

Women of the Bible

By Jess and Sam Pritchard

1. Eve

Reading: Genesis 3:13 “Then the Lord God said to the woman, “What is this that you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

Message: For the last two weeks we have looked at the 12 disciples, so to balance it out I thought why not look at 12 women from the bible as well. With this in mind, what better person to start with than the first woman in the bible, who was also the first woman to ever live. Because of this it is fair to say that all human life came from Eve, but on the negative side she is also where all human sin originated.

When we read that statement, it is very easy for us to immediately judge Eve and think, if it wasn't for her we would be in such a better position. Because of her actions work is now harder, childbirth is painful and eventually we will all die. We are so quick to judge other people for their sin, but if we were in the same position as her, do we think that we could have ignored the serpent and walked away from the tree? In reality, if any of us were in her position we would have done the same thing. The temptation of sin is a difficult one for us to overcome on our own, and we should definitely not be judging anyone for being in this position.

We are all guilty of sin and we are all deserving of death, just like Eve was all that time ago, but the amazing thing is that God showed her grace just like he shows this to us. Before they were removed from the garden God made them aware of the one who was to come, to give them a hope for the future and provided them with a sacrifice so they could be clothed. For us it is slightly different as we can read about Jesus and how he came to be the ultimate sacrifice for our sins. The one common factor in this is that we both needed to have faith in him in order to be saved. God did not immediately deliver Eve over to death, he gave her a chance, just like we have a chance to turn to him and meet him in heaven when we die.

This story of Eve clearly displays God's mercy, which is always comforting for us to see and know that this same mercy applies to us today. We are all responsible for our own sins and we have no one to blame but ourselves, but what is lucky is that we are not responsible for the removal of our sins, this has been done already by God sacrificing his son, Jesus because of his great love for us.

Prayer: Lord we thank you for the story of Eve and how you showed great mercy to her, and we thank you that you have shown us the same mercy. I pray that you will help me to not judge others for their sin and to remember that we are all in the same position. But I do thank you again Lord that we are all saved because of your love and your sacrifice.

2. Sarah

Reading: “The Lord said, “I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife shall have a son.” And Sarah was listening at the tent door behind him. Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years. The way of women had ceased to be with Sarah. So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, “After I am worn out, and my lord is old, shall I have pleasure?”” (Genesis 18:10-12).

Message: The story of Sarah is one that is familiar to some as it is used quite often in Sunday schools. A quick recap of the story is that Sarah was Abraham’s wife and they both wanted a child, but as they got older, they did not think they would ever have one. However, this was something God had promised them, but Sarah struggled to believe this promise would come true.

This promise was first given to Abraham when he was told his descendants would be as numerous as the stars, which clearly implied that Sarah would need to have a child, but there was disbelief from the start. This disbelief came from the fact that she was aware that physically she was too old to have a child and by the world’s standards this was not likely to happen. Even in the above verse when Sarah was given a shorter time frame, she was in such disbelief she laughed.

I don’t think I am out of place by saying that we have all felt like this at some point in our lives and began to doubt that something might happen. Maybe we have been praying for a family member to be saved, praying for an illness to be healed or even in the same position as Sarah, praying that you will have a child one day, but we know that God is faithful, and he keeps his promises. Sarah was patient throughout her waiting, even though she found it very difficult and was upset or frustrated at times, she trusted God and he kept his word.

I think the lesson from this story can be summed up very well in Hebrews 11:11 which says, “And by faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she considered him faithful who had made the promise”. This shows that even though Sarah had doubts and there were times she thought the promise would not happen, she continued to have faith and then she bore a child.

It is important to remember at this point that faith won’t just give you everything you ask for, but we need to trust that God knows what is best. His timing and his decisions are perfect, and he is in control. Our job is to trust him and to pray to him and to worship him as well.

Prayer: I thank you Lord that you know what is best for me and you’re the one who is in control. I am sorry for when I don’t trust you like I should, but I thank you that you never let me go regardless. I pray that you will help me to trust your timing and have patience to leave your plans work out.

3. Rahab

Reading: “By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies” (Hebrews 11:31)

Message: Yesterday we looked at Sarah, who’s story was mentioned in Hebrews and now we look at the only other woman who was mentioned by name in Hebrews 11 and that is Rahab. Rahab lived in Jericho and her and her family were saved from the destruction of Jericho because of her deeds of faith. This deed must have been something pretty impressive for her to be saved. When we read the account of Rahab, we see that she lied to save the spies. Lying which is clearly against the Ten Commandments, yet caught up in this narrative about the reception and welcome she gave the spies she also lied to protect them and through those events she was still spared.

