resurrection.

Prepared for the Next Storm

Years later, Elisha warned her that a seven-year famine was coming. She listened. She took her household to the land of the Philistines and survived.

When she returned, her house and land had been taken. She went to the king to appeal. And at that very moment, Gehazi was telling the king about Elisha raising a boy from the dead. 'This is the woman,' he said.

> *Restore all that was hers, and all the proceeds of the field from the day that she left the land until now.*
>
> **— 2 Kings 8:6 (NKJV)**

The woman who had once said 'I dwell among my own people' and needed nothing from the king now needed justice from him, and received it, with back payment.

Scripture for Further Study

Proverbs 3:5–6; Proverbs 22:3; Galatians 6:2; Romans 12:13; Revelation 21:3–5.

Ten Questions for Self-Examination

Take your time. Answer honestly, before God, and write your answers down if you can.

1. Do I notice needs before anyone asks, or only when I am asked directly?
2. Is my generosity free, or do I usually expect something back?
3. When trouble overwhelms me, do I go straight to God and seek the right help?
4. What can I do today to prepare for a difficulty I can already see coming?
5. How can I comfort the grieving without promising what only God can give?
6. Do I have 'a small room' in my life, my home, my time, or my budget, that I keep available for God's work?
7. When a crisis hits, do I go straight to God, as she went to the man of God, or do I spend my energy telling everyone else first?
8. Am I able to say 'It is well' as an act of faith, without using it to hide real pain from people who could help?
9. When I have lost something through no fault of my own, do I have the courage to ask for what is rightfully mine?
10. Did I make room for God in the good years, before I needed anything from Him?

Final Word

Spread your branches. Make room for others, without expecting anything back. Then, when the storm comes, let your roots go down deep into God.

The God of the Shunammite is the same God who will raise the dead at the last trumpet. With Him, even grief can be carried with hope, and ‘it is well’ can be said with honest tears.

> “
> *And she answered, “It is well.”*
>
> **— 2 Kings 4:26 (NKJV)**

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

The Captive Little Maid

Faithfulness and Compassion in Unjust Circumstances

On a moonless night in the village, when the power is off and every compound is dark, you may see tiny lights blinking in the bush. Fireflies. Each one is smaller than a fingernail, and its light could not read a newspaper. But in deep darkness, a firefly can be seen from far away, and children never forget the first time they saw one.

Darkness does not make a small light weaker. It makes it easier to see.

A little Israelite girl was snatched from her home by Syrian raiders and taken to serve the wife of Naaman, commander of the Syrian army. She had every reason to be bitter. Instead, when she learned that her master had leprosy, she said that if only he were with the prophet in Samaria, he would be healed. One sentence from a captive child led a powerful man to God.

KEY SCRIPTURES

2 Kings 5:1–19.

CENTRAL LESSON

Even in painful and unfair circumstances, we can choose compassion, speak hope, and point others to God without letting bitterness rule us.

Stolen From Home

Her story begins with violence.

> *And the Syrians had gone out on raids, and had brought back captive a young girl from the land of Israel. She waited on Naaman's wife.*
>
> **— 2 Kings 5:2 (NKJV)**

A young girl. Snatched in a raid. Taken from her parents, her village, her language, and her faith, and carried off to serve in a foreign general's house.

We do not know her name. We do not know what happened to her family. We do not even know whether she ever saw home again. What we know is that she ended up in the household

of the man whose army may well have destroyed her world.

A Great Man With a Hidden Wound

> *Now Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria, was a great and honorable man in the eyes of his master, because by him the LORD had given victory to Syria. He was also a mighty man of valor, but a leper.*
>
> **— 2 Kings 5:1 (NKJV)**

Every phrase builds him up. Great. Honourable. Victorious. Mighty. Then the last three words knock him down: *but a leper.*

Everyone has a 'but'. The successful businessman with a broken marriage. The respected elder with a secret addiction. The popular woman who cries herself to sleep. Naaman had everything except the one thing he most needed.

Refusing to Let Bitterness Win

This girl had every reason to be glad about Naaman's suffering. 'Let him rot,' she could have thought. 'After what his soldiers did to my family.'

Instead, she spoke words of hope to her mistress: if only her master were with the prophet in Samaria, he would be healed.

That is astonishing compassion. She wanted good for the very household that held her captive.

> *Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*
>
> **— Romans 12:21 (NKJV)**

Centuries later, God would tell Israelite exiles in Babylon to do exactly what this girl did.

> *And seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to the LORD for it; for in its peace you will have peace.*
>
> **— Jeremiah 29:7 (NKJV)**

This is not a call to pretend that injustice is acceptable. Her captivity was wrong. But she refused to let the wrong done to her turn her into someone she did not want to be.

> **LESSON FOR TODAY**

> You cannot always choose your circumstances, but you can refuse to let bitterness have the final word over your heart.

A Small Voice With a Great Truth

She was young. She was a slave. She was a foreigner. In that household, she was about as low as a person could be. And yet her words travelled from Naaman's wife to Naaman, from Naaman to the king of Syria, and from the king of Syria to the king of Israel.

Picture a young house-help who overhears her madam crying about a child's illness that doctors cannot diagnose. Shyly, she mentions that her church in the village runs a mission hospital with a visiting specialist. It would be easy to dismiss her. But what if the madam goes, and the child is finally treated? That is exactly the shape of this story.

Never underestimate your influence because you lack a title. A small voice can carry great truth.

Help That Does Not Look the Way We Expect

The king of Israel panicked when Naaman arrived with a letter asking for healing. 'Am I God, to kill and make alive?' He tore his clothes. Elisha sent word: send him to me.

Naaman arrived at Elisha's house with horses and chariots. Elisha did not even come out. He sent a messenger: go and wash in the Jordan seven times.

Naaman was furious.

> "*Are not the Abanah and the Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?*
>
> **— 2 Kings 5:12 (NKJV)**

It is a very human reaction. He had expected a ceremony, a big performance, some respect for his rank. Instead he was told to bathe in a muddy local river. Proud people often want God to heal them in a way that flatters them.

Once again, servants saved the day.

> "*My father, if the prophet had told you to do something great, would you not have done it? How much more then, when he says to you, "Wash, and be clean"?*
>
> **— 2 Kings 5:13 (NKJV)**

From the little captive girl to the servants on the road, God kept using the people at the bottom of the household to bring the man at the top to healing.

Pointing Beyond Herself

Naaman went down to the Jordan, dipped seven times, and came up clean. Then he returned to Elisha with a confession.

> "*Indeed, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, except in Israel.*"
>
> — 2 Kings 5:15 (NKJV)

The girl's faithfulness did more than heal a body. It brought a pagan general to know the living God. She did not point to herself. She pointed to God's prophet, and through him, to God.

Seen by the God Who Remembers

She remains unnamed in Scripture. But she is not forgotten. Jesus Himself mentioned Naaman's healing in His first sermon at Nazareth, and every time this story is told, a little captive girl is remembered for her courage and her compassion.

Scripture for Further Study

2 Kings 5:1–19; Genesis 50:20; Psalm 34:18; Proverbs 15:1–4; Isaiah 43:1–2; Matthew 5:44–48; Romans 12:17–21; Galatians 6:9–10.

A Thought to Carry With You: God can place hope in the mouth of someone the world has overlooked.

Ten Questions for Self-Examination

Take your time. Answer honestly, before God, and write your answers down if you can.

1. Have hard circumstances made me bitter or closed?
2. Who near me needs a word of hope this week?
3. Do I underestimate my influence because I have no title?
4. How can I show compassion without excusing injustice?
5. Am I humble enough to receive help that does not come the way I expected?
6. How can I stay faithful where I am, even if it is not where I hoped to be?
7. Have my unfair circumstances made me bitter or closed toward the people around me?

8. Do I think I am too small, too young, or too low to make any difference?
9. Is there someone around me who needs to hear a simple word of hope from me?
10. Can I show compassion to people without excusing the wrong that was done to me?

Final Word

Wherever you are, even if it is not where you wanted to be, you can still shine. Speak hope. Point people to God.

The darkness around you may be the very thing that makes your small light visible. A captive girl's one sentence brought a general to the Jordan. Your one sentence may yet bring someone to the living God.

> "*Then she said to her mistress, "If only my master were with the prophet who is in Samaria! For he would heal him of his leprosy."*
>
> **— 2 Kings 5:3 (NKJV)**

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Jehosheba

Hidden Courage and the Work of Protecting Life

Anyone who has kept chickens has seen it. A hawk appears high above the compound, circling slowly. The mother hen gives a sharp cry, and in an instant her chicks disappear. She has gathered them under her wings and crouched low, and to the hawk she now looks like a single brown hen with nothing worth stealing. She does not fight the hawk in the sky. She simply hides what she loves until the danger passes.

It is quiet courage, and it saves lives.

When the wicked queen Athaliah set out to destroy the royal family of Judah, a princess named Jehosheba stole away her infant nephew Joash and hid him in the house of the LORD for six years. Without her, the line of David would have been cut off. Hardly anyone preaches about her, but the promise of the Messiah passed safely through her hands.

KEY SCRIPTURES

2 Kings 11:1–21; 2 Chronicles 22:10–23:21.

CENTRAL LESSON

Some of the most important acts of faith are quiet acts of protection. Courage may require risk, careful planning, and partnership to preserve life.

A Massacre in the Palace

Athaliah was a daughter of the house of Ahab and Jezebel, and she had clearly learned their methods. When her son, King Ahaziah of Judah, was killed, she did not mourn. She seized the throne.

> “*When Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah saw that her son was dead, she arose and destroyed all the royal heirs.*
>
> **— 2 Kings 11:1 (NKJV)**

Her own grandsons. Every child who might one day claim the throne. She had them murdered.

And with that, she was trying to do something far bigger than she knew. God had promised David that his throne would be established forever, and that the Messiah would come from his line. If every male descendant of David was killed, that promise would die in a palace bloodbath.

One Woman Moved Against the Tide

> *But Jehosheba, the daughter of King Joram, sister of Ahaziah, took Joash the son of Ahaziah, and stole him away from among the king's sons who were being murdered; and they hid him and his nurse in the bedroom, from Athaliah, so that he was not killed.*
>
> **— 2 Kings 11:2 (NKJV)**

Stole him away from among the king's sons who were being murdered. Read that slowly. Jehosheba walked into a scene of slaughter and came out with a baby. She was a princess, a daughter of the king, perhaps even Athaliah's own stepdaughter. She had every reason to keep her head down and survive. Instead, she acted.

Violence threatened the vulnerable, and she refused to look away.

> *Deliver those who are drawn toward death, And hold back those stumbling to the slaughter.*
>
> **— Proverbs 24:11 (NKJV)**

Protection Requires a Plan

Jehosheba did not simply grab the child and run into the street. She hid him and his nurse first in a bedroom. Then, with her husband, she moved him somewhere much safer.

> *So he was hidden with her in the house of the LORD for six years, while Athaliah reigned over the land.*
>
> **— 2 Kings 11:3 (NKJV)**

Six years. Six years of keeping a boy quiet in the temple complex, feeding him, teaching him, making sure no servant gossiped and no visitor noticed a child who should not exist. That is not a single act of courage. That is courage sustained day after day, year after year.

I know of a woman who, during a night of communal violence in her town, hid four of her neighbours' children in the storeroom behind her kitchen, under sacks of grain. Armed men came to her door. She offered them water and told them she was alone with her own children. They left. She kept those four children for three weeks until their relatives could fetch them.

She has never told the story in public. Her neighbours tell it for her.

> **LESSON FOR TODAY**
> Protecting the vulnerable often needs careful planning, discretion, and patience, not only a brave moment.

Essential, Though Not Prominent

Jehosheba is mentioned in only a handful of verses. Her husband Jehoiada the priest eventually led the public revolution. He organised the guards, brought out the boy, and crowned him. Most sermons on this passage focus on Jehoiada.

But there would have been no coronation without the woman who first stole the baby out of the massacre.

Many of the most important roles in God's work are quiet ones. The woman who keeps a family together while her husband ministers. The aunty who quietly pays a child's school fees. The church cleaner who notices a child in danger and reports it. Hidden work is not lesser work.

Stronger Together

Second Chronicles tells us that Jehosheba was the wife of Jehoiada the priest. A princess from the palace and a priest from the temple, working together against a murderous queen.

Courage is often strengthened by partnership. Jehosheba had access to the royal family. Jehoiada had access to the temple and its guards. Together, they could do what neither could have done alone.

Power Without Accountability

Athaliah's story is a warning about what happens when power answers to no one. She ruled for six years as a usurper, and the land suffered under her.

Then, in the seventh year, Jehoiada brought out the hidden boy.

> "*And he brought out the king's son, put the crown on him, and gave him the Testimony; they made him king and anointed him, and they clapped their hands and said, "Long live the king!"*
> **— 2 Kings 11:12 (NKJV)**

Athaliah heard the noise, rushed to the temple, tore her clothes, and cried 'Treason!' But it was too late. The rightful king was on the throne, and the line of David continued.

God Works Through Those Who Refuse to Surrender

God had promised that David's line would endure. He kept that promise, but He kept it through a woman who refused to surrender to evil. Divine faithfulness and human courage worked together.

We often pray for God to act against injustice. Jehosheba's story reminds us that sometimes He answers that prayer by sending us.

Scripture for Further Study

2 Kings 11:1–21; 2 Chronicles 22:10–23:21; Psalm 82:3–4; Proverbs 24:11–12; Isaiah 1:17; Matthew 18:5–6; Romans 12:9–18; James 1:27.

Ten Questions for Self-Examination

Take your time. Answer honestly, before God, and write your answers down if you can.

1. Is there someone vulnerable whose safety I need to take more seriously?
2. Do I think courage must be loud, or do I value quiet protection?
3. Which trusted people or services could help me when a child or vulnerable person is at risk?
4. Am I using my influence to protect others or to protect my own comfort?
5. What is one wise action I can take when I see genuine danger?
6. Have I overlooked someone whose hidden work has kept others safe?
7. Is there a child or vulnerable person in my care who needs more protection than I have been giving?
8. Do I despise quiet, unglamorous acts of protection because nobody applauds them?
9. Who could I partner with, as Jehosheba partnered with her husband Jehoiada, to keep someone safe?
10. Have I noticed the hidden people in my church who have sheltered others for years?

Final Word

You may never stand in front of a crowd. But you may be the one who hides a child from harm, gives refuge to a frightened neighbour, or quietly keeps a family together.

Hidden work is not lesser work. The LORD Himself covers His people with His feathers. When you shelter others, you are doing what He does, and He sees every hour of it.

Quiet courage protects life when others are tempted to look away.

> “
> *He shall cover you with His feathers, And under His wings you shall take refuge; His truth shall be your shield and buckler.*
>
> **— Psalm 91:4 (NKJV)**

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Huldah

Spiritual Integrity and Uncompromising Truth in Times of Renewal

Every Nigerian kitchen knows bitter leaf. Before it goes into the soup, it is washed and squeezed and washed again to remove some of its bitterness. But no matter how much you wash it, bitter leaf is still bitter leaf. You cannot turn it into sugar cane. And people still eat it, because it is good for the body.

Some truths are like that. You can deliver them gently, but you cannot make them sweet without making them false.

When the Book of the Law was rediscovered in the temple during King Josiah's reign, the king sent his officials to ask a prophetess named Huldah what it meant. She did not soften God's word to please the palace. She told them plainly that judgment was coming, and then she gave a personal word of mercy to a king whose heart was tender.

