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Women of the Bible

Learning from the
women in the Book



Women of the Bible

Learning from the women in the Book



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Introduction

Women in the Bible

by *Janine Petry*



You might not be able to relate, but I have this habit of comparing myself to other women. Doesn't matter where or when—or who. I might be at the mall with my children, and upon spotting an attractive, well-dressed young woman with her children, I've immediately decided I'm doing everything wrong—starting with my wardrobe and, somehow, ending with the use of all of my life skills.





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Women in the Bible

Most of the time, I don't even realize I'm doing it—it comes so naturally. I might *look* like I'm sitting, but inside I'm doing all sorts of mental acrobatics to see just how I measure up to other women. It's a dangerous sport. And I can't do it without taking risks and getting injuries. The problem is, I know next to nothing about someone based on what I see outwardly. And when I choose to make judgment calls on my life—and theirs—based on what I don't know, I sacrifice living by God's truth to follow my foolish imaginings.

Needless to say, comparing myself to other women is *not* a part of God's plan for my life. *Learning* from other women, however, is. And there's a world of difference between the two. The Bible is filled with narratives about women, and they're not there to torture me with images that I can't measure up to. Instead, when I study these women, I see the working of a mighty God through the lives of imperfect women. And that's something I can relate to.

2 Timothy 3:16 says, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." God included these women—both godly and wayward—in his holy Writ for a reason: to prepare us to do good works through knowledge of him and his power.





Women of the Bible

Women in the Bible

This resource will serve as a guide to getting acquainted with the women in the Bible. As you read about their stories, you'll learn more the Author of their lives—the Author of yours as well. You'll also find plenty of other resources packed inside for you to go even farther in living a powerful and godly life. Enjoy learning from those who have walked before us.

Blessings,

Janine Petry

Contributing Editor, KYRIA downloads
Christianity Today International



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Identity Crisis

Mary Heart, Martha Brain

How could this Martha learn to be Mary—
and live to tell about it?

by Kathy Callahan-Howell

I used to picture myself as Mary, sitting in my living room and listening to my guest's heartaches while Martha mashed potatoes in the kitchen. *I always choose Mary's stillness over Martha's work*, I thought.

I was wrong.



I left home early one Sunday morning to prepare my heart for worship and preaching. I entered the empty sanctuary, sat in the quiet, and tried to focus on Christ. The minutes ticked by and I remembered I hadn't plugged in the coffeepot.

That can wait, I told myself, and I directed my thoughts back to Jesus.

Another minute passed. Then I wondered, *Are the transparencies for the overhead projector ready? And what about the banner—did anyone remember to change it? And someone really ought to plug in that coffeepot.*

Reality struck. I was Martha—concerned about many things, and not about the one thing that was truly needed.

I had written a book on spiritual disciplines and was serving as the prayer editor of my denomination's magazine, but after my Sunday morning frenzy, I realized my inner life needed some work. I had a sabbatical planned for the following summer, and I determined to use that time to develop my prayer life.

I planned a series of retreats and made a long list of books I wanted to read. I planned to visit 17 churches, sometimes more than one per Sunday. One way or another, this Martha was *going* to learn how to be Mary.

From that sabbatical, I developed several different paradigms for prayer and meditation—including centering prayer and temperament-targeted meditation. I have



incorporated these methods into my prayer life. Together they have instigated a shift in my spirit from distracted busyness to focused devotion.

Centering on Prayer

My first attempts at reforming my prayer life began the way many of us begin—I tried praying more. I read two books that convicted me to increase my prayer time.

But is time really the issue? The question resembles the old parenting issue, quality versus quantity time. We long for quality time with children and for quality time with God, but both prove difficult without enough quantity. Like throwing a rock in the pond and waiting for the ripples to settle, it takes some time to settle ourselves and be still before God.

Rising earlier and taking more time, however, only provided part of my answer. I still found myself distracted. A pastor friend gave me a book on intimate prayer that addressed this very issue. This book instructed me to just stop thinking: if thoughts distracted me from listening to God, I should tell my brain to stop it. The author made it sound simple, so I tried it. I told my mind to stop thinking. I might as well have told my lungs to stop breathing.

Why couldn't I do what the author asked? My husband Roger can. I, however, am the consummate multi-tasker. My mind readily juggles family, church, and personal commitments. I know God made my brain this way so I can fulfill my roles as pastor, wife, and mother. But what



about prayer? Surely there must be some way to pray with my Martha brain.

Then I discovered a wonderful book, *Concerning the Inner Life* by Evelyn Underhill. She liberated my approach of adoration. Underhill said, "Persons whose natural expression is verbal, and who need the support of concrete image, make violent efforts to 'go into the silence' because some wretched little book has told them to do so."

That was it! I needed to throw that wretched little book in the trash (well, return it to my friend) and try something else! That technique worked for others, but it didn't work for me. I needed to find another way to center my mind.

The first retreat of my sabbatical summer provided an answer. I submitted myself to the tutelage of a nun, learning about meditative prayer at the quiet confines of a convent. I spent three days learning from a fourteenth century volume written by an anonymous monk about "centering prayer." A modern Trappist monk, Thomas Keating, also teaches this method in his book, *Open Mind, Open Heart*.