Hebrews is very careful to not promote or advocate the act of lying instead citing a friendly welcome the King James Version says, "Received the spies with peace". This is a very difficult passage with many different views on it I believe that Rahab was saved despite her lying not because of it. Then thing we can say for certain is that lie she told was well intentioned even if the act of lying is discouraged throughout scripture. What we can commend Rahab for doing was standing up against the soldiers who came looking for the spies, who were in a much higher position of authority compared to her as a prostitute. She would have been considered as the lowest of the low in society and she made a stand against those who represented the Kings authority.

This is not an easy thing for anyone to do, when we are challenged by the world the easy option is to just go along with it and to follow their lead. It took a lot of courage for her to stand up to them to protect these people, especially knowing what could happen to her and her family if the soldiers found out the spies were hidden in the roof.

This is an important lesson we can take from Rahab, that even though she was not the most truthful person in the bible, she did stand up in faith because of what she believed. We know that she had heard stories about this God as that is what she told the spies in Joshua (chapter 2 vs 9 if you want to have a read), so she had a limited understanding of who He is and what he is capable of.

Even with this limited knowledge she was willing to step out in faith, and this does provide us with a challenge. She knew little and tried to do good, we know a lot but how often do we try to do good? How much more willing should we be to take that step of faith when we know so much more about God and who he is because we have the entirety of the Bible. And of course through her someone looked Down on by society, despite lying she was made through God's plan a part of the genealogy of Jesus.

Prayer: Lord I thank you that even though we may do things wrong that you can still use us and still love us, just like you used Rahab. I thank you that you can give us courage to take a stand for you and to step out in faith, and I pray you will give me more of this courage so I can take more opportunities to stand for you. We thank you for caring for your people and for protecting us these last few months and we pray this protection will continue.

4. Ruth

Reading: “But Ruth said, “Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the Lord do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you.” And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more.” (Ruth 1:16-18)

Message: The book of Ruth is one of my favourites from the bible as the story has so many aspects to it, there is sadness and joy which is true of life today. I believe that whatever we are going through there is a lesson we can take from Ruth and apply it to that. If I did write about all these lessons, then I would not need to write another devotional for a few weeks. In this devotional I am going to look at Naomi and how she was a great example for us to follow.

As a bit of a background Naomi was the mother in law of Ruth, who lost her husband and two sons. This is a tragedy that anyone would find difficult, and at times like this naturally we look to the people we care about and want them around. However, Naomi cared for these girls so she told them to go back to their hometown so they could be with their own people and carry on with their lives.

Ruth decided to stay with Naomi, which clearly showed that she cared about her a lot so Naomi must have shown a lot of love to Ruth. What’s more than that is that Ruth did not only want to stay with Naomi but she was willing to follow her God, which makes me think about how great a witness Naomi must have been. Ruth was willing to leave her people and all that she knew because she had seen Naomi’s faith and she was willing to follow her God.

Even in the first few verses of this book we can see that by being bold in our faith and displaying our beliefs clearly that this can rub off on those around us and can have a really positive effect. In this story Ruth came to know God through seeing Naomi’s faith and this shaped her story so she would then meet Boaz and continue the genealogy that eventually led to Christ.

Prayer: We thank you for your continued love for us, we pray that you would so fill us that others might see your love working in us and we pray that through you working in us they might be drawn to you. Amen.

5. Esther

Reading: “The Jews had light and gladness and joy and honour. And in every province and in every city, wherever the king's command and his edict reached, there was gladness and joy among the Jews, a feast and a holiday. And many from the peoples of the country declared themselves Jews, for fear of the Jews had fallen on them” (Esther 8:16-17)

Message: A few days ago, we looked at the story of Rahab and how much courage it can take to take a stand for God against the world. Today I am going to use the story of Esther to look at what the results can be if we do take a stand, despite how difficult it can be.

The story of Esther is one with a lot of twist and turns and we can see how hard it was for her to take this stand, but the fate of her people was at stake. She knew that if she upset or angered the King then this could potentially lead to her death, so it was a big risk for her. But this did not stop her, she clearly trusted that God would protect her, so she went and spoke to the king.