KEY SCRIPTURES

2 Kings 22:8–20; 2 Chronicles 34:14–28.

CENTRAL LESSON

When God's word confronts a compromised world, faithfulness means speaking it plainly, without flattery and without fear.

A Book Found in the Rubble

Josiah became king of Judah at the age of eight, after generations of idolatry. His grandfather Manasseh had filled the land with idols and even sacrificed his own son. By the time Josiah was a young man, the temple of the LORD was in disrepair, and the worship of God had been buried under decades of compromise.

Josiah ordered the temple repaired. And in the middle of the renovation, the high priest made a startling discovery.

> "*Then Hilkiah the high priest said to Shaphan the scribe, "I have found the Book of the Law in the house of the LORD."*

> — 2 Kings 22:8 (NKJV)

Think about that. The Word of God had been lost inside the house of God. Nobody had noticed it was missing.

It can happen to us too. A church can be busy with programmes, buildings, and events while the Scriptures gather dust. A believer can attend every service while the Bible at home sits unopened under a pile of old calendars.

A King Who Tore His Clothes

When Shaphan read the book aloud to the king, Josiah's reaction was immediate.

> "*Now it happened, when the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, that he tore his clothes.*
>
> — 2 Kings 22:11 (NKJV)

He understood what the nation had done. And he wanted to know what God would do about it.

> "*Go, inquire of the LORD for me, for the people and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that has been found; for great is the wrath of the LORD that is aroused against us, because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book.*
>
> — 2 Kings 22:13 (NKJV)

Why They Went to Huldah

> "*So Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam, Achbor, Shaphan, and Asaiah went to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum… (She dwelt in Jerusalem in the Second Quarter.) And they spoke with her.*
>
> — 2 Kings 22:14 (NKJV)

This is remarkable. Jeremiah was already prophesying in those days. So was Zephaniah. Yet the king's highest officials, including the high priest himself, went to Huldah.

Scripture does not explain why. It simply presents her as the obvious person to consult. She lived nearby, and she was clearly known and trusted as someone who heard from God and spoke truthfully.

Spiritual authority is not about office or title. It grows from holiness, faithfulness, and a reputation for speaking truth. The officials did not go to the most famous prophet or the most

senior. They went to the one they trusted to tell them what God was actually saying.

Truth Without Flattery

Huldah's first words to the king's delegation set the tone.

> *Tell the man who sent you to me, "Thus says the LORD: 'Behold, I will bring calamity on this place and on its inhabitants—all the words of the book which the king of Judah has read.'"*
>
> **— 2 Kings 22:15–16 (NKJV)**

Tell the man who sent you to me. Not 'Tell His Majesty'. Not 'Tell our beloved king'. Before God, Josiah was simply a man, and Huldah addressed him that way. She was not being rude; she was being clear about whose message this was.

Her message was hard. Judgment would come. There was no softening, no 'but if you sow a seed', no promise that everything would be fine.

Some of us prefer prophets like those in Jeremiah's day.

> *They have also healed the hurt of My people slightly, Saying, "Peace, peace!" When there is no peace.*
>
> **— Jeremiah 6:14 (NKJV)**

Picture a businessman who invites his pastor to pray over a contract he knows is built on inflated figures. He wants a blessing on a deal that God cannot bless. A Huldah-hearted pastor will read the documents, put them down, and say quietly, 'I cannot pray for this to succeed. But I will pray for you.' The businessman may be offended for a month. He may also come back, cancel the deal, and ask for help to start again honestly.

LESSON FOR TODAY

When you are asked for counsel, tell the truth with love. Flattery may keep a friend for a season, but honesty can save a life.

Mercy for a Tender Heart

But Huldah's message was not only judgment. It had a second part, addressed personally to the king. Because Josiah's heart was tender, because he had humbled himself and wept, God had heard him.

> *Surely, therefore, I will gather you to your fathers, and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace; and your eyes shall not see all the calamity which I will bring on this place.*
>
> **— 2 Kings 22:20 (NKJV)**

Notice the language. Gathered to his grave. Josiah would sleep with his fathers, awaiting the day of resurrection, and would be spared from seeing the destruction of Jerusalem.

Huldah distinguished between national judgment and personal repentance. The nation's long rebellion would bring consequences. But one humble heart still mattered to God.

A Word That Sparked Reform

Huldah's word launched the greatest religious reform in Judah's history. Josiah gathered all the people, read the book aloud, and made a covenant.

> *Then the king stood by a pillar and made a covenant before the LORD, to follow the LORD and to keep His commandments and His testimonies and His statutes, with all his heart and all his soul.*
>
> **— 2 Kings 23:3 (NKJV)**

He tore down the idols, removed the corrupt priests, and restored the Passover in a way not seen since the days of the judges. Scripture's verdict on him is extraordinary.

> *Now before him there was no king like him, who turned to the LORD with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses.*
>
> **— 2 Kings 23:25 (NKJV)**

Behind that reform stood a woman who refused to water down God's word.

Scripture for Further Study

2 Kings 22:1–20; 2 Chronicles 34:1–33; Deuteronomy 28:15–68; Psalm 51:16–17; Isaiah 58:1–12; Jeremiah 1:4–10; 2 Timothy 4:1–5; Hebrews 4:12–13.

A Thought to Carry With You: True spiritual authority never flatters human power; it speaks God's truth with courage, humility, and love.

Ten Questions for Self-Examination

Take your time. Answer honestly, before God, and write your answers down if you can.

1. Has the Word of God been 'lost' under routine in my life?
2. When people ask my counsel, do I soften the truth to keep them comfortable?
3. How do I react when Scripture exposes my own failures?
4. Do I believe God still notices a humble heart in an indifferent society?
5. What am I doing privately to grow in discernment and integrity?
6. How can my words encourage others towards genuine repentance?
7. When people ask my counsel, am I tempted to add sugar to God's bitter leaf?
8. Has God's word been 'lost' in my life, buried under routine and religious activity?
9. How do I respond when Scripture confronts something I have been comfortable with?
10. Do I prefer preachers and friends who flatter me, or those who tell me the truth?

Final Word

God's truth is both bitter and healing. Do not water it down for others, and do not run away from it yourself.

Find the Word again if it has been lost under the rubble of busy religion. Read it. Let it tear your clothes if it must. A tender, humble heart still moves God, as it moved Him for Josiah.

> *Because your heart was tender, and you humbled yourself before the LORD when you heard what I spoke against this place... I also have heard you, says the LORD.*
>
> **— 2 Kings 22:19 (NKJV)**

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

Esther

The Courage to Speak When Silence Is Safer

In the forests of Africa, monkeys live in troops, and some monkeys act as lookouts. When a lookout spots a leopard or an eagle, it gives a sharp alarm call. Naturally, the safest thing for that monkey would be to keep quiet and slip away, because shouting draws the predator's attention. But if the lookout stays silent to save itself, the whole troop may perish.

The alarm call is an act of courage. It puts the speaker at risk for the sake of everyone else.

Esther was a young orphan who found herself in the palace of the most powerful king of her day. When a decree went out to destroy her people, the safe thing was to say nothing. Her cousin Mordecai reminded her that silence would not save her, and that perhaps her position had a purpose.

KEY SCRIPTURES

Esther 2:1–23; 3:1–15; 4:1–17; 5:1–14; 7:1–10; 8:1–17.

CENTRAL LESSON

Courage is not the absence of fear. It is doing the right thing, wisely and prayerfully, when the welfare of others depends on it.

An Orphan in the Palace

Esther's story takes place far from Jerusalem, in the glittering capital of the Persian Empire. She was a Jewish orphan living in exile.

> "*And Mordecai had brought up Hadassah, that is, Esther, his uncle's daughter, for she had neither father nor mother.*
>
> — **Esther 2:7 (NKJV)**

When King Ahasuerus sought a new queen, Esther was taken into the royal harem along with many other young women. She found favour with everyone who saw her, and eventually the king chose her as queen.

But she carried a secret.

> *Esther had not revealed her people or family, for Mordecai had charged her not to reveal it.*
> — Esther 2:10 (NKJV)

She was queen of an empire, and nobody in the palace knew who she really was.

Recognising What Is at Stake

Then Haman rose to power. When Mordecai refused to bow to him, Haman's wounded pride grew into genocidal hatred. He did not want to punish one man. He wanted to wipe out a whole people.

> *There is a certain people scattered and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of your kingdom; their laws are different from all other people's, and they do not keep the king's laws.*
> — Esther 3:8 (NKJV)

Listen to how evil talks. It never says 'I want to kill innocent people.' It says 'they are different', 'they don't follow our ways', 'they are a problem'. Tribal and ethnic violence in our own continent has often started with exactly this kind of language. Words that make a group seem less than human prepare the ground for terrible deeds.

The decree went out. On a single appointed day, every Jew in the empire was to be killed and their property plundered. Mordecai tore his clothes and wailed at the king's gate.

When Silence Seems Safer

Esther sent to ask what was wrong. Mordecai sent back a copy of the decree and urged her to go to the king. Her reply was honest.

> *Any man or woman who goes into the inner court to the king, who has not been called, he has but one law: put all to death, except the one to whom the king holds out the golden scepter, that he may live. Yet I myself have not been called to go in to the king these thirty days.*
> — Esther 4:11 (NKJV)

Esther was not being dramatic. Ahasuerus had already deposed one queen for disobedience. And he had not asked for Esther in a month. She had every reason to believe she might be out of favour.

Mordecai's reply cut through her fear.

> *Do not think in your heart that you will escape in the king's palace any more than all the other Jews.*
>
> **— Esther 4:13 (NKJV)**

Privilege is a dangerous place to hide. It is easy to believe that our position, our salary, our estate gate, or our connections will protect us from the troubles of 'ordinary people'. Mordecai reminded Esther that her comfort was not a wall. It was a window of opportunity.

> **LESSON FOR TODAY**
>
> Privilege carries responsibility. Ask not only 'How does this affect me?' but 'Whom can I help from where I stand?'

Courage That Prays First

Esther's answer is one of the great declarations of faith in Scripture.

> *Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king, which is against the law; and if I perish, I perish!*
>
> **— Esther 4:16 (NKJV)**

Esther did not rush in. Courage is not the same as recklessness. She asked for the support of her community. She fasted. She prepared. Even her maids fasted with her.

Before every great act of courage, there is usually a quiet season of preparation that nobody sees.

Wisdom That Waits for the Right Moment

On the third day, Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court. The king held out the golden scepter. She lived.

And then she did something surprising. She did not immediately accuse Haman. She invited the king and Haman to a banquet. At the banquet, she invited them to a second banquet. Some readers find that frustrating. But Esther understood timing. She was building the moment.

And in between the two banquets, God worked without being named.

> *That night the king could not sleep.*

> — Esther 6:1 (NKJV)

One night of royal insomnia changed history. The sleepless king asked for the court records to be read to him, the way some of us scroll through our phones at two in the morning. He discovered that Mordecai had once saved his life and had never been rewarded. By morning, Haman was leading Mordecai through the city on the king's horse, proclaiming his honour. God's name never appears in the book of Esther. His fingerprints are on every page.

Speaking Up With Discernment

At the second banquet, Esther finally spoke.

> "
> *If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it pleases the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request.*
>
> — Esther 7:3 (NKJV)

She identified herself with her people at last. The secret was out. And then she named the enemy: 'this wicked Haman'.

Imagine a woman who rises to a senior position in a large organisation and discovers that the wages of contract cleaners are being quietly shaved every month by a supervisor with powerful friends. It is not her department. She could look away. Instead she gathers evidence for weeks, finds allies, chooses the right meeting, and speaks. Not everyone thanks her. But the cleaners get paid. That is Esther's spirit in a modern office.

Silence has consequences. But speaking up well requires discernment: knowing what to say, when to say it, and to whom.

Justice, Not Revenge

Haman was hanged on the gallows he had built for Mordecai. A new decree allowed the Jews to defend themselves. And when the day came, Scripture notes three times that they did not take the plunder, though they were permitted to.

That detail matters. The goal was survival and justice, not enrichment or revenge. Courage that turns into vengeance becomes the very thing it fought against.

Esther's story still lives in the Jewish festival of Purim. But its lesson belongs to all of us. God may have placed you in your office, your family, your community, or your church for reasons bigger than your own comfort.

Scripture for Further Study

Esther 4:1–17; Esther 5:1–8; Esther 7:1–10; Proverbs 31:8–9; Ecclesiastes 4:9–12; Matthew 5:13–16; Galatians 6:9–10.

Ten Questions for Self-Examination

Take your time. Answer honestly, before God, and write your answers down if you can.

1. What hard responsibility have I been avoiding because I fear the cost?
2. How could my position, skills, or connections help someone vulnerable?
3. Am I calling it 'wise preparation' when it is really delay?
4. Who can I ask to pray and stand with me before a difficult step?
5. How can I pursue justice without letting anger turn into revenge?
6. Is there someone being harmed around me while I stay quiet because speaking up is risky?
7. Have I assumed that my comfortable position means I am safe from the problems of others?
8. Do I, like Esther, pray and seek others' support before taking a big risk, or do I rush in alone?
9. Am I using my access, influence, or connections only for myself, or also for those without a voice?
10. What would 'If I perish, I perish' look like in my own workplace, church, or family this year?

Final Word

You may be where you are for reasons bigger than your own comfort. Your job, your position, your platform, or your relationships could be the place God has set you to speak for someone who cannot speak for themselves.

Be wise. Be prayerful. Gather others to fast with you. Choose your moment. But do not keep quiet when the leopard is near. Relief may come from elsewhere, but you will have missed the reason you were placed in the palace.

> *For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place... Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?*
>
> **— Esther 4:14 (NKJV)**

PART FIVE

Women of the Gospels

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John

Women who waited for the Messiah, met Him, followed Him, and first proclaimed Him risen.

Elizabeth
Mary, the Mother of Jesus
Anna the Prophetess
The Samaritan Woman
The Woman with the Issue of Blood
The Syrophoenician Woman
Martha and Mary of Bethany
Mary Magdalene

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

Elizabeth

Patient Hope and Dignity in a Season of Waiting

Every mango season there are trees that seem to be in no hurry at all. The neighbour's tree has already been stripped by children with sticks and stones, and yours is still holding small, hard, green fruit. You begin to wonder whether your tree has forgotten its job. Then, late in the season, when everyone else has finished their mangoes, yours ripen slowly on the branch. Ask any grandmother and she will tell you: the fruit that ripens slowly on the tree is often the sweetest.

Mangoes that are plucked early and forced to ripen in a sack are edible, but they never quite taste the same.

Elizabeth lived for many years with the quiet shame of childlessness in a culture that often treated it as a judgment. Scripture insists that she and Zechariah were righteous before God. Her late fruit came, and with it a lesson about dignity in a long season of waiting.

KEY SCRIPTURES

Luke 1:5–25; Luke 1:39–45; Luke 1:57–66; Luke 1:67–80.

CENTRAL LESSON

A long season of waiting does not erase dignity or righteousness. We can keep living fully, rejoice in others' blessings, and receive our own with gratitude.

Righteous, and Still Waiting

Luke introduces Elizabeth and her husband Zacharias with a description most of us would love to have written over our lives.

> "*And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.*
>
> **— Luke 1:6 (NKJV)**

Then, immediately, the very next verse.

> “
>
> *But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both well advanced in years.*
>
> **— Luke 1:7 (NKJV)**

Righteous. Blameless. And childless. Luke places those two verses side by side on purpose. Elizabeth’s barrenness was not a punishment and not a hidden sin. It was simply her situation, carried for decades by a faithful woman.