The goal of centering prayer is to enter totally into God's presence, discovering communion with him through focusing our attention on him alone. Proponents suggest this practice creates a deeper settledness within us and a greater awareness of God.

Instead of an angry or irritated reaction to unwanted, distracting thoughts, centering prayer teaches us to take





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a sacred word and gently brush the pesky thoughts away. Since frustration would be as much of a distraction as the original thought, Keating teaches us to think of the sacred word as a feather brushing away a piece of cotton.

There's nothing magical about the sacred word itself. Each person chooses their own word that resonates within without carrying intense distracting emotions. The word must be simple, and usually one syllable. Commonly used words include *God, Jesus, love, peace, and trust*.

Yes became my first sacred word. I chose it because it implies submission to whatever God has for me, yet I don't find it emotionally laden. When I was practicing centering prayer and distracting thoughts came along, I simply thought to myself, *Yes*. Centering prayer has made quieting my spirit easier.

Last week my day started with an angry phone call. Rather than moving on and carrying that anger with me, I sat in my prayer chair and took several minutes to refocus. Brushing away nagging and bitter thoughts with a humbly obedient "yes" calmed my mind to find its peace in God. Taking time for centering prayer enabled me to begin the day at rest, rather than stewing in anger.

Four Meditation Temperaments

Mary sat at Jesus' feet and listened to him. She found that one needed thing. Good for her. But is it right to expect Martha to sit on her hands and listen while the bread is burning? I know God created Martha and me to be complex and multi-tasking individuals. Is there a way



to sit at Jesus' feet that works with, and not against, the personality and temperament God gave me?

That question led me to select Chester Michael and Marie Norrisey's book *Prayer and Temperament* for my sabbatical reading list. In it I found four forms of prayer and meditation. Each form is designed to accommodate one of four temperaments (based on the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator).

- The first meditation style, designed for "intuitive feelers" like myself, stresses creative exercises involving imagination, imagery, and journaling.

One exercise is addressing Scripture passages to yourself. To bring this to life, just insert your name into a passage and meditate on it with the personal application. For example, Jesus says, "Come to me, Kathy, and I will give you rest." Stirring the heart with the recognition that the promises and commands of Scripture are meant for me personally opens a depth of feeling that is too often buried under the busywork of ministry.

A related technique employs imagery to release emotions as we interact with God. Some people like to use artwork depicting biblical scenes to help imagine the power, the love, or the beauty of God. Others pick up on the depth of feeling found in the colors and images of other forms of art. I remember a painting entitled "Grace" on the cover of a Christian magazine. It depicted a free flowing image in shades of blue and white. In the swirl of cool motion, a human figure was being lifted up by the waves of color. Its





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imagery gave me a sense of being buoyed by grace, of being lifted up by the hands of God.

- Scientifically minded folks, labeled "intuitive thinkers," may benefit from taking a Scripture passage and asking basic investigative questions: who, what, when, where, why, and how. Going beyond those questions, you may ask yourself, "What area of my life will this help with?" This investigative type of meditation can help draw us into truth and discover how it applies to our lives.

- For those driven by duty, "sensory judges," a concrete, orderly system of meditation appeals to the spirit more than abstract notions of peace, grace, and joy. Using the senses to see, hear, and smell the scenes of Scripture—as though actually there—can bring ancient truth to modern application.

During Holy Week this year, I used this form of meditation to focus on Christ's passion. I imagined the two thieves and Jesus with a sign over his head, "King of the Jews." I imagined the jeers of the crowd, the weight of sin, and the sting of sweat and blood. Then I imagined a sign over my head saying "Beloved Child of God," and I realized anew how much it cost him to give me that title.

- The fourth form of meditation engages action in prayer. Fishing, hiking, and swimming can all be meditation-enhancing activities. And while outdoor enthusiasts may enjoy this kind of prayer, the key for "sensory perceivers" is not just being outside, but moving and working while they pray. Like Brother Lawrence, my friend Kim likes to pray



while washing the dishes. What a Martha way to be Mary!
Do the work and sit at Jesus' feet at the same time!

Michael and Norrissey explain that regardless of which style you prefer, people benefit by occasionally using prayer styles preferred by other types. It adds variety and breadth to our relationship with God.

A Change of Place

My husband Roger and I have taken years to develop familiar patterns of communication. Those patterns suit our relationship and enable us to function smoothly on a daily basis. We can, however, grow overly familiar with and unresponsive to the same old messages. So when I break the norm by writing Roger a love letter, my words make a deeper impact—on Roger and on me—than my usual "I love you."

The same is true of our prayer lives. When we use our usual prayer pattern, we find a comfortable and efficient way to spend time with God. That is good. And that is what is needed most of the time, especially when we are weary. But occasionally, if we try communicating with God in a different way, he opens a fresh understanding of himself.

The last of my three retreats during the sabbatical was spent at a friend's house in rural Kentucky, far away from anyone and everyone. Though the first of the four meditation styles is best suited for me, I decided to attempt the fourth—active, nature-appreciating prayer. Hiking seems a strange form of prayer to me, but I spent days in the open fields and forested glens of Kentucky trying to hear God through his creation.