This worked out very well as the King declared that the Jews would not be slaughtered as Haman had planned and as we can see from the verse above they were in a much better position afterwards as they had ‘joy and honour’ which wasn’t bestowed on them before. What is also encouraging from the verse above is not only were they saved from the slaughter from the king, but also many people ‘declared themselves Jews’. Many people were saved after seeing what had happened to the Jews and this is ultimately what we should be aiming for is to see others being saved.

One important thing to remember is that just because we take a stand it doesn’t necessarily mean that we are going to save a nation of people and people from other countries will hear and turn to God. It could be something as simple as telling your neighbour you are going to church, or in these times sending a friend the online services, you never know what is going to happen in their lives but that step could be the first point in their relationship with God. Anyway if Esther can do it with the thought that she could be facing death, you can have a chat with your neighbour about what you’ll be doing on Sunday.

Prayer: Lord I thank you that you work in mysterious ways. We thank you that Esther was chosen as the queen and was then able to save her people, which had amazing results. I pray we will have the same courage as Esther and be able to take a stand for you and hopefully see results, but we know we can trust you and everything will work out according to your plan. Amen

6. The Widow of Zarephath

Reading: “And Elijah said to her, “Do not fear; go and do as you have said. But first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterward make something for yourself and your son. For thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, ‘The jar of flour shall not be spent, and the jug of oil shall not be empty, until the day that the Lord sends rain upon the earth.’” And she went and did as Elijah said. And she and he and her household ate for many days” (1 Kings 17:13-15)

Message: It is hard to follow instructions sometimes, especially when we think that the instructions won't make any difference, or they won't work. One example of this could be in school when a teacher is telling you to stop leaning back on to the two back legs of your chair as you will fall. At this point you probably used to think that you have done it so many times previously without injury that you are sure of the result, but you stop anyway to show you are listening. In this story we meet The Widow of Zarephath who is given an instruction by Elijah and even though she thinks she knows the end results she still follows it through.

From the beginning of the story we see that God has a plan to not only to save the widow and her son from starving but also to save her in a much more important way. In this story the Widow had little food, so little that she thought this was going to be her last meal.

However, God had a different plan. When Elijah asked her for food a second time and told her that her jar of flour and her oil would not run out until the rain comes, she must have been questioning this, but this did not stop her from believing and acting on this. She took a step of faith at this point to use what she thought was the last of her food to feed Elijah before herself and her son. This must have been hard for her to do as if Elijah was wrong her and her son would not get to eat, but she trusted God would provide. How often do we do this in our lives? Do we trust that God will provide for us so we leave everything in his hands, or do we keep a little bit back for ourselves just encase the results we get are not what we think they should be?

Prayer: Lord, I thank you that you know what is best for us and you will provide exactly what we need. I also thank you that you don't always just give us what we want, as we do not know what is best for ourselves. I pray you will help me to trust you and your provision and to leave everything in your hands. Amen

7. Mary the mother of Jesus

Reading: And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. (Luke 1:46-49)

Message: If it is not clear from the verse above the Mary we are going to be looking at today is Mary, Jesus' mother. Her story is probably one of the most well-known stories of the bible as it is quoted in churches and Sunday schools every Christmas. Usually when looking at Mary we would look at the miracle of Jesus birth and how she was told about this through an Angel, but today I am going to look at Mary's reaction to these events rather than the story itself.

When we look at what happened to Mary we know that she was distressed as it was certainly not a normal situation. She clearly had a lot of questions which is understand and it is likely that any of us would be confused or scared as well. At this point it would have been easy for Mary to turn away from God or think that he had no idea what he was doing, but this was not what she did. She trusted God, even though she did not fully understand the situation herself.

The above passage also shows that she not only trusted in him, but she praised him and rejoiced in him. She did not understand what she was going through but she knew that God knew best, and he would not put her in harm's way. She even knew her story would be important for generations to come, which it must be for us to revisit it every year. However, after reading this can we say that we react the same way? Do we trust that God knows what is best for us and do we trust his plans? If not, why? What is stopping us from trusting him?

For Mary there were probably a lot of fears running through her head; what will people think about me? Will my husband to be believe me? Am I going to be able to raise this baby who is the son of God? These were big questions, but she did not doubt God, she held fast to his promise and now many generations have called her blessed.

Prayer: Lord, I thank you that we can trust every aspect of our lives to you as you know what is best for us. I pray that when I am confused or scared that you will help me to praise you instead of worrying. I thank you that the stories in the bible are still applicable to us even now and I thank you for each opportunity we have to learn from your word.