In her culture, childlessness was often treated as a disgrace. In many African communities it still is. The questions at family meetings. The whispers at naming ceremonies. The relatives who suggest that something ‘must be wrong spiritually’. Elizabeth knew all of that. Later she would describe it with one heavy word: reproach.

Pain Is Not a Spiritual Verdict

Some of the cruellest words ever spoken in church have been explanations. ‘If your faith were strong enough…’ ‘There must be a curse somewhere in the family…’ ‘Have you examined yourself?’

Job’s friends did the same thing. They sat with him in silence for seven days, which was wise, and then opened their mouths, which was not. God eventually rebuked them for speaking wrongly about Him.

Luke 1:6 is God’s answer to every careless explanation of Elizabeth’s pain. She was righteous. She was still waiting. Both were true at the same time.

> **LESSON FOR TODAY**
>
> Before you explain someone’s suffering, sit with them. Before you diagnose, comfort. You may be standing beside an Elizabeth whom God calls righteous.

Living Fully While Waiting

Zacharias was a priest. Year after year he travelled to Jerusalem to serve when his division was on duty. Elizabeth kept her home and kept her faith. They did not put their lives on hold until their prayer was answered.

That is a quiet but important lesson. Waiting does not have to suspend everything else. Some people stop living while they wait for marriage, for a child, for a visa, for the right job. Elizabeth and Zacharias kept walking with God, serving, worshipping, and living.

And then, one ordinary day of temple duty, the angel Gabriel appeared to Zacharias beside the altar of incense.

> *Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John.*
>
> **— Luke 1:13 (NKJV)**

Your prayer is heard. Many scholars think Zacharias had probably stopped praying that particular prayer years earlier. God had not stopped hearing it.

Zacharias doubted and was made mute until the birth. Elizabeth conceived, and she hid herself for five months, perhaps to savour privately what God had done before facing the public, perhaps to be sure it was real.

Rejoicing in Someone Else's Blessing

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, a young relative arrived from Nazareth. Mary was carrying the Messiah, and nobody in her town understood.

Elizabeth could have been jealous. She had waited a lifetime; this teenager had not waited at all. Instead, the old woman became the first person on earth to celebrate Mary's child.

> *And it happened, when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, that the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. Then she spoke out with a loud voice and said, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!"*
>
> **— Luke 1:41–42 (NKJV)**

> *Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord.*
>
> **— Luke 1:45 (NKJV)**

Elizabeth gave Mary what Nazareth would not: welcome, honour, and three months of shelter. The older woman who had known shame protected the younger woman who was facing it.

> *Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.*
>
> **— Romans 12:15 (NKJV)**

Rejoicing with others is harder than weeping with them. Weeping costs us sympathy. Rejoicing costs us pride. Elizabeth paid the price gladly.

‘No; He Shall Be Called John’

When the baby was born, her neighbours and relatives rejoiced with her. And on the eighth day, the family gathered to name the child. Anyone who has attended a naming ceremony in Africa knows what happened next. Everybody had an opinion.

The relatives had decided he would be called Zacharias, after his father. It was the sensible, traditional choice. Elizabeth spoke up.

> “*His mother answered and said, “No; he shall be called John.” But they said to her, “There is no one among your relatives who is called by this name.”*
>
> **— Luke 1:60–61 (NKJV)**

There is no one among your relatives who is called by this name. You can almost hear the uncles. The family turned to Zacharias, who was still mute. He asked for a writing tablet and wrote: ‘His name is John.’ And immediately his tongue was loosed.

There is a lesson here for parents. Elizabeth understood that this child did not exist to carry on the family’s expectations. He belonged to God’s purpose. A child’s future is not merely an extension of a parent’s ambition, or of the extended family’s plans.

A Life Seen More Clearly in Time

Elizabeth probably did not live to see John’s ministry at the Jordan, or his death in Herod’s prison. She was already old when he was born. She raised him, and then she slept, as all the faithful do, awaiting the resurrection.

But the value of her life became clearer with every passing year. The barren woman whose neighbours pitied her became the mother of the greatest prophet born of women, the one who prepared the way for the Messiah.

Scripture for Further Study

Luke 1:5–25; Luke 1:39–45; Luke 1:57–80; John 9:1–3; Romans 12:15; Philippians 4:11–13; Galatians 6:9–10.

Ten Questions for Self-Examination

Take your time. Answer honestly, before God, and write your answers down if you can.

1. Have I let one unmet desire overshadow everything good in my life?
2. Do I judge people by their circumstances instead of their character?
3. Can I rejoice with someone while honestly admitting my own disappointment?
4. What work or relationship have I neglected while waiting for something else?
5. When blessing comes, will it make me humbler and kinder?
6. Do I see my life as a failure because one area has 'ripened' later than other people's?
7. Have I ever interpreted someone's unanswered prayer as a sign of hidden sin in their life?
8. When a younger person receives the blessing I have waited for, can I greet them with joy as Elizabeth greeted Mary?
9. In my waiting, have I stayed faithful in my daily duties, as Zechariah kept serving in the temple?
10. Who around me is carrying a private reproach that I could help lift with kindness rather than questions?

Final Word

If your fruit is ripening slowly, do not let anyone pluck your dignity off the branch. God is not late. He is never late. Keep living faithfully in the meantime.

And when someone else's season comes before yours, be the Elizabeth who rejoices with them. There are few things more beautiful in the family of God than an older saint, who waited long, celebrating a younger one who did not.

> "*Thus the Lord has dealt with me, in the days when He looked on me, to take away my reproach among people.*
>
> **— Luke 1:25 (NKJV)**

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

Mary, the Mother of Jesus

Faith When the Future Is Uncertain

Anyone who has walked a village path at night, long before streetlights reached the countryside, knows that the moon does not show you the whole road to the market. It gives you just enough light for the next few steps: the stone ahead, the root across the path, the bend in the bush. You keep walking, and the light keeps showing you a little more.

Waiting at home until the whole road is lit means waiting for the sun, and some journeys cannot wait until morning.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, was a young woman in a small town when an angel brought her a message that would turn her life upside down. She did not receive a full map of what lay ahead: the whispers about her pregnancy, the flight to Egypt, the sword that would pierce her soul. She received just enough light for the next step, and she took it.

KEY SCRIPTURES

Luke 1:26–56; Matthew 1:18–25; Luke 2:1–52; John 2:1–12; John 19:25–27; Acts 1:12–14.

CENTRAL LESSON

Faith says yes to God without seeing the whole road. Humility, pondering, and perseverance keep us faithful when the calling becomes costly.

An Ordinary Girl in an Ordinary Town

Nazareth was not an important place. When Nathanael first heard of Jesus, his reaction was, 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?' It was a small Galilean town, the kind of place people come from rather than go to.

Mary was a young woman there, engaged to a carpenter named Joseph. She had no title, no wealth, and no platform. And one day the angel Gabriel appeared to her.

> "*Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!*
>
> **— Luke 1:28 (NKJV)**

> *But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was.*
>
> **— Luke 1:29 (NKJV)**

She was troubled. She considered. Mary's first response to the most extraordinary message ever given to a woman was not excitement or panic. It was thought.

Faith Without the Full Map

Gabriel told her she would conceive and bear a son, and call His name Jesus. He would be great, called the Son of the Highest, and His kingdom would have no end.

Mary asked one honest question.

> *How can this be, since I do not know a man?*
>
> **— Luke 1:34 (NKJV)**

That is not unbelief. Zechariah, when told of John's birth, asked for proof. Mary asked for understanding. There is a difference. God welcomes honest questions; what He resists is a heart that refuses to trust.

> *The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.*
>
> **— Luke 1:35 (NKJV)**

Gabriel did not give Mary a detailed plan. He did not tell her about Bethlehem, Egypt, Nazareth, the cross, or the empty tomb. He gave her enough light for the next step. And she took it.

Many of us are waiting for God to explain everything before we obey anything. Mary shows us another way. Faith does not require every detail in advance.

Humility Is Not Self-Contempt

When Mary visited Elizabeth, she broke into song, and her song tells us a great deal about her.

> *My soul magnifies the Lord, And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed.*
>
> **— Luke 1:46–48 (NKJV)**

Notice the balance. Mary called herself lowly. She also said all generations would call her blessed. She did not pretend to be nothing, and she did not make herself the centre. That is true humility: an honest view of ourselves in the light of God's goodness.

Some believers, especially women raised to be 'quiet', confuse humility with self-erasure. They believe being humble means never acknowledging any gift, any calling, any worth. Mary teaches otherwise. You can bow low before God and still know that He has done great things for you.

Obedience Amid Whispers

We must not forget what Mary's 'yes' cost her in that small town. An unmarried young woman, pregnant. Everyone could count to nine.

Even Joseph, a good man, initially planned to end the engagement.

> *Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly.*
>
> **— Matthew 1:19 (NKJV)**

God spoke to Joseph in a dream, and he took Mary as his wife. But the whispers in Nazareth likely never fully stopped. Years later, in an argument with Jesus, some of His opponents pointedly said, 'We were not born of fornication.' Many readers hear in that remark an echo of the old rumour.

Obedience to God does not always make us look respectable. Sometimes it makes us misunderstood. Mary's story assures us that being misjudged by people is not proof that we have missed God.

> **LESSON FOR TODAY**
>
> Do not treat misunderstanding from others as evidence that you are outside God's will. Obedience is sometimes lonely before it is vindicated.

A Heart That Ponders

After the shepherds came and went, telling everyone about the angels, Luke gives us a quiet sentence.

> *But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart.*
>
> **— Luke 2:19 (NKJV)**

Many of our grandmothers had this gift. You could tell them shocking news and they would not react immediately. They would sit, look at the floor, perhaps hum a little, and only after a long silence say something wise. That silence was not emptiness. It was pondering.

In a world of instant reactions, Mary's habit is a treasure. Not every experience must be posted, discussed, or explained at once. Some things are best kept and turned over slowly before God until their meaning becomes clear.

When the Calling Becomes Painful

When Mary and Joseph presented the baby in the temple, old Simeon blessed them, and then turned to Mary with a strange word.

> "
>
> *(Yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.*
>
> **— Luke 2:35 (NKJV)**

The joy of Bethlehem would one day become the agony of Golgotha. Mary did not get a calling without cost. She raised a son she could not fully understand. When He was twelve, He stayed behind in the temple, and after three days of frantic searching she said what every African mother has said at some point: 'Son, why have You done this to us?'

And she stayed faithful when it hurt most.

> "
>
> *Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother.*
>
> **— John 19:25 (NKJV)**

Most of the disciples had fled. His mother stood there. Even from the cross, Jesus thought of her, entrusting her to John: 'Woman, behold your son!' Faithfulness does not end when the calling stops being glorious.

Pointing Away From Herself

At the wedding in Cana, when the wine ran out, Mary brought the problem to Jesus. Then she turned to the servants and spoke the last recorded words of Mary in Scripture.

> "
>
> *His mother said to the servants, "Whatever He says to you, do it."*
>
> **— John 2:5 (NKJV)**

That is a perfect summary of Mary's life and message. Not 'look at me', but 'listen to Him'. She is honoured best not by being exalted above Scripture, but by doing what she said.

Part of the Praying Community

The last time we see Mary, she is not on a pedestal. She is in a room full of ordinary believers, praying.

> "*These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.*
>
> **— Acts 1:14 (NKJV)**

The mother of the Messiah took her place among the disciples, waiting for the promise of the Father. Faithful service is not a solo performance. It is lived among God's people.

Scripture for Further Study

Luke 1:26–56; Matthew 1:18–25; Luke 2:1–52; John 2:1–12; John 19:25–27; Acts 1:12–14; Proverbs 3:5–6; Philippians 2:3–8.

Ten Questions for Self-Examination

Take your time. Answer honestly, before God, and write your answers down if you can.

1. Am I waiting for complete certainty before I take the next right step?
2. Can I be humble without thinking of myself as worthless?
3. Do I give myself time to ponder before I react?
4. How do I respond when a calling I embraced becomes painful?
5. What can I do today that may bless people long after me?
6. Am I refusing to take the next step because God has not yet shown me the whole road?
7. Do I, like Mary, 'ponder' things in my heart, or do I react quickly and regret it later?
8. Have I treated misunderstanding from others as proof that I was not walking in God's will?
9. How do I respond when God's calling becomes painful rather than glorious?
10. Is there a young person in my church who has said 'yes' to God and needs an Elizabeth to encourage them?

Final Word

You do not need to see the end of the road to take the next step. Ask your honest questions. Ponder what God shows you. Then walk with the light you have.

And when the calling becomes costly, as it did for Mary, keep standing near the cross. The road ends, for all who follow Him faithfully, in the Kingdom of God, where the One she carried will reign forever.

> “
>
> *Then Mary said, “Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word.”*
>
> **— Luke 1:38 (NKJV)**

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

Anna the Prophetess

Faithfulness Through the Years

In many compounds across West Africa there is an old palm tree that has been there longer than anyone can remember. Its trunk is scarred and rough, and it leans a little now. Grandchildren who have grown up and moved to the city come home and find that it is still standing, and still producing palm fruit. The oil in the pot, the broom in the corner, and the palm wine at the naming ceremony may all have come from that same patient tree.

Scripture says the righteous shall flourish like a palm tree. It is a fitting picture. Palm trees do not rush, and they do not retire.

Anna was a widow of great age who had lived only seven years with her husband. For decades she served God with fasting and prayer in the temple. When the infant Jesus was carried in, she was there, and she recognised Him. Her story tells us that faithfulness does not expire with age.

KEY SCRIPTURES

Luke 2:22–38.

CENTRAL LESSON

Usefulness to God does not expire with age or loss. Faithful habits, patient expectation, and a word of hope for others remain valuable in every season.

A Woman of Great Age

Anna appears in just three verses. Luke gives her a short introduction, but every phrase is loaded.

> *Now there was one, Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity; and this woman was a widow of about eighty-four years, who did not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day.*
>
> **— Luke 2:36–37 (NKJV)**

A prophetess. From the tribe of Asher, one of the northern tribes long scattered by Assyria, yet her family had kept its line. Married only seven years before her husband died. A widow for decades, either until the age of eighty-four or for eighty-four years; the Greek can be read both ways. Either way, she was old. Very old.

And she did not retire.

Age Is Not the End of Usefulness

Our world worships youth. Advertisements, job vacancies, even some church programmes quietly assume that the most valuable people are under forty. Older people are honoured at birthdays and then gently moved to the back row.

Anna's story stands against that. In old age she was still a prophetess, still serving, still praying, still expecting. Her circumstances had changed. Her calling had not.

> "
>
> *Now also when I am old and grayheaded, O God, do not forsake me, Until I declare Your strength to this generation, Your power to everyone who is to come.*
>
> **— Psalm 71:18 (NKJV)**

Many of our churches would not survive without women like Anna. Every congregation seems to have one: the elderly mother who arrives before the pastor, who knows every member's name, who prays for each of them at five in the morning, and whom the young people call 'Mama Adura', mother of prayer. Her body is slower now. Her spiritual work is not.

> **LESSON FOR TODAY**
>
> Do not assume your ability to serve has ended because your season has changed. Ask God what faithfulness looks like for you now.

Ordinary Habits, Extraordinary Faithfulness

Fasting and prayers, night and day. There is nothing dramatic about that description. No miracles, no crowds, no famous sermons. Just habits, repeated year after year.

Faithfulness is rarely built in a single moment of decision. It is built in thousands of ordinary mornings when we choose to pray instead of scroll, to read the Scriptures instead of sleep a little longer, to show up again when nothing seems to be happening.