8. Martha

Reading: “But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me.” But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary...” (Luke 10:40-42).

Message: I know a lot of you reading this will know the feeling of when someone is coming to visit you, you need to get the house perfect and tidy up. If you are anything like me, it can take the whole day to tidy to make sure everything is right for your guests. Even when they arrive this doesn't stop as you want to make sure they have a drink, make sure they are comfortable and that everything runs smoothly.

There is nothing wrong with doing this you may think, you are just being a good host, what more can people want? But in all the rushing around you miss out on the funny story just being told and you miss out on actually spending time with your guests. Well, this situation is exactly what happened to Martha.

From the verse above we can see that Martha was so worried about making sure everything was done correctly around the house that she nearly missed out on spending time with the Lord. It's slightly different because we are not preparing the house for Jesus to physically walk into, but it can be something as simple as trying to work out the perfect routine for your quiet times and planning them out, but not actually spending time on them because your plan isn't quite right. You could think that you can't regularly pray until you have a very organised checklist of who and what to pray for and a timeline of when prayers are answered, so you make the list rather than actually praying.

It is important to remember that in these times that God does not want us to be perfect, he isn't looking for the most organised person with the best colour coded checklist, he is looking for a relationship with us. If we spend so much time worrying about the little things, then we are going to miss out on building a close relationship with him as we are worrying about everything else. At this point I will say there is nothing wrong with being organised and by making sure things go right, but when this planning and organising stops you from building a relationship we need to turn our minds to the “one thing that is necessary.”

Prayer: Lord, I thank you that we do not need to be perfect in order to build our relationship with you, and I pray that you won't let worry or anxious thoughts get in the way of our time with you. I pray that you will help us focus our minds on you and not think about those things that can distract us.

9. Mary

Reading: “Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me.” But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.” (Luke 10:38-42)

Message: Yesterday we looked at Martha and how she was trying to make everything perfect while Christ was in the house. But while this was going on there was someone else in the house who we are going to look at today. This was Martha's sister Mary. It is from the same passage as yesterday but just a bit more added in to show Mary's side of the story.

We can see that while Martha was rushing around and focusing on everything in the house, Mary's first priority was not to go and help. For most people this would be considered quite rude, seeing someone struggling and rushing to get everything done but no offer of help has been given. But from the verses above we can see that this was not the case.

Mary was not offering to help because she wanted to listen to Jesus' teaching and this was the most important thing she could have been doing at the time. As we see from Martha's reaction this is something that is not widely understood, and this is definitely the case today. If we tell a friend or a family member that we can't come to an event or spend time with them on a Sunday because we are going to church, a lot of times they may ask us if we can miss one week because it is not that important. But in times like this it is important to remember Mary's story and follow her example.

She was being criticised by her sister and probably felt a bit guilty for not helping, but the fact that Christ said that she was correct for listening to him was probably a huge encouragement. As hard as it may be for us to say no to friends or family members, or even for us to resist distractions when it comes to spending time with Christ, we need to avoid this, just like Mary did. As the verse says, “one thing is necessary”, we should be focussing fully on Christ and putting him first before all other things.

Prayer: Lord, I thank you for what we can learn from your word, even in this same passage we have had different lessons and I thank you they both still apply today. I pray that you will help me to think more like Mary and to put you first before all things. I am sorry for when I am distracted, or other things draw me away from you, but I thank you that you are still the one thing that I need in life and you will never leave me or forsake me.

10. Women at Samaria

Reading: “Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, “He told me all that I ever did.” So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Saviour of the world.” (John 4:39-42)

Message: As we can see from the title the woman, we are going to look at today doesn't have a name, and that's because in the bible she wasn't given a name. In the world's standards this could mean that she is not an important character, but as I have mentioned in a previous devotional, God does not follow the world's standards. She has her story in the bible which shows that it is of extreme importance, as it was chosen by God to be in there which means it has a lesson for us to learn.

This story is one that is relatively well known but I will give a quick run through as I am mainly going to focus on the end of the story. After Jesus had been on a long journey he stopped at a well for a drink and met the woman at the well. He then asked her for a drink even though Jews and Samaritans never interacted, which surprised her. He then challenged her on her sins, and she then believed and followed him, and it is the next part of the story I will focus on.

When this woman came to know Jesus, she was so happy and excited that she could not keep this news to herself, and she ran into her town, leaving her water jug behind, which was the reason that she went to the well to start with. Because of her actions, many people came to believe in Christ, and they made an effort to get to know him further. I wonder when was the last time we were so excited about a message we heard or a passage of the bible we had read that we had to tell everyone about it and shared this good news?

I think we can all be guilty of not sharing the news like we should or not being as excited as we should be, but this does not mean that God loves us any less. But when we think about this story and how the woman's actions meant so many people were saved, this should give us the motivation to share the good news that means so much to us.

Prayer: Lord, I thank you for opportunities that you give me to share your word with others, but I am sorry that I don't make the most of each one. I pray you will help me to be bold and like the woman from Samaria I pray I will be so excited about you and your word that I have to share your word with others.

11. Nympha

Reading: For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis. Luke the beloved physician greets you, as does Demas. Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house. (Colossians 4:13-16)

Message: Very little is known about Nympha she is mentioned solely in this one verse, but despite this I think it is a very relevant and topical character to examine. As we have recently studied Paul lists a long list of Christians and believers many of whom we know their traits and character and in this great list of saints we read about the faithfulness of Nympha.

Was this woman a great preacher, evangelist or teacher did she lead thousands of people to Jesus through her understanding of the Bible? No, quite simply she opened her house and allowed the church meet there. Her act of service was very simple, some might even consider it small she had a house, and she allowed the church to meet there and use it. Yet Paul felt it worthy to mention her service.

What can we learn about Nympha? We really only know two things about her, firstly she owned a house, secondly, she used it for God. In our daily lives we have so much but when was the last time we thought to use it for God.

Something so small and simple but was such a blessing to the church, when was the last time we opened up our house to members in the church? When was the last time we made a conscious effort to invite someone round for a cup of tea (always offer someone a cupper) maybe even some biscuits but most importantly fellowship, open the bible with them, pray with them? When was the last time we opened up our homes as a way of proclaiming Jesus?

I also want to address those people might not have the time or a house to open up, what do you have? What has God given you that you can then use for Him? Do you have time? Do you have energy or strength do you have financial means do you have a phone to be able to encourage each other in Jesus? You might not have much, but are you using it for God?

What can we learn about Nympha? What she had she used for God's glory, do we use what we have for ourselves or for Him?

Prayer: Help us to love you and be transformed by you and help us to reach out, we thank you that we have a message which fills us and can help and encourage others. We ask that you help us to manage and use our resources for you and not just for ourselves. We pray that all of us no matter who we are might be able to serve you. Amen.

12. Proverbs 31 Women

Reading: Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised. (Proverbs 31:30)

Message: The last two weeks has involved us looking at individual women and their personal accounts. As we close this series, we today will be slightly different, we are going to be looking at Proverbs 31 which details and explores the Godly character women should seek to duplicate.

Though we will only be looking at one verse I highly recommend everyone takes the time to read this entire chapter of scripture. Today we will be homing in on 'The woman who fears the Lord' which as we will hopefully see is a virtue that can be seen in all the women we have previously studied; I wonder if this can be seen in your life? It is also worth reminding ourselves that fearing the Lord is something that is relevant and applicable to men and women.

As we look back previously at all the women, we have had devotion on when life was going right or wrong what was their primary focus? Was it how other people viewed them? Was it how they looked? Was it their standing and worth in society? By no means (to quote Paul), they focused on following the direction and leading of God, he was what they valued and in essence lived for.

If this is what these women valued above everything, this proverb says that to live in a God centred, fearing way is a lifestyle to be praised. Nothing else in this life should be placed with a higher sense of belonging or meaning than our service and submission to God. What attributes do you value? Is it the superficial things such as a clean house, well-paying Job, nice jewellery, or do you value knowing and fearing the Lord?

This also leaves the responsibility of men who in a similar way need to be fearing the Lord, the first thing any of us must do is ensure that we are walking in a relationship with Jesus, and that we know him personally. However, if a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised then as men, we should be the ones praising, encouraging and coming along side to help support our sisters in Christ spurring each other on in the Lord.

Prayer: Lord, I thank you that you have given us so many stories in the bible that we can learn from and still apply to our lives today. I thank you that you care enough about us to give us so many chances when we do things wrong. I am sorry that we do not always follow you as we should, and I pray you will help us to listen to your word and apply it to our lives.