The rainforest does not become a forest in one rainy season. It becomes a forest one leaf, one ring of growth, one year at a time.

Grief That Became Devotion

Anna lost her husband after only seven years. We do not know what that loss did to her at first. But we know where it eventually led her: not into bitterness, but into the house of God.

Grief can harden or deepen us. Some widows and widowers close the door on life. Others, after a season of genuine mourning, discover a new kind of usefulness, a freedom to give themselves to God and to others in ways they never could before. Anna's loss did not erase her purpose. It redirected it.

This is not a call to rush anyone through grief. Mourning takes time, and the Bible honours it. But it is a reminder that loss does not have to be the final word on a life.

Waiting Is Not the Same as Giving Up

Anna was waiting. So was Simeon, who was described as 'waiting for the Consolation of Israel'. So were others in Jerusalem who 'looked for redemption'.

But Anna's waiting was active. She was not sitting in her house complaining about the state of the nation. She was in the temple, praying and fasting, keeping her heart ready.

> "
>
> *But those who wait on the LORD Shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary, They shall walk and not faint.*
>
> **— Isaiah 40:31 (NKJV)**

Passive resignation says, 'Nothing will change.' Patient expectation says, 'God will do what He promised, and I will be found faithful when He does.'

She Recognised Him, and She Told Others

When Mary and Joseph brought the infant Jesus to the temple, old Simeon took Him in his arms and blessed God. And at that very moment, Anna walked in.

> "
>
> *And coming in that instant she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem.*
>
> **— Luke 2:38 (NKJV)**

In that instant. Decades of faithfulness, and then perfect timing. Anna recognised in a poor couple's baby what the priests and scholars around her missed.

And she did not keep it to herself. She spoke of Him to everyone who was waiting. An old widow became one of the first people to announce the Messiah in Jerusalem.

Long walks with God sharpen our sight. Those who have prayed for years often recognise God's work before anyone else does.

A Quiet Legacy of Hope

Anna left no book, no building, no famous children. Her legacy was hope. She spent her life believing God would keep His word, and she lived to see the first light of its fulfilment.

She did not see the cross or the empty tomb. She sleeps now, awaiting the resurrection, when the One she held in the temple will return in glory. On that day, she will see the rest of the story.

Scripture for Further Study

Luke 2:22–38; Psalm 92:12–15; Isaiah 46:3–4; Titus 2:2–5; Romans 12:11–12; Hebrews 10:23–25.

Ten Questions for Self-Examination

Take your time. Answer honestly, before God, and write your answers down if you can.

1. Have I assumed my usefulness has ended because my season has changed?
2. Which ordinary daily habits are keeping my faith alive?
3. Can I make room for grief without concluding my future is worthless?
4. Am I waiting actively, or have I quietly given up?
5. What kind of hope am I passing on to the next generation?
6. Have I decided that my most useful years are behind me?
7. What daily habits are keeping my faith alive in this season, and which ones have I let slip?
8. Has a long sorrow made me bitter, or has it made me more attentive to God?
9. Am I still looking for the redemption God promised, or have I quietly stopped expecting anything?
10. Which younger person could benefit from the story of my long walk with God?

Final Word

If you are older, your prayers are not decorations on the church wall; they are part of the work. Keep praying, keep fasting, keep watching. God may yet walk in through the temple door in your lifetime.

If you are younger, honour the Annas around you. One day, when Christ returns with His saints and the dead in Christ rise first, many faithful old women whom the world forgot will be among the first to stand up.

> *They shall still bear fruit in old age; They shall be fresh and flourishing.*
>
> **— Psalm 92:14 (NKJV)**

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

The Samaritan Woman

Honest Encounters, Personal Transformation, and the Courage to Share

In the tropical noon sun, nobody with sense walks to the stream to fetch water. The heat bounces off the ground, the goats hide under the trucks, and even the lizards look for shade. Women fetch water early in the morning or in the cool of the evening, laughing and gossiping together on the way.

So if you see a lone woman walking to the well at noon, it is worth asking why. Sometimes the heat of the sun is easier to bear than the heat of other people's eyes.

The Samaritan woman came to Jacob's well at about the sixth hour, the middle of the day. There she found a tired Jewish man who asked her for a drink, broke several social rules in one sentence, and then told her everything she had ever done without despising her. She left her waterpot and ran to tell the whole town.

KEY SCRIPTURES

John 4:1–42

CENTRAL LESSON

An honest encounter with Jesus can heal shame, lift worship beyond arguments, and turn a person's story into an invitation for others.

A Journey Through Samaria

John records a simple sentence about Jesus' route from Judea to Galilee.

> "*But He needed to go through Samaria.*"
>
> — **John 4:4 (NKJV)**

Geographically, He did not have to. Many Jews took a longer road to avoid Samaria altogether. Jews and Samaritans had centuries of hostility between them: disputes over ancestry, worship, temples, and Scripture. Many Jews would not eat with Samaritans, drink from their vessels, or walk through their land if they could avoid it.

We know this kind of division. Tribes who will not intermarry. Neighbours who will not eat in each other's houses. Communities that remember a quarrel from three generations ago better than they remember last week. Into exactly that kind of division, Jesus deliberately walked.

A Tired Man at the Well

> "
>
> *Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied from His journey, sat thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour.*
>
> **— John 4:6 (NKJV)**

Jesus was tired. That detail matters. The One who would offer living water was Himself thirsty and worn out by the road. His disciples had gone into town to buy food.

Then a woman came to draw water, at noon, alone. And Jesus began the conversation with a simple request: 'Give Me a drink.'

> "
>
> *Then the woman of Samaria said to Him, "How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?" For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.*
>
> **— John 4:9 (NKJV)**

In one sentence, Jesus had crossed three barriers. He was a man speaking to a woman alone. He was a Jew speaking to a Samaritan. And He was a rabbi offering to drink from her cup. Good conversations often begin with an ordinary request and an open heart.

Living Water

> "
>
> *If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, "Give Me a drink," you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.*
>
> **— John 4:10 (NKJV)**

She took Him literally, as most of us would. 'Sir, You have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep.' Jesus pointed her beyond the bucket.

> "
>
> *Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst.*
>
> **— John 4:13–14 (NKJV)**

We spend our lives drawing from wells that never fully satisfy. Money, approval, relationships, achievement. Each one helps for a while. Then we are thirsty again.

Truth Without Contempt

Then Jesus said something that changed the direction of the conversation.

> *Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." The woman answered and said, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You have well said, 'I have no husband,' for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; in that you spoke truly."*
>
> **— John 4:16–18 (NKJV)**

We should be careful how we read this. Preachers often assume she was a woman of loose morals. Scripture does not say that. In that world, women could not easily divorce, but men could dismiss a wife for very little. Some of her husbands may have died. Some may have sent her away. Her present arrangement may have been the only security available to her. We do not know her whole story. Jesus did.

And notice how He handled it. He named the truth. He did not shame her. He even complimented her honesty twice: 'You have well said', 'you spoke truly'.

I know a woman who had been divorced twice. In her church, people were polite to her face and whispered behind her back. She stopped coming. Years later she joined another congregation where an older deaconess sat with her, heard her whole story, and said simply, 'God knows all of this, and He still wants you here.' She has been serving there ever since.

> **LESSON FOR TODAY**
>
> Truth spoken with love does not reduce people to their past. It opens a door to a new future.

Beyond Mountains and Traditions

Perhaps uncomfortable, the woman changed the subject to a religious debate.

> *Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship.*
>
> **— John 4:20 (NKJV)**

Every generation has its version of this argument. Which denomination. Which building. Which style. Jesus did not dismiss her question, but He lifted it higher.

> “But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him.
>
> — John 4:23 (NKJV)

God is not primarily looking for the right mountain. He is looking for true worshippers.

Questions on the Way to Faith

She said, ‘I know that Messiah is coming. When He comes, He will tell us all things.’ And Jesus made one of the clearest self-revelations in the Gospels.

> “Jesus said to her, “I who speak to you am He.”
>
> — John 4:26 (NKJV)

He told this to a Samaritan woman at noon before He told it so plainly to almost anyone else.

She left her waterpot and ran to town. Her message was not a polished sermon. It ended with a question: ‘Could this be the Christ?’ Honest questions are not the enemy of faith. Sometimes they are the road to it.

From Shame to Testimony

> “And many of the Samaritans of that city believed in Him because of the word of the woman who testified, “He told me all that I ever did.”
>
> — John 4:39 (NKJV)

The woman who had avoided her neighbours became the reason many of them believed. They begged Jesus to stay, and He stayed two days. And then they said something that every evangelist longs to hear.

> “Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard Him and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world.
>
> — John 4:42 (NKJV)

Her testimony brought them to Jesus. Jesus Himself made them believers. That is how it should be. Our part is to say ‘Come and see’. His part is to be seen.

Scripture for Further Study

Psalm 51:6; John 8:31–32; John 13:34–35; Acts 1:8; 1 Peter 3:15–16.

Ten Questions for Self-Examination

Take your time. Answer honestly, before God, and write your answers down if you can.

1. Do tribal, social, or religious prejudices stop me listening to certain people?
2. Can I face hard truths about my life without letting shame define me?
3. Is my worship about truth and spirit, or about mountains and traditions?
4. Can I share my faith honestly without pretending to know everything?
5. Whom could my story encourage to 'come and see'?
6. Am I avoiding people because of shame, choosing the 'noon' hours of life to stay out of sight?
7. Do I use religious arguments, as she did about mountains, to avoid letting God touch the real issue?
8. Whom have I written off because of their tribe, background, or marital history?
9. Have I ever left my 'waterpot', my ordinary preoccupation, because something about Jesus was more urgent?
10. Am I willing to let Jesus speak to the real story of my life, not just the respectable parts?

Final Word

Jesus still sits by wells at noon, waiting for people who think they are too stained to be welcomed. He knows everything you have done, and He is still offering you living water.

Drink. Then leave your waterpot, go back to the people you have been avoiding, and tell them simply what He has done for you. You do not need perfect theology. 'Come and see' is enough.

> *The woman then left her waterpot, went her way into the city, and said to the men, "Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?"*
>
> **— John 4:28–29 (NKJV)**

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

The Woman with the Issue of Blood

Faith, Dignity, and Healing Beyond Shame

Watch a young yam vine in the rainy season and you will see it searching. Its tender tip turns and stretches, feeling through the air until it touches the stake beside it. Once it touches, it wraps itself around and begins to climb towards the light. It does not need to grab the whole stake at once. One touch is enough to begin.

Reaching is sometimes the bravest thing a weak thing can do.

For twelve long years a woman had suffered from constant bleeding. Under the law she was considered unclean, which meant isolation, embarrassment, and exclusion from worship. She had spent all her money on doctors and grown worse. In a pressing crowd, she reached out and touched the hem of Jesus' garment.

KEY SCRIPTURES

Matthew 9:20–22; Mark 5:24–34; Luke 8:42–48.

CENTRAL LESSON

No one is too ashamed, too tired, or too long-suffering to come to Jesus. He restores not only the body, but dignity, peace, and belonging.

Twelve Long Years

Her story is told inside another story. Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue, had begged Jesus to come quickly because his twelve-year-old daughter was dying. Jesus went with him, and a great crowd pressed around them.

In that crowd was a woman who had been suffering for exactly as long as Jairus' daughter had been alive.

> "*Now a certain woman had a flow of blood for twelve years, and had suffered many things from many physicians. She had spent all that she had and was no better, but rather grew worse.*
>
> **— Mark 5:25–26 (NKJV)**

Twelve years. Twelve years of weakness, tiredness, and the constant inconvenience of a condition she could not control. While Jairus' daughter was growing up in a loving home, this woman was slowly wasting away.

Desperation That Cost Everything

She had suffered many things from many physicians. She had spent all she had. And she had grown worse.

Many Africans will recognise this story immediately. A long illness. First the hospital, then the bigger hospital. Then the herbalist. Then the prayer house where a prophet promises deliverance for a fee. Then another prophet, with a bigger fee. Then the 'special oil', the 'anointed handkerchief', the trip to a far-off camp. Some have sold shops, cars, and family jewellery chasing healing for a condition that a careful doctor could later treat simply and affordably.

Desperation makes us vulnerable to people who profit from our pain. This woman had been exploited by those who promised much and delivered nothing.

Unclean and Unseen

Her illness was not only physical. Under the law of Moses, a woman with a continuous flow of blood was ceremonially unclean, and anyone she touched became unclean too. For twelve years she could not freely worship at the temple. She could not embrace people without making them unclean. She lived on the margins, an untouchable in her own town.

That is why she came secretly. If anyone recognised her, she would be pushed away. She was not supposed to be in a crowd at all, and she was certainly not supposed to touch a rabbi.

A Reach of Faith

> "
>
> *When she heard about Jesus, she came behind Him in the crowd and touched His garment. For she said, "If only I may touch His clothes, I shall be made well."*
>
> **— Mark 5:27–28 (NKJV)**

Jewish men wore tassels on the corners of their garments, as the law commanded. Some have connected her reach with Malachi's promise that the Sun of Righteousness would arise with healing in His wings, a word that can also mean the corners of a garment.

Whatever was in her mind, her faith was simple and focused. Not 'if He lays hands on me'. Not 'if He notices me'. Just: *if only I may touch.*

> *Immediately the fountain of her blood was dried up, and she felt in her body that she was healed of the affliction.*
>
> **— Mark 5:29 (NKJV)**

Twelve years of failed treatment, ended in a moment.

> **LESSON FOR TODAY**
>
> Bring your need to Jesus, even if all you can manage is a small, trembling reach. He responds to faith, not to the size of the gesture.

Jesus Would Not Let Her Hide

She could have slipped away, healed and unnoticed. But Jesus stopped.

> *And Jesus, immediately knowing in Himself that power had gone out of Him, turned around in the crowd and said, "Who touched My clothes?"*
>
> **— Mark 5:30 (NKJV)**

His disciples could not believe the question.

> *But His disciples said to Him, "You see the multitude thronging You, and You say, 'Who touched Me?'"*
>
> **— Mark 5:31 (NKJV)**

You can almost hear Peter's tone. 'Master, it's like Oshodi market on a Saturday, and You want to know who touched You?' But Jesus kept looking around.

> *But the woman, fearing and trembling, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell down before Him and told Him the whole truth.*
>
> **— Mark 5:33 (NKJV)**

Why did Jesus insist? Not to embarrass her. Her healing had been private, but her shame had been public. Everyone in that town knew she was unclean. If she simply slipped away, she would still be treated as an outcast. Jesus called her forward so that everyone could hear Him declare her healed, and give her a name of honour that the whole crowd would remember.

Restored to Community

Jesus did not merely heal her body. He restored her place among people. After twelve years of being 'that unclean woman', she was publicly declared well, sent away in peace, and given a new identity.

Healing in the Bible is rarely just physical. Jesus heals relationships, dignity, and belonging too.

> "
> *Surely He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows.*
>
> **— Isaiah 53:4 (NKJV)**

Time for the Overlooked

Remember Jairus. While Jesus stopped for this woman, a messenger arrived from his house: 'Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?'

From a human point of view, the delay was disastrous. An important man's dying child versus a nameless, unclean woman who was already healed. Surely Jesus should have hurried on.

But Jesus had time for both. He turned to Jairus, said 'Do not be afraid; only believe,' went to the house, and raised the girl. The woman who had suffered twelve years and the girl who had lived twelve years were both restored on the same day.

Jesus is never too busy for the person everyone else overlooks.

Scripture for Further Study

Matthew 9:20–22; Mark 5:24–34; Luke 8:42–48; Leviticus 15:19–33; Psalm 34:17–18; Isaiah 53:4–5; Matthew 11:28–30; Hebrews 4:14–16.

Ten Questions for Self-Examination

Take your time. Answer honestly, before God, and write your answers down if you can.

1. What burden or shame have I carried alone for too long?
2. Have I made light of someone's long suffering because I could not see it?
3. What small act of faith is God inviting me to take today?
4. Do I believe Jesus wants to meet me personally in my weakness?
5. How can I make my church or family a place where hurting people keep their dignity?
6. Where do I need to receive His peace and remember that I belong to Him?

7. Is there a burden I have carried privately for so long that I have stopped expecting relief?
8. Have I minimised someone else's long-term suffering because I cannot see its full weight?
9. What small 'touch' of faith is God inviting me to make today?
10. Do I believe Jesus wants to meet me personally, not just heal my problem?

Final Word

However long you have suffered, reach out. You do not need to grab the whole stake; one touch of faith is enough to begin. And do not be afraid when He calls you forward. He is not exposing you. He is restoring you.

For every sickness not healed in this age, remember the promise of the Kingdom of God, where there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying, nor pain.

Jesus sees the pain you have hidden and calls you out of shame into peace.

> "*And He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace, and be healed of your affliction."*
>
> **— Mark 5:34 (NKJV)**

CHAPTER THIRTY

The Syrophoenician Woman

Persistent Faith and Courageous Advocacy

Anyone who has lived with goats knows how persistent they can be. Shoo a goat away from the kitchen door and it will stand at a respectful distance, chew thoughtfully, wait until you turn around, and then come right back. Close the door and it will push its nose through the gap. Goats are not rude, exactly. They are simply convinced there is something good inside.

There is a kind of persistence that is born not from pride but from need and hope.

A Gentile woman from the region of Tyre and Sidon came to Jesus crying out for her daughter, who was severely tormented. At first He answered her not a word. The disciples wanted her sent away. When He spoke of the children's bread, she replied with humble, brilliant faith: even the little dogs eat the crumbs.

KEY SCRIPTURES

Matthew 15:21–28; Mark 7:24–30.

CENTRAL LESSON

Faith does not always get an immediate answer, but humble, persistent trust keeps seeking God, especially on behalf of those we love.

A Foreign Mother in Distress

Jesus had withdrawn to the region of Tyre and Sidon, Gentile territory on the Mediterranean coast. He was trying to rest.

> "*And He entered a house and wanted no one to know it, but He could not be hidden.*
>
> **— Mark 7:24 (NKJV)**

Somebody always finds out. A mother with a desperate need will find a doctor's house even on his day off.

> *And behold, a woman of Canaan came from that region and cried out to Him, saying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed."*
>
> **— Matthew 15:22 (NKJV)**

Matthew calls her a Canaanite, a name loaded with centuries of hostility. Mark calls her a Greek, a Syrophoenician by birth. Either way, she was an outsider. And yet she called Jesus 'Son of David', a title many in Israel refused to give Him.

She did not come for herself. She came carrying her daughter's pain.

When God Seems Silent

> *But He answered her not a word. And His disciples came and urged Him, saying, "Send her away, for she cries out after us."*
>
> **— Matthew 15:23 (NKJV)**

He answered her not a word. Few experiences are harder in prayer than silence. We cry out, and nothing seems to happen. No answer. No sign.

And the disciples made it worse. 'Send her away; she is making noise.' To them she was an embarrassment, a nuisance, a problem to be removed.

Desperate people are often treated as interruptions. The woman in the hospital corridor asking the same question again. The father who keeps visiting the school about his child. The widow who keeps coming back to the government office. It is easy to wish them away. It is far better to see them.

Humility and Boldness Together

Jesus then spoke, though not yet to her directly.

> *But He answered and said, "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."*
>
> **— Matthew 15:24 (NKJV)**

His primary mission at that point was to Israel. The woman heard it. And she did not leave.

> *Then she came and worshiped Him, saying, "Lord, help me!"*
>
> **— Matthew 15:25 (NKJV)**

Three words. No argument. No complaint. Just worship and a plea.

> *But He answered and said, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs."*
>
> **— Matthew 15:26 (NKJV)**

These words sound harsh to our ears. The word Jesus used was the diminutive, 'little dogs', the household puppies rather than wild street dogs. Many readers sense that Jesus was testing her faith, perhaps even inviting her to answer. And she did, with one of the most brilliant replies in Scripture. Yes, Lord. Yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.

She did not argue with His mission. She did not demand equal treatment. She simply pointed out that there was enough bread in God's house for crumbs to fall. And a crumb from Jesus would be enough.

Persistence Rewarded

> *Then Jesus answered and said to her, "O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire." And her daughter was healed from that very hour.*
>
> **— Matthew 15:28 (NKJV)**

Great is your faith. Jesus said that to very few people. Once to a Roman centurion. Once to this Canaanite mother. Both were outsiders.

I know a mother whose son was born with a learning disability. School after school turned him away. Officials told her there was 'no provision'. Teachers told her to keep him at home. She kept coming back, politely, persistently, with letters, with reports, with her son's hand in hers. Eventually a head teacher said, 'Bring him on Monday. We will find a way.' Today he reads, writes, and works in a printing press. She says the hardest part was not the rejection. It was refusing to go home.

> *Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart.*
>
> **— Luke 18:1 (NKJV)**

> **LESSON FOR TODAY**
>
> Keep coming back with your need, especially when it is for someone you love. Silence is not always refusal, and persistence is not always rudeness.

A Wider Mercy

This woman's story was a preview of what was coming. After the resurrection, the gospel would go out to every nation, including the people of Tyre and Sidon, and the people of Africa. God's mercy was never meant to stay behind ethnic walls.

> "*For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations.*
>
> **— Isaiah 56:7 (NKJV)**

Great Faith Where Nobody Expected It

Matthew places this story with deliberate care. Just one chapter earlier, Peter walked on the water, looked at the wind, began to sink, and heard Jesus say:

> "*O you of little faith, why did you doubt?*
>
> **— Matthew 14:31 (NKJV)**

Now a Canaanite mother, who had never walked with Jesus, never heard the Sermon on the Mount, and never seen the feeding of the five thousand, hears the opposite: *great is your faith.* The insiders were struggling to trust. The outsider would not let go.

Tyre and Sidon had a long history in Scripture, much of it dark. It was the land of Jezebel and of Baal worship. Yet it was also the region of the widow of Zarephath who fed Elijah, and Jesus once said that if His mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago.

We should be careful about deciding in advance where great faith will be found. It may be in the visiting mother at the back of the church, the stranger from another tribe, the person nobody expected. God's mercy keeps surprising His own people.

Scripture for Further Study

Matthew 15:21–28; Mark 7:24–30; Psalm 34:17–18; Isaiah 56:6–8; Matthew 7:7–11; Luke 18:1–8; Romans 10:12–13; Hebrews 4:14–16.

Ten Questions for Self-Examination

Take your time. Answer honestly, before God, and write your answers down if you can.

1. Whom have I grown weary of bringing to God in prayer?
2. How do I respond when prayer seems to meet silence?
3. Have others' discouragement or prejudice silenced my prayers?
4. Do I come to God with both humility and confidence in His mercy?
5. Have I treated someone as an interruption when they genuinely needed help?
6. How can I become a more patient advocate for people who are suffering?
7. Have I grown tired of bringing a loved one's need before God?
8. When God seems silent, do I conclude that He has said no?
9. Have other people's discouragement or prejudice silenced my prayers?
10. Do I treat desperate people as interruptions, as the disciples did?

Final Word

Keep coming back to the door. God is not irritated by the persistence of a parent who loves a child. He is moved by it.

Even His crumbs are enough, and He has far more than crumbs for those who seek Him. Do not let silence, delay, or the disciples' impatience send you home before He answers.

Persistent faith keeps returning to the mercy of Jesus.

> "*And she said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table."*
>
> **— Matthew 15:27 (NKJV)**

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

Martha and Mary of Bethany

Service, Attention, and Faith Through Grief

A fast-flowing stream is wonderful. It turns the water wheel, washes the cassava, and carries leaves down to the river. But if you lean over a rushing stream to look at the sky, you will see nothing but ripples. Further downstream, where the water slows into a quiet pool, you can see the clouds, the trees, and on a clear night even the moon reflected perfectly.

Both kinds of water are useful. The trouble begins when the stream thinks it must never slow down.

Every African party has a Martha. She is in the kitchen with three pots on the fire, sweating, organising, and listening to the laughter from the parlour with growing irritation. Martha and Mary of Bethany were both friends of Jesus. Their story is not a contest between a good sister and a bad sister, but a gentle lesson about service, attention, grief, and faith.

KEY SCRIPTURES

Luke 10:38–42; John 11:1–44; John 12:1–8.

CENTRAL LESSON

Service is good, but it must never crowd out sitting at Jesus' feet. Faith makes room for practical care, attentive listening, honest grief, and resurrection hope.

A Home Jesus Loved

Bethany was a village about two miles from Jerusalem, and in Bethany there was a house where Jesus was always welcome. It belonged to two sisters, Martha and Mary, and their brother Lazarus. John tells us something lovely about that household.

> *Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.*
>
> **— John 11:5 (NKJV)**

This was not a household Jesus visited out of duty. These were His friends. And their story, told across three Gospel scenes, is one of the most human in the New Testament.

The Kitchen and the Floor

> *And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word. But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me."*
>
> **— Luke 10:39–40 (NKJV)**

Every African woman who has hosted a large gathering knows exactly how Martha felt. Thirteen hungry men had arrived. Probably more. The jollof would not cook itself. And there, sitting on the floor in the parlour, completely relaxed, was her sister.

Martha did not speak to Mary. She went over Mary's head and spoke to Jesus. 'Lord, do You not care?' That is the voice of a tired, overlooked, slightly resentful servant. Many of us have used it.

> *And Jesus answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her."*
>
> **— Luke 10:41–42 (NKJV)**

Jesus said her name twice. Gently. He did not condemn her cooking. Somebody had to feed the guests. But He saw that her service had become worry, and her worry had become a complaint against her sister.

Good work can become a distraction. Choir practice, committee meetings, building projects, endless church programmes: all good, and all capable of pushing out the one thing needed, which is time at Jesus' feet.

> **LESSON FOR TODAY**
>
> Serve with your whole heart, but do not let serving crowd out listening. When your service starts producing resentment, it is time to sit down.

Listening Is Not Laziness

Mary was not being idle. In that culture, sitting at a teacher's feet was the posture of a disciple. Jesus was affirming Mary's right to learn, a significant thing for a woman in that world.

Listening is part of love. Spouses need to be heard. Children need to be heard. Friends in trouble need to be heard. And above all, we need to hear the Word of God before we rush off to do things for Him.

When Jesus Delayed

Some time later, Lazarus fell sick. The sisters sent a message.

> *Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick.*
>
> **— John 11:3 (NKJV)**

They did not even ask Him to come. They assumed love would be enough to bring Him running. And then came one of the most puzzling verses in the Gospels.

> *So, when He heard that he was sick, He stayed two more days in the place where He was.*
>
> **— John 11:6 (NKJV)**

John deliberately connects it to the previous verse. Jesus loved them. So He stayed. His delay was not indifference. It was love with a larger plan.

Before He set out, Jesus told His disciples something important.

> *Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up.*
>
> **— John 11:11 (NKJV)**

The disciples misunderstood, so Jesus spoke plainly: 'Lazarus is dead.' But notice His first description. Death, for those who belong to God, is sleep. Lazarus had not gone off somewhere else. He was asleep in the tomb, waiting for the voice that would wake him.

Faith and Grief in the Same Heart

By the time Jesus arrived, Lazarus had been in the tomb four days. Martha went out to meet Him. Mary stayed in the house.

> *Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.*
>
> **— John 11:21 (NKJV)**

Both sisters would say those exact words. It was honest grief, with a little reproach in it. And Jesus did not rebuke either of them.

Then Martha, the busy, practical sister often dismissed by preachers, made one of the clearest confessions of faith in the whole Gospel.

> "Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world."
>
> — John 11:27 (NKJV)

Never reduce a person to one bad afternoon in the kitchen. The same Martha who complained in Luke 10 stands as a confessor of faith in John 11.

When Mary came and fell at His feet weeping, and Jesus saw the mourners weeping with her, He was deeply moved.

> "Jesus wept."
>
> — John 11:35 (NKJV)

The shortest verse in the Bible may be one of the most comforting. Jesus knew He was about to raise Lazarus. He wept anyway. Grief is not a failure of faith. Even the Son of God cried at a graveside.

And then, at the tomb, Martha was Martha again.

> "Martha, the sister of him who was dead, said to Him, "Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days."
>
> — John 11:39 (NKJV)

You have to smile. Faith and practicality in the same woman, at the same moment. Jesus reminded her of His promise, the stone was rolled away, and He called, 'Lazarus, come forth!' And the man who was sleeping woke up.

Love Expressed While There Is Time

Six days before the Passover, the family gave a supper for Jesus. And again, each sister was perfectly herself.

> "There they made Him a supper; and Martha served... Then Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil.
>
> — John 12:2–3 (NKJV)

Martha served. Nobody rebuked her this time. Mary poured out perfume worth a year's wages. Judas complained. Jesus defended her: she had done it for His burial.

Mary seemed to understand what the disciples did not. Time was short. She expressed her love while she still could. How many of us have stood at a funeral wishing we had said 'thank you' or 'I love you' while the person could still hear it?

Both Sisters Were Needed

The story of Martha and Mary is not a contest. Practical service and devotion are not enemies. The kingdom needs both the kitchen and the floor, both the hands that cook and the hearts that listen. The danger comes when either one despises the other, or when service forgets the One it serves.

Scripture for Further Study

Luke 10:38–42; John 11:1–44; John 12:1–8; Ecclesiastes 3:1–8; Proverbs 18:13; Romans 12:10–15; Galatians 6:2; Philippians 4:6–7.

Ten Questions for Self-Examination

Take your time. Answer honestly, before God, and write your answers down if you can.

1. Have my duties become so heavy that I neglect the people closest to me?
2. Do I compare my contribution with others' and quietly resent them?
3. Do I listen properly before I give advice?
4. Have I treated grief or hard questions as a sign of weak faith?
5. What expression of love or gratitude have I been postponing?
6. How can I balance service, stillness, relationships, and rest more wisely?
7. Has my busyness for God quietly replaced my time with God?
8. Do I resent people who seem to be 'sitting down' while I am working, without knowing what they carry?
9. When was the last time I was still enough to reflect the sky?
10. In my grief, can I say with Martha, 'Lord, if You had been here,' and still believe that He is the resurrection and the life?

Final Word

Serve with all your heart, but do not lose the good part. Somewhere in every busy week, find your way back to the floor at Jesus' feet.

And when death touches your home, hold on to Martha's confession. Our loved ones who sleep in Christ are not lost. Jesus called Lazarus' death sleep, and He woke him. The same voice will one day wake all His people, when the trumpet sounds and the dead in Christ rise first.

> "
>
> *Martha said to Him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live."*
>
> **— John 11:24–25 (NKJV)**

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

Mary Magdalene

Freedom, Faithful Devotion, and Witness to the Resurrection

In the village, the people who see the sunrise first are the ones who did not go back to sleep. The cockerel has crowed, the sky is still dark, and most people have rolled over for one more hour. But someone is already up, sweeping the compound, lighting the fire, or walking to the stream, and that person sees the first light break over the hills.

Those who stay through the darkness are the first to see the dawn.

Mary Magdalene had been freed by Jesus from seven demons. She followed Him, supported His ministry from her own resources, stood near the cross when most disciples had fled, watched where He was buried, and came to the tomb while it was still dark. She became the first person to see the risen Christ and the first sent to announce His resurrection.

KEY SCRIPTURES

Luke 8:1–3; Matthew 27:55–61; Matthew 28:1–10; Mark 15:40–47; Mark 16:1–11; John 19:25; John 20:1–18.

CENTRAL LESSON

A life transformed by Christ becomes a life of devotion, faithful presence, and bold witness. Those He restores are not defined by their past.

Freed From Seven Demons

Mary Magdalene, Mary from the town of Magdala on the Sea of Galilee, is one of the most frequently misunderstood women in the Bible.

For centuries, many people have believed she was a former prostitute. Scripture never says so. That idea came from a sixth-century sermon that mixed her up with other women in the Gospels. What Scripture does tell us is this:

> *"And certain women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities—Mary called Magdalene, out of whom had come seven demons, and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others who provided for Him from their substance.*
>
> **— Luke 8:2–3 (NKJV)**

Seven demons. We are not told what that looked like. But it describes a life of deep torment and bondage. Whatever she had suffered, Jesus set her free.

We should be careful not to add to people's stories what God has not said. Mary Magdalene has carried a false label for centuries. How many people around us carry labels that are equally untrue?

Gratitude Turned Into Service

Mary did not simply thank Jesus and go home. She followed Him. And she, along with other women, provided for His ministry from her own resources.

That tells us something about Mary. She had means, and she put them at His disposal. Jesus and His disciples needed food, lodging, and support as they travelled, and women like Mary made that possible.

Most churches have someone like this: a man who spent years bound by alcohol, who lost his job and nearly lost his marriage. When God set him free, he did not just stop drinking. Now he is the first to arrive, setting up chairs, and the last to leave. Ask him why, and he will tell you he has been given too much to give only a little.

Those who have been forgiven much often love much.

She Stayed When Others Ran

When Jesus was arrested, the disciples scattered. Peter denied Him three times. But at the cross, Mark records who was still there.

> "
>
> *There were also women looking on from afar, among whom were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the Less and of Joses, and Salome.*
>
> **— Mark 15:40 (NKJV)**

She stayed through the agony, the mocking, and the death. And when the body was taken down, she followed to see where they laid Him.

> "
>
> *And Mary Magdalene was there, and the other Mary, sitting opposite the tomb.*
>
> **— Matthew 27:61 (NKJV)**

Faithfulness is not proven when things go well. It is proven when everything falls apart, and you stay anyway.

LESSON FOR TODAY

Stay close to Jesus, and to His suffering people, even when everything seems lost. Faithful presence in the dark is a powerful form of love.

Grief Did Not Keep Her Away

> *Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb.*
>
> **— John 20:1 (NKJV)**

She went to do the last thing she could do for Him: care for His body. She found the tomb open and the body gone. She ran to tell Peter and John, who came, looked, and went home. Mary stayed, weeping.

Two angels asked her why she was crying.

> *Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him.*
>
> **— John 20:13 (NKJV)**

Then she turned and saw a man standing there. He asked her the same question: 'Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?' And she, supposing Him to be the gardener, asked where He had put the body.

There is gentle humour and great tenderness here. The risen Lord of the universe was standing in front of her, and she mistook Him for the groundsman. Grief can blind us to the very answer we are seeking.

Called by Name

> *Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to Him, "Rabboni!" (which is to say, Teacher).*
>
> **— John 20:16 (NKJV)**

One word. Her name. Spoken the way only He had ever spoken it. And everything changed.

Jesus then gave her a commission.

> "Go to My brethren and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.'"
>
> — John 20:17 (NKJV)

My Father and your Father, My God and your God. The risen Christ placed Himself alongside His disciples before the One God and Father of them all. And He entrusted that message first to a woman whom many had once looked down upon.

First Witness to the Resurrection

In that culture, a woman's testimony was often not accepted in court. And indeed, when the women first reported what they had seen, the apostles did not believe them.

> "And their words seemed to them like idle tales, and they did not believe them.
>
> — Luke 24:11 (NKJV)

Yet God chose women to be the first witnesses of the most important event in history. That was not an accident.

The resurrection of Jesus is the foundation of our hope. Because He rose, those who sleep in Him will rise too.

> "But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.
>
> — 1 Corinthians 15:20 (NKJV)

A Transformed Life Is Not a Lesser Life

Mary Magdalene's story proves that a painful past does not disqualify anyone from God's service. The woman once bound by seven demons became the first herald of the risen Christ. Whatever your story, it is not too dark for His light.

Scripture for Further Study

Luke 8:1–3; Matthew 27:55–61; Matthew 28:1–10; Mark 16:1–11; John 20:1–18; Psalm 40:1–3; Isaiah 61:1–3; Romans 8:1–2; 2 Corinthians 5:17.

Ten Questions for Self-Examination

Take your time. Answer honestly, before God, and write your answers down if you can.

1. Has an old label defined me more than God's grace has?
2. How can my gratitude to Christ become practical service?
3. Do I stay faithful when I am grieving and confused, or only when life makes sense?
4. Where do I need to bring my sorrow honestly to Jesus?
5. What has God done in my life that I can share humbly and boldly?
6. How can I honour people whose past has made others overlook them?
7. Am I still following Jesus in the dark seasons, or only when the sun is shining?
8. Has gratitude for what God has done for me become practical generosity?
9. Do I stay near people when their situation looks hopeless, or do I run like most of the disciples?
10. Is there a message about Jesus I have seen for myself but have not yet told anyone?

Final Word

Christ's resurrection is the foundation of our hope. Because He lives, those who sleep in Him will rise.

The same Jesus who called Mary by name in the garden will one day call all His people from their graves, and His feet will stand again on the Mount of Olives. Until then, stay near Him through the dark. The dawn is coming, and those who stay are the first to see it.

The grace that sets you free can also send you forth with purpose.

> "*Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that He had spoken these things to her.*
>
> **— John 20:18 (NKJV)**

PART SIX

Women of the Early Church

Acts and the Epistles

Servants, hosts, teachers, and mothers in the faith who carried the gospel forward.

Tabitha
Lois and Eunice
Lydia
Priscilla
Phoebe
Euodia and Syntyche

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

Tabitha

Practical Love, Generous Service, and a Legacy of Care

In the north of Nigeria, when the cotton bolls split open, the fields look as if a light snow has fallen on them. That soft white fibre is picked, spun, woven, and dyed, and in time it becomes the cloth that covers a newborn, dresses a bride, and wraps a grandmother against the harmattan cold. Few people who wear the cloth think about the plant, but everybody benefits from it.

Some lives are like cotton: quietly useful, and woven into everyone else's comfort.

Tabitha, also called Dorcas, lived in Joppa and was full of good works and charitable deeds. When she died, the widows gathered in her room, weeping and showing Peter the tunics and garments she had made for them. Her ministry was a needle, thread, and an open heart.

KEY SCRIPTURES

Acts 9:36–42.

CENTRAL LESSON

A faithful life is measured less by public recognition than by tangible love. Mercy, generosity, and practical service leave a legacy that strengthens a whole community.

A Disciple With a Needle

Joppa was a busy port on the Mediterranean coast, the same town where Jonah once boarded a ship to run from God. In the early church, Joppa had a disciple whose ministry was far less dramatic than Jonah's, and far more faithful.

Luke calls her a disciple, the only time in the New Testament that the feminine form of that word is used. Her Aramaic name was Tabitha; in Greek, Dorcas. Both mean 'gazelle'.

And Luke tells us what she was known for: good works and charitable deeds. Not words about good works. Good works.

> "*For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.*

— Ephesians 2:10 (NKJV)

Love You Could Wear

Tabitha's ministry was sewing. She made tunics and garments, apparently for the widows of Joppa. In a port town, many women would have lost husbands at sea. With no pensions and few protections, widows were among the poorest people in the community.

Tabitha saw them, and she reached for her needle and thread.

In many towns there is a seamstress who, every year before school resumes, quietly sews uniforms for children whose parents cannot afford them. She uses offcuts from paying customers and buys extra cloth from her own small profit. She never announces it in church. But somewhere, young men and women who are now graduates first walked into a classroom in a uniform she made. She is a Tabitha.

That is Tabitha. Her love was practical. You could wear it.

> "*Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.*
>
> — James 1:27 (NKJV)

LESSON FOR TODAY

Use whatever skill God has given you, needle, pot, pen, or toolbox, to meet real needs. Practical service is worship.

A Community That Felt the Loss

> "*But it happened in those days that she became sick and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room.*
>
> — Acts 9:37 (NKJV)

The believers did not rush to bury her. They washed her body and laid her in an upper room, and then they sent two men to Lydda, where Peter was staying, begging him not to delay.

When Peter arrived, he walked into a room full of grief.

> *And all the widows stood by him weeping, showing the tunics and garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them.*
>
> **— Acts 9:39 (NKJV)**

Picture it. The widows did not give speeches. They simply held up their clothes. This tunic. This shawl. This dress for my daughter. Their grief was written in cloth.

What will people hold up when we are gone? Certificates? Titles? Or the things our love made for them?

Grief That Acts

The believers in Joppa did not respond to death with passive despair. They sent for help. They acted in hope, even when they could not see what God would do.

That is still the calling of the church when loss comes: to gather, to care for the body, to support the bereaved, and to bring the situation before God.

'Tabitha, Arise'

> *But Peter put them all out, and knelt down and prayed. And turning to the body he said, "Tabitha, arise." And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up.*
>
> **— Acts 9:40 (NKJV)**

Peter did exactly what he had seen Jesus do in Jairus' house: he sent the mourners out, prayed, and spoke to the dead. Jesus had said, 'Talitha, cumi', little girl, arise. Peter said, 'Tabitha, arise.'

Tabitha woke up. Peter called the believers and the widows and presented her alive.

> *And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed on the Lord.*
>
> **— Acts 9:42 (NKJV)**

We must handle this miracle as we handle the others. Not every faithful servant is raised in this life. Tabitha herself would later die again. Her raising was a sign, a foretaste of the resurrection that God has promised to all who sleep in Christ at His return.

Service Is Not Second-Class Spirituality

Some believers quietly rank ministries. Preaching at the top. Prophecy close behind. Singing somewhere in the middle. Cooking, cleaning, and sewing near the bottom.

Scripture does not share that ranking. Jesus said that on the day of judgment, the righteous will be those who fed the hungry and clothed the naked.

> *I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.*
>
> **— Matthew 25:36 (NKJV)**

> *Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.*
>
> **— Galatians 6:10 (NKJV)**

What Happened Next in Joppa

After raising Tabitha, Peter did not hurry back to Jerusalem. Luke adds a small detail.

> *So it was that he stayed many days in Joppa with Simon, a tanner.*
>
> **— Acts 9:43 (NKJV)**

Tanners worked with the skins of dead animals, a trade many devout Jews considered unclean. Peter was already being stretched. And it was on the roof of that tanner's house in Joppa that Peter saw the vision of the sheet let down with animals of every kind, the vision that prepared him to go to the house of Cornelius, a Roman centurion, and open the door of the gospel to the Gentiles.

Think of the chain. A seamstress serves widows. She dies. The church sends for Peter. Peter stays in Joppa. In Joppa, God prepares him for the Gentile mission. And through that mission, the gospel eventually reaches people like us.

Tabitha never knew how her life fitted into that story. We rarely know how our faithfulness fits into God's larger plan. Sew the tunic anyway. Serve the widow anyway. God is weaving more than cloth.

Scripture for Further Study

Acts 9:36–42; Proverbs 19:17; Isaiah 58:6–10; Matthew 25:31–40; Galatians 6:9–10; James 1:27; James 2:14–17; 1 John 3:16–18.

Ten Questions for Self-Examination

Take your time. Answer honestly, before God, and write your answers down if you can.

1. What practical gift has God placed in my hands?
2. Which need in my community have I noticed but not acted on?
3. Do I value practical service as highly as public ministry?
4. How can I give more consistent support to the vulnerable and grieving?
5. What legacy are my everyday choices building?
6. How can I help my church care for people in both joyful and hard seasons?
7. What 'needle and thread' has God placed in my hands for the good of others?
8. If I died this week, what would the widows of my community hold up to show?
9. Do I value practical service as highly as preaching, singing, and public ministry?
10. Is there someone vulnerable I noticed months ago but have not yet helped?

Final Word

Tabitha now sleeps, awaiting the resurrection. Her raising in Joppa was a foretaste of a greater day, when Christ comes with His saints and the faithful are raised to live in the Kingdom of God.

Until then, keep sewing, keep serving, keep clothing others with love. When you are gone, let the people you served have something to hold up.

Love becomes unforgettable when it takes practical form in another person's need.

> "*At Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas. This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did.*
>
> **— Acts 9:36 (NKJV)**

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

Lois and Eunice

The Quiet Strength of Generational Faith

In many family compounds there is a mango tree that Grandma planted long ago. You have eaten from it since you were small. One day, you took a seed from that tree and planted it in your own compound in the city. Now your children climb that new tree, eat its fruit, and spit the seeds on the ground, where, who knows, another tree may grow.

The fruit your grandchildren eat may come from a seed your grandmother planted.

Paul reminds Timothy that his genuine faith first lived in his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice. Timothy's father was a Greek, and the household was not perfect. But two women quietly taught a boy the Scriptures from childhood, and that boy became one of the most trusted leaders of the early church.

KEY SCRIPTURES

Acts 16:1–3; 2 Timothy 1:3–7; 2 Timothy 3:14–17.

CENTRAL LESSON

Faith is often formed at home through sincere example, steady teaching, and patient love. Quiet influence can shape generations.

A Boy From a Mixed Home

When Paul arrived in Lystra on his second missionary journey, he met a young disciple.

> *Then he came to Derbe and Lystra. And behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a certain Jewish woman who believed, but his father was Greek.*
>
> **— Acts 16:1 (NKJV)**

His mother was a Jewish believer. His father was a Greek, apparently not a believer. Timothy had not been circumcised as a child, which suggests that his father's influence in religious matters was significant. It was not the ideal home many of us picture when we think of raising a godly child.

Yet Timothy was already a disciple, and well spoken of by the believers in two towns. Somebody had been planting seeds.

Sincere Faith That Lived at Home

Years later, Paul wrote to Timothy and named the planters: Lois, his grandmother, and Eunice, his mother. Paul described their faith as genuine, literally 'unhypocritical'. It was not a Sabbath performance. It was real, every day of the week.

Children are excellent detectors of hypocrisy. They notice when the prayer at church does not match the shouting at home. They notice when Mummy sings about generosity and then quarrels with the gate man over twenty naira. Lois and Eunice's faith was believable, because it was lived.

The Scriptures From Childhood

> *But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.*
>
> **— 2 Timothy 3:14–15 (NKJV)**

From childhood. Lois and Eunice did not wait for Timothy to be 'old enough'. They taught him the Scriptures as a small boy.

Across much of Africa, grandmothers have always been teachers. In the evening, by moonlight or lamplight, children gathered around them for stories, riddles, proverbs, and songs. Many of us learned our first lessons about courage, honesty, and respect sitting on a grandmother's mat. Lois and Eunice did the same, but their stories were Abraham, Joseph, Ruth, and David.

> *And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.*
>
> **— Deuteronomy 6:6–7 (NKJV)**

LESSON FOR TODAY

Teach the Scriptures in ordinary moments: at meals, on the way to school, at bedtime. Faith is caught as much as it is taught.

Faithful in a Complicated Family

Lois and Eunice did not have a perfect setting. They could not control everything in their household. But they were faithful with what they could influence.

Many believing mothers and grandmothers today live in similar homes: a husband who does not share their faith, a family that mocks church, a culture pulling in other directions. Their story is an encouragement. You do not need a perfect home to raise a faithful child. You need sincere faith, patient teaching, and trust in God.

Preparing for a Calling They Could Not See

When Lois rocked baby Timothy, she could not have imagined that he would one day travel with the apostle Paul, lead the church in Ephesus, and receive two letters that would become part of Scripture.

Paul trusted Timothy more than almost anyone.

> “
> *For I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state.*
>
> **— Philippians 2:20 (NKJV)**

That sincere care for others was the same sincerity Paul had seen in Lois and Eunice. The fruit had grown true to the tree.

Faith Must Become Personal

Yet Paul also told Timothy that the faith which dwelt first in his grandmother and mother was now in him also. Faith can be taught, but it cannot be inherited like a house. Each generation must make it their own.

> “
> *Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.*
>
> **— 1 Timothy 4:12 (NKJV)**

Parents and grandparents plant and water. God gives the increase. And each child must eventually stand before God on their own feet.

A Legacy Beyond a Lifetime

Imagine inheriting your grandmother's Bible. Its pages are soft and torn, held together with tape. In the margins are dates and short notes: the day your father was born, the day she prayed for your mother's safe delivery, and, near the back, your own name, with the words 'Lord, keep this one for Yourself'. Countless believers owe more than they know to prayers like that.

> "
>
> *We will not hide them from their children, Telling to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, And His strength and His wonderful works that He has done.*
>
> **— Psalm 78:4 (NKJV)**

Faith Raised in a Hard Town

Lystra was not an easy place to be a believer. When Paul first preached there, the crowds tried to worship him as a god. Within days, they were persuaded to turn on him.

Then Jews from Antioch and Iconium arrived, stirred up the crowds, and they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, thinking he was dead. The disciples gathered around him, and he got up and went back into the city.

Timothy was most likely a boy or young man in Lystra at the time. Years later, Paul reminded him of it.

> "
>
> *But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra—what persecutions I endured. And out of them all the Lord delivered me.*
>
> **— 2 Timothy 3:10–11 (NKJV)**

Lois and Eunice raised a faithful son in a town that stoned apostles. They did not wait for a friendly environment. Many African parents today raise children amid hostility, insecurity, mockery of faith, or simply a culture that has other priorities. Lois and Eunice show that a sincere home can still produce a steady believer, even in a hard town.

Scripture for Further Study

Acts 16:1–3; 2 Timothy 1:3–7; 2 Timothy 3:14–17; Deuteronomy 6:4–9; Psalm 78:1–7; Proverbs 22:6; Joel 1:3; Ephesians 6:4; 3 John 1:4.

Ten Questions for Self-Examination

Take your time. Answer honestly, before God, and write your answers down if you can.

1. Is my faith sincere and visible from Sunday to Saturday?
2. How can I make Scripture and prayer part of ordinary family life?
3. Am I discouraged because my home is not the ideal Christian home?
4. Who quietly shaped my faith, and have I ever thanked them?
5. Which child or new believer can I mentor more intentionally?
6. Do I leave room for young people to ask honest questions and own their faith?
7. Is my faith sincere, 'without hypocrisy', and visible at home, not only in church?
8. Am I discouraged because my family does not look like the ideal Christian family?
9. Who planted the seed of faith in my life, and have I ever thanked them?
10. Which child or young believer am I deliberately teaching the Scriptures?

Final Word

Plant the seed. Read the Scriptures with your children and grandchildren. Pray aloud in your home. Live sincerely.

You may never see the full harvest in your lifetime. But on the day the faithful are raised, many grandmothers will meet the fruit of seeds they planted long ago, in children they taught on their laps.

A *sincere faith lived at home can become a foundation for generations.*

> "*When I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also.*
>
> **— 2 Timothy 1:5 (NKJV)**

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

Lydia

Enterprise, Generosity, and an Open Heart

In Abeokuta and other towns across Yorubaland, women have for generations turned the leaves of the indigo plant into the deep blue dye of adire cloth. The leaves are pounded, fermented, and mixed in great pots, and the cloth is dipped again and again. It is patient, skilled, demanding work, and the best dyers are respected business women.

The plain leaf, rightly handled, becomes something rich and beautiful that people travel far to buy.

Lydia was a businesswoman from Thyatira who traded in purple cloth, one of the most valuable products of the ancient world. She already worshipped God when she met Paul by a riverside place of prayer. The Lord opened her heart, she was baptised with her household, and her home became the first base of the church in Philippi.

KEY SCRIPTURES

Acts 16:11–15; Acts 16:40

CENTRAL LESSON

Professional skill, an open heart, and generous hospitality can work together to build something that outlasts us.

A Businesswoman by the River

Paul had seen a vision of a man of Macedonia pleading, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.' So he crossed the sea to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of the region.

And the first person to respond to the gospel in Europe was not a man at all.

> "*And on the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to the women who met there.*
>
> **— Acts 16:13 (NKJV)**

There was apparently no synagogue in Philippi, so a small group of women gathered for prayer by the river on the Sabbath. Among them was Lydia, a businesswoman from Thyatira, a city

famous for its purple dye. She was a seller of purple cloth, the luxury fabric of the Roman world, worn by the wealthy and the powerful.

Lydia was a long way from home, running a trade in an expensive commodity, with a household of her own. In our terms, she was like one of the great market women of Onitsha, Balogun, or Kano: shrewd, respected, and a significant figure in the local economy.

Work Done Well Is Not Unspiritual

Scripture never suggests that Lydia's business was a distraction from her faith. Her professional life and her spiritual life sat together naturally.

Some believers carry a quiet suspicion that business is 'worldly' and ministry is 'spiritual'. Lydia's story disagrees. Excellence in trade is a way of honouring God.

> "*Do you see a man who excels in his work? He will stand before kings; He will not stand before unrecognized men.*
>
> **— Proverbs 22:29 (NKJV)**

> "*And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men.*
>
> **— Colossians 3:23 (NKJV)**

Fair prices, honest measures, paying suppliers on time, treating staff well: these are acts of worship, as much as singing in the choir.

An Open Heart Hears More Than Words

Lydia already worshipped God. She was keeping the Sabbath and gathering to pray. But Luke says that as she listened, the Lord opened her heart to heed what Paul was saying.

Spiritual openness requires more than hearing words. Many people sit under preaching every week and remain unchanged. Lydia heard with an open heart. She did not assume that because she was already religious, she had nothing new to learn.

Even for those of us who have walked with God for years, this is a searching question. When I hear Scripture explained, am I listening to learn, or listening to agree with what I already think?

Faith That Moves Into Action

Lydia's response was immediate and practical.

> *And when she and her household were baptized, she begged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." So she persuaded us.*
>
> **— Acts 16:15 (NKJV)**

She persuaded us. Like the Shunammite woman, she would not take no for an answer. Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke moved into her house. A businesswoman's home became the first base of the church in Europe.

LESSON FOR TODAY

Let what you believe shape what you do with your home, your time, and your resources. Faith that does not move into action is only an opinion.

Hospitality That Holds Others Up

Soon afterwards, Paul and Silas were beaten and thrown into prison in Philippi. After an earthquake, a converted jailer, and a remarkable night, they were released. And where did they go first?

> *So they went out of the prison and entered the house of Lydia; and when they had seen the brethren, they encouraged them and departed.*
>
> **— Acts 16:40 (NKJV)**

Bruised and battered, the apostles went to Lydia's house, and found the believers gathered there. Her home had become the living room of the Philippian church.

That church went on to become Paul's most generous supporters. Years later he would write that no other church shared with him in giving and receiving as they did, sending help again and again. It is not hard to imagine that Lydia's generous spirit helped shape that culture from the very beginning.

Generosity With Wisdom

Lydia gave generously, but she also ran a business well enough to have something to give. Generosity is not the opposite of good stewardship. It depends on it.

Every big market has a woman like this: she has sold fabric for thirty years, and everyone in her church knows that when there is a funeral, a wedding, or a family in crisis, she will quietly send something. But she also keeps careful records, never borrows to give, and has trained several young women in the trade. Her generosity lasts because it is wise.

Background Is No Barrier

Lydia was a woman, a foreigner in Philippi, and a businessperson. None of these limited her contribution. God used exactly who she was and what she had.

Your background, your profession, and your circumstances are not obstacles to serving God. They may be the very tools He intends to use.

Scripture for Further Study

Proverbs 11:25; Proverbs 16:3; Matthew 25:34–40; Romans 12:9–13; Colossians 3:23–24.

Ten Questions for Self-Examination

Take your time. Answer honestly, before God, and write your answers down if you can.

1. Do I treat my work as a responsibility to be done with integrity before God?
2. Do I listen with an open heart when Scripture challenges what I assumed?
3. What practical action should follow from what I say I believe?
4. How can my hospitality, skills, or resources support others?
5. Is my generosity wise and sustainable?
6. Do I see my business or profession as part of my service to God, or as something separate from my faith?
7. Do I conduct my trade with the honesty I would want if God were my customer?
8. Is my heart open enough to hear something new from Scripture, even when I think I already know God?
9. Am I using my resources to make room for God's work, or only to enlarge my own comfort?
10. After hearing a message, do I take practical action, as Lydia immediately did?

Final Word

If God has given you skill in business, do not despise it. Work with excellence and integrity. Open your heart to His word, and your home to His people.

Like the indigo leaf in skilled hands, an ordinary working life given to God can become something rich, beautiful, and lasting. Lydia's purple cloth has long since faded. The church that met in her house has not.

> "
>
> *Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul.*
>
> **— Acts 16:14 (NKJV)**

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

Priscilla

Partnership, Learning, and the Courage to Strengthen Others

Wherever cattle graze across the grasslands, you will usually see white cattle egrets walking beside them. As the cows move through the grass, they disturb insects, and the egrets catch them. In return, the egrets pick ticks and flies off the cattle and sound the alarm when danger approaches. Neither animal is trying to outshine the other. They simply do better together.

Our elders put it another way: the right hand washes the left, and the left hand washes the right.

Priscilla and her husband Aquila were tentmakers who lost their home when the emperor expelled the Jews from Rome. They moved, worked with their hands, hosted churches in their home, and risked their lives for Paul. When a brilliant preacher named Apollos needed a fuller understanding, they did not shame him in public. They took him home and explained things more accurately.

KEY SCRIPTURES

Acts 18:1–28; Romans 16:3–5; 1 Corinthians 16:19; 2 Timothy 4:19

CENTRAL LESSON

Lasting influence grows when knowledge is joined to humility, gifts are shared in partnership, and homes are opened for God's work.

Refugees With a Trade

Priscilla and her husband Aquila first appear in Scripture as displaced people.

> "*And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome).*
>
> **— Acts 18:2 (NKJV)**

An emperor's decree had uprooted their lives. They had lost their home, their customers, their community in Rome. They arrived in Corinth with what they could carry and their skills.

> “
>
> *So, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked; for by occupation they were tentmakers.*
>
> **— Acts 18:3 (NKJV)**

That is how they met Paul: at work, stitching leather. Life’s interruptions did not end their purpose. They became the setting for it.

Many Africans know what it is to start over in a new city, or a new country, with nothing but a trade and the grace of God. The tailor from the north who opens a small shop in Lagos. The nurse who relocates abroad and must requalify. Priscilla and Aquila would understand.

Partnership That Multiplies

Priscilla and Aquila are never mentioned apart. In the New Testament they appear six times, always together. And in four of those six, Priscilla’s name comes first.

We are not told why. It may suggest that she was the more prominent in ministry, or simply that she was well known in the churches. Either way, there is no hint of competition between them. They worked, travelled, hosted, taught, and risked their lives as one team.

> “
>
> *Two are better than one, Because they have a good reward for their labor.*
>
> **— Ecclesiastes 4:9 (NKJV)**

Our elders say that the right hand washes the left, and the left hand washes the right. Partnership in marriage, in ministry, in business, multiplies what individuals can accomplish alone.

> **LESSON FOR TODAY**
>
> Look for ways your gifts can combine with others’. Shared work, without competition for credit, often bears the most lasting fruit.

A Home Open for God’s Work

Wherever Priscilla and Aquila lived, a church gathered. In Ephesus. In Rome.

> “
>
> *Aquila and Priscilla greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house.*
>
> **— 1 Corinthians 16:19 (NKJV)**

The first believers did not have cathedrals. They had living rooms. Priscilla's home was a meeting place, a classroom, a place of prayer and meals. Many of our churches began exactly the same way: a handful of people in someone's parlour, plastic chairs, and a big pot of rice afterwards.

Teaching Without Humiliating

Then an impressive preacher arrived in Ephesus.

> "
>
> *Now a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus.*
>
> **— Acts 18:24 (NKJV)**

Alexandria was in Egypt. Apollos was an African, a brilliant, eloquent teacher from the great learning city of our continent. But his knowledge had a gap: he knew only the baptism of John.

Priscilla and Aquila heard him preach. They could have stood up and corrected him in front of everyone. Most of us would have been tempted to. Instead, they took him aside, privately, and explained the way of God more accurately.

That is wisdom. Knowledge should make us better teachers, not prouder people. Correcting someone in public may win us a point; correcting them in private may win us a brother.

And notice that Apollos received it. A gifted, educated preacher humbly learned from a tentmaking couple. Both the teachers and the student showed grace.

Growth That Travels Further

> "
>
> *And when he desired to cross to Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him; and when he arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace; for he vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ.*
>
> **— Acts 18:27–28 (NKJV)**

Priscilla's quiet lesson in a living room went on to strengthen whole churches in Greece. Paul would later write, 'I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.' Behind the watering was a couple who had helped the waterer.

When we invest in others, our influence travels further than we ever could ourselves.

Faithful Through Every Season

Priscilla and Aquila moved from Rome to Corinth, to Ephesus, back to Rome, and later appear again in Ephesus. Through all the moves, their faithfulness never changed. They even risked their lives for Paul.

> “
>
> *Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.*
>
> **— Romans 16:3–4 (NKJV)**

All the churches of the Gentiles were grateful to them. That is quite a reputation for a couple who sewed tents.

Tentmaking Is Not a Lesser Calling

It is easy to read past the detail that Priscilla and Aquila were tentmakers, as though their trade were just background scenery for the ‘real’ ministry. Paul did not see it that way. He worked alongside them, stitching leather, so that he would not be a financial burden on the young churches.

> “
>
> *Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me.*
>
> **— Acts 20:34 (NKJV)**

Across Africa, much of the church’s work has always been carried by people with two callings. The deaconess who runs a provisions shop. The elder who is a mechanic during the week. The pastor of a small congregation who teaches in a secondary school to feed his family. Some people quietly look down on such ministry as second-class. Priscilla’s life says otherwise.

Her workshop was where she met Paul. Her income made her hospitality possible. Her trade took her to the great cities where churches needed planting. Work and ministry were not rivals in her life. They were partners, like she and her husband.

> **LESSON FOR TODAY**
>
> Do not despise the work of your hands. A trade done faithfully can fund, open doors for, and carry the work of the gospel.

Scripture for Further Study

Ecclesiastes 4:9–10; Proverbs 27:17; Matthew 5:16; Romans 12:4–8; 2 Timothy 2:2.

Ten Questions for Self-Examination

Take your time. Answer honestly, before God, and write your answers down if you can.

1. How do I respond when life uproots my plans?
2. Which of my gifts would bear more fruit in partnership with someone else?
3. How could I use my home, time, or skills to encourage others?
4. Can I correct someone without humiliating them?
5. Am I investing in others' growth, or do I prefer to remain indispensable?
6. When my plans are disrupted, do I resent it, or do I look for what God may be doing in the new place?
7. Do I work well in partnership, or do I need to be the one who gets the credit?
8. When I see a gap in someone's understanding, do I correct them privately and kindly, or publicly and proudly?
9. Is my home a place where faith is nurtured, or only a place where I rest from church?
10. Who is the Apollos in my life, gifted but still growing, whom I could quietly strengthen?

Final Word

Whatever God has given you, use it in partnership. Teach without humiliating. Host without showing off. Strengthen others without needing to be the star.

The Kingdom of God is not built by lonely heroes, but by couples, friends, and coworkers whose hands wash each other. Somewhere near you is an Apollos who needs a quiet word in your living room.

> "*So he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.*
>
> **— Acts 18:26 (NKJV)**

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

Phoebe

Dependability, Service, and the Dignity of Trusted Responsibility

In parts of Africa there lives a small, plain bird called the honeyguide. It has a remarkable habit. When it finds a bees' nest, it chatters and flutters ahead of people, leading them through the bush, branch by branch, until they reach the hive. Herders and honey hunters have trusted it for generations. It is not beautiful, and it is not famous, but it is dependable: it takes you where it said it would.

There is great value in someone who simply delivers what they promised.

Phoebe appears in only two verses of Scripture. Paul calls her a servant, or deacon, of the church in Cenchrea and a helper of many, including himself. Most scholars believe she carried his letter to the Romans, perhaps the most important letter ever written, across the sea to Rome. A great deal was entrusted to her.

KEY SCRIPTURES

Romans 16:1–2

CENTRAL LESSON

Faithful service, practical help, and trustworthy character can carry God's work further than any title.

Two Verses, Great Trust

At the end of his letter to the Romans, Paul includes a long list of greetings. Before all the others, he introduces one woman.

> "*I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea, that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever business she has need of you; for indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also.*
>
> **— Romans 16:1–2 (NKJV)**

That is all we are told. Two verses. But those two verses carry a great deal of weight.

Cenchrea was the eastern port of Corinth, where Paul wrote Romans. The letter had to travel hundreds of miles, by sea and road, to Rome. Paul was commending Phoebe to the Roman believers because, as most scholars believe, she was the one carrying the letter.

Think about that. Romans is arguably the most important letter ever written. There were no photocopies. Phoebe carried the only copy, across dangerous seas, and very likely read it aloud and explained it when she arrived.

Service Is Not Inferiority

Paul calls Phoebe a 'servant' of the church. The Greek word is *diakonos*, the same word used elsewhere for deacons and for ministers of the gospel, including Paul himself.

In our world, 'servant' sounds small. In God's kingdom, it is the highest title there is.

> "
>
> *Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant.*
>
> **— Mark 10:43 (NKJV)**

> "
>
> *For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.*
>
> **— Mark 10:45 (NKJV)**

Phoebe was a servant. So was Jesus. That puts her in very good company.

Trust Built Over Time

Nobody hands the most important letter in the world to a stranger. Paul trusted Phoebe because she had proved herself trustworthy, over and over again.

Across West Africa, many market women belong to a rotating savings group called *esusu* or *ajo*. Every week, each member contributes, and one person collects the whole pot. At the centre of it is the collector, the woman everyone trusts to hold the money and hand it to the right person on the right day. Nobody chooses her for her eloquence. They choose her because, for years, every naira has arrived where it was supposed to.

Phoebe was that kind of person.

> "
>
> *He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much.*
>
> **— Luke 16:10 (NKJV)**

> *Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.*
>
> **— 1 Corinthians 4:2 (NKJV)**

LESSON FOR TODAY

Trust is built in small, consistent faithfulness. Keep your word, guard what is entrusted to you, and deliver what you promised.

Help That Goes Beyond Words

Paul calls her 'a helper of many'. The word suggests a patron, someone who used her resources and influence to support others. She did not merely wish people well. She acted.

> *If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?*
>
> **— James 2:15–16 (NKJV)**

'I will pray for you' is a beautiful sentence. It is even more beautiful when it is followed by a bag of rice, a paid school fee, or a lift to the hospital.

Helpers Need Help Too

Look at what Paul asks the Romans to do: *assist her in whatever business she has need of you.* The woman who had helped so many now needed help in a strange city.

Some people spend their whole lives supporting others, and no one ever asks how they are doing. The pastor's wife. The eldest daughter. The aunty who hosts every family meeting. Phoebe's story reminds us to look out for the helpers.

> *Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.*
>
> **— Galatians 6:2 (NKJV)**

A Contribution That Travelled Further

Phoebe's name appears in only two verses. But the letter she carried has travelled across the whole world and every century since. Every believer who has been strengthened by Romans owes something to the woman who carried it safely across the sea.

Your contribution may travel much further than you do. Faithful, dependable service rarely makes headlines. But God remembers, and so, in this case, does Scripture.

Paul's Long List of Women

Phoebe is the first name in Romans 16, but she is far from the only woman there. Read the chapter slowly and you will find Priscilla, risking her neck for Paul. Mary, 'who laboured much for us'. Junia, honoured among the apostles. The mother of Rufus, whom Paul calls a mother to him as well. And three more names that are easy to skip.

> "
> *Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, who have labored in the Lord. Greet the beloved Persis, who labored much in the Lord.*
>
> **— Romans 16:12 (NKJV)**

Tryphena and Tryphosa were possibly sisters, perhaps even twins. Persis was 'beloved'. All three 'laboured in the Lord'. Paul uses the language of hard, tiring work.

This is exactly the picture of the *Ezer Kenegdo*: not decoration, but strength. In the most theological letter Paul ever wrote, he closed by honouring women who worked, carried, hosted, risked, and laboured beside him. The early church did not run on men alone, and it never could have.

If you are a woman who has been told that your service is merely 'helping out', read Romans 16 again. In God's economy, helpers are the ones others lean on.

Scripture for Further Study

Mark 10:42–45; Romans 12:10–13; 1 Corinthians 12:21–26; Galatians 6:2; Philippians 2:3–4.

Ten Questions for Self-Examination

Take your time. Answer honestly, before God, and write your answers down if you can.

1. Do I measure people mainly by status and recognition?
2. What habits make me trustworthy, and which ones undermine it?
3. When I say 'I will pray for you', do I also offer practical help?
4. Who around me helps everyone but may need help too?
5. How can I strengthen a community of mutual care where I am?
6. Can people rely on me to deliver what I promised, on time and intact?

7. Do I serve faithfully even when my name appears in only 'two verses' of the story?
8. Have I despised quiet, practical service because it does not carry a big title?
9. If someone entrusted me with something precious, money, a message, a secret, would it arrive safely?
10. Whom should I 'commend' today, as Paul commended Phoebe, so that others will receive and help them?

Final Word

You may never be famous. But you can be the person God trusts to carry what matters. Be dependable. Be faithful in small things. Help many. And when you see a helper struggling, help them too.

In the Kingdom of God, the honeyguides and the esusu collectors will not be forgotten. Every faithful errand done in His name will be remembered.

> "*Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.*
>
> **— 1 Corinthians 15:58 (NKJV)**

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

Euodia and Syntyche

Reconciliation, Humility, and Shared Purpose

There is an old story told across Africa about two goats who met in the middle of a narrow log bridge over a river. Neither would go back. 'I was here first,' said one. 'I am older,' said the other. They pushed and butted heads until both fell into the river and were carried away. Another day, two wiser goats met on the same bridge. One knelt down, the other stepped carefully over her, and both reached the other side dry.

Being right is not the same as reaching the other side.

Euodia and Syntyche were faithful women in the church at Philippi who had laboured side by side with Paul in the gospel. Yet they had fallen out, and their disagreement was serious enough for Paul to name them in a letter read aloud to the whole church. He did not take sides; he urged them to be of the same mind in the Lord.

KEY SCRIPTURES

Philippians 4:2–3; Philippians 1:27; Philippians 2:1–5; Philippians 4:4–9.

CENTRAL LESSON

Even faithful people disagree, but conflict must not destroy shared purpose. Reconciliation needs humility, wise helpers, and a shared mind in the Lord.

Two Faithful Women in Conflict

Philippi was the church Lydia's house first sheltered, the church that supported Paul more generously than any other. When Paul wrote to them from prison, his letter overflowed with joy. But near the end, he named a problem.

Two women, Euodia and Syntyche, were not getting along.

These were not troublemakers or outsiders. Paul says they had laboured with him in the gospel. They had been on the front line. And now they were on opposite sides.

Faithful People Can Still Disagree

We are not told what the disagreement was about. Perhaps it was a ministry decision, a personal offence, a clash of personalities, or a misunderstanding that grew. Paul did not think the details needed to be recorded. What mattered was that it was dividing the church.

Every church has seen this. Two choir leaders who no longer speak. Two leaders of the women's fellowship whose groups sit on opposite sides of the hall. Two founding families who each believe the church belongs to them. The congregation quietly takes sides, and the work of God suffers.

Many churches carry a scar like this. Two senior women fall out over the arrangement of the harvest thanksgiving. Within a year, the quarrel has spread to their husbands, their friends, and the youth. By the time anyone tries to make peace, nobody can remember exactly what the original disagreement was. Only the bitterness remains.

Same Mind in the Lord

Paul did not take sides. He did not say who was right. He appealed to each woman equally, using the same verb twice: I implore Euodia, and I implore Syntyche.

And he asked them to be 'of the same mind in the Lord'. Not to agree on every detail, but to share a common mind shaped by Christ. Earlier in the same letter, he had described what that mind looks like.

> "*Fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.*
>
> **— Philippians 2:2–3 (NKJV)**

> "*Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.*
>
> **— Philippians 2:5 (NKJV)**

Christ humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death. Reconciliation begins when we are willing to lower ourselves, not to win.

LESSON FOR TODAY

In a conflict, ask not 'How can I prove I am right?' but 'What would the mind of Christ do here?'

A Community That Helps

Paul then turned to someone else in the church.

> *And I urge you also, true companion, help these women who labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the Book of Life.*
>
> **— Philippians 4:3 (NKJV)**

We do not know who the 'true companion' was. But Paul asked a trusted third party to help. Reconciliation often needs a wise mediator, someone respected by both sides who can listen without taking sides.

In many African communities, elders have always played this role. When two families quarrel, they do not go straight to court. They sit before the elders, each tells their side, and the elders help them find a way back to peace. The church needs such elders too.

Truth and Boundaries Still Matter

Reconciliation does not mean pretending wrong did not happen. Jesus taught a process that begins with honest conversation.

> *Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother.*
>
> **— Matthew 18:15 (NKJV)**

Sometimes peace requires apology, restitution, or new boundaries. Paul does not ask Euodia and Syntyche to ignore the problem. He asks them to resolve it in the Lord.

> *If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.*
>
> **— Romans 12:18 (NKJV)**

As much as depends on you. We cannot control the other person's response. We can control our own willingness.

The Gospel Is Bigger Than Our Quarrels

Immediately after his appeal, Paul wrote some of the most loved words in Scripture.

> *Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand.*
>
> **— Philippians 4:4–5 (NKJV)**

The Lord is at hand. Christ is coming back. When He returns, and the faithful are raised to share His Kingdom, none of our petty rivalries will matter. Euodia and Syntyche will stand together. So will we, with every brother and sister we have quarrelled with. It makes sense to begin practising now.

Teammates, Not Rivals

When Paul describes Euodia and Syntyche, he says they 'laboured with' him in the gospel. The Greek word pictures athletes competing side by side, the same word he uses earlier when he urges the Philippians to stand fast with one mind.

> *That you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.*
>
> **— Philippians 1:27 (NKJV)**

Every football lover knows the frustration of watching two gifted players on the same team who refuse to pass to each other. Each wants to score the goal himself. The opposing team does not need to defend very hard; the problem has already been solved for them.

Euodia and Syntyche were on the same team. They had once played side by side with Paul against real opposition. Now their energy was being spent against each other. Paul's appeal is, at heart, a coach's appeal: remember who you are playing for, and remember who the real opponent is.

Church conflicts are often fought with great skill and passion. Imagine if that same energy were turned outward, towards the work of the gospel, the care of the poor, and the strengthening of the weak.

Scripture for Further Study

Philippians 1:27; Philippians 2:1–11; Philippians 4:2–9; Matthew 5:23–24; Romans 12:9–18; Ephesians 4:1–6; Colossians 3:12–15; James 3:13–18.

Ten Questions for Self-Examination

Take your time. Answer honestly, before God, and write your answers down if you can.

1. Is there a disagreement I have allowed to harden into distance?
2. Have I reduced someone to our quarrel and forgotten their years of faithfulness?
3. Do I want to be proved right more than I want unity?
4. Is there a conversation, apology, or forgiveness I need to pursue?
5. Would a wise, impartial helper bring clarity to a conflict I cannot solve alone?
6. How can I help my church handle conflict truthfully, without gossip or favouritism?
7. Is there a 'narrow bridge' in my life where I am butting heads instead of kneeling down?
8. Do I want to be proved right more than I want to reach the other side together?
9. Have I forgotten the good years I shared with the person I am now fighting?
10. Whom can I ask to help, as Paul asked his true companion, to bring peace?

Final Word

Their names, Paul says, are in the Book of Life. If God has written their names in His book, they can surely write each other back into their hearts. So can we.

Kneel down on the bridge. Let your sister step over. You will both get home, and the Lord who is at hand will find you standing together.

Unity grows when Christ matters more to us than the need to win.

> "
> *I implore Euodia and I implore Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord.*
> **— Philippians 4:2 (NKJV)**

A Closing Word

When the rains finally come after a long harmattan, you can stand at the edge of a compound and almost hear the land breathe again. Seeds that seemed dead push up. Dry riverbeds fill. Trees that looked finished put out new leaves. Nothing in the dry season was wasted; it was all waiting for the rain.

We have walked with thirty-eight women. Some were queens, and some were slaves. Some led nations, and some were never even named. Some saw prayers answered in their lifetime, and some died still waiting. But not one of them was overlooked by God. Leah was seen. Hagar was found. Hannah was heard. Rizpah's vigil was noticed. A little captive girl spoke one sentence, and a general was healed.

If you have found yourself somewhere in these pages, that is no accident. The God who saw them sees you. He sees the sacrifices no one thanks you for, the prayers you are embarrassed to keep praying, the injustice no one else will name, and the faithfulness you keep up when it would be easier to quit.

And remember where the story is going. The same Jesus who called Mary Magdalene by name at the tomb will return. His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives. The dead in Christ will rise first at the sound of the last trumpet. The holy city will come down, and God will dwell with His people. On that day, in the Kingdom of God, many women whom history forgot will stand in the front row.

> "
>
> *Strength and honor are her clothing; She shall rejoice in time to come. She opens her mouth with wisdom, And on her tongue is the law of kindness.*
>
> **— Proverbs 31:25–26 (NKJV)**

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If this book has blessed you, you may also enjoy *A Woman Was Never Meant To Be Decorative*, the study of the *Ezer Kenegdo* that inspired it; *A Friend Loves at All Times*; *Yet Will I Trust Him*; *Thou Shalt Prosper*; and *Immortality: Birthright or Gift*, which explores in greater depth the resurrection hope described in these pages. All are free at oludareakinbo.com/my-books. Please share this book with anyone who needs to know that God sees them.

Rise, daughter. Your story is not over.