One prayer suggestion asked me to find two trees: one that represented me now, and one that I would like to be. I ventured out to a grove of walnut trees to try the exercise. Within that grove, I journaled (my fallback prayer form) several lessons from the trees.

The grove was planted by a man who, at 60 years of age, would never harvest the wood. He planted the trees for those who came after him. He could have harvested walnuts if he wanted, but as the young trees grew, he pruned off the lower branches to force the trees to grow upward and straight. One day, not only walnuts, but solid, straight lumber would be harvested from this grove. Pruning the trees when they're young doesn't hurt them, but enables them to grow straight. Waiting to cut a tree until it's older, however, is more painful to the tree, leaving scars that mar the wood's quality.

I still mull the lessons learned in that grove, but on that particular day, God had a specific lesson in mind for me. Two trees stood in contrast to one another. One was tall and straight, a pillar that extended to the sky. Great lumber would come from that tree. Another was thick and strong at the base, but its limbs branched in several directions, and each branch distracted the tree from its upward course.

I realized that the straight tree was what I wanted to be. But my life was better characterized by the second, distracted from my goal by moving in too many directions. This exercise outside my characteristic form enabled me to hear God in a fresh way, directing my life to be more focused on him.





Opening My Ears

The fruit of deepened prayer shows in my professional and personal life. It deepens my understanding of Scripture, which deepens my leadership skills. Sitting at the feet of Christ has deepened my love for him. My heart has begun to break over what breaks the heart of God. I've discovered a fresh and moving compassion for the lost, because I know how much it pains God's heart.

Best of all, my hearing has improved. For years I bemoaned the fact that God didn't seem to talk to me much. I realize now that a Martha brain is often so diverted by today's to-do list that it doesn't hear the gentle whisperings of God. In fact, my Martha brain fought against God's intrusion into its plans.

Developing Mary's heart, on the other hand, has taught me to listen for and obey God's agenda, instead of following Martha's.

One Thursday morning I had a few moments before leaving for an early meeting. I was glad to see an e-mail from my friend Rayna, for she had been out of touch for a couple of weeks. She asked a question about an upcoming date and apologized because her mind hadn't been functioning well lately. I wondered what she meant by that. I couldn't really explain it, but I felt compelled to check on her.

My inner Martha had already planned to go to the meeting and then do some shopping. There were some things I needed to pick up, and I had just enough time to cover the bases before the rest of my schedule stacked up. But when I



left the meeting to do my shopping, I could only think about visiting Rayna. The sense was so strong, I pushed Martha's agenda aside and went to Rayna's house.

When Rayna came to the door, she looked distressed, her clothing disheveled. She asked, "Why did you come, how did you know?" *How did I know what?* I wondered. I stood there confused, having no clear reason for why I'd dropped by.

Then she burst out with the admission that she had just been trying to harm herself. Rayna's husband was out of town, her other close friend was out of the country, and her therapist was booked for the day. God had sent me at just the right moment. Besides the immediate rescue from that dangerous situation, the fact that God would act in such a clear way communicated a message of deep love to Rayna.

I had heard my marching orders for that moment. In the past, Martha's agenda would likely have overruled the very instructions that saved my friend's life. I'm convinced that cultivating Mary's heart by sitting with the Father has increased my ability to hear from God.

I wish I'd started this focused listening, abiding, and obeying a lot sooner, but I'm encouraged by Thomas Merton's comment about prayer, "We do not want to be beginners. But let us be convinced of the fact that we will never be anything else but beginners, all our life!"

Kathy Callahan-Howell is pastor of Winton Community Free Methodist Church in Cincinnati, Ohio. This article first appeared in the Fall 2001 issue of LEADERSHIP JOURNAL.



Reflect

- *Have you ever wanted to be like someone else, or to have a different personality-type? Which personality and why? What were the results of this struggle?*
- *How could you better embrace your God-given personality and gifts, while also improving on weaknesses?*
- *Respond to the author's comment and question: "I know God created Martha and me to be complex and multi-tasking individuals. Is there a way to sit at Jesus' feet that works with, and not against, the personality and temperament God gave me?"*



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One Woman's Story

Rahab: An Unlikely Hero

The Bible is filled with heroes who, at first glance, don't seem at all special or powerful.

by Jarrett Stevens

When I was a kid, my friends and I loved to pretend we were superheroes. This involved running as fast as we could with our arms out in front of us, hanging upside down from the monkey bars and jumping off the swings at the highest possible point. Everyone would always pick their favorite superhero and I, without fail, would pick Aquaman.





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Rahab: An Unlikely Hero

There's a good chance you've never heard of Aquaman. He had the superhuman powers of being able to swim for hours without ever taking a breath, and perhaps the lamest power of all: the ability to talk to fish. That's it. Swimming and talking to fish! As I think back, I realize I hadn't chosen the most impressive superhero around.

But the Bible is filled with my kind of heroes—people who, at first glance, don't seem all that special or powerful. One such hero is found in Joshua 2. It's the story of a couple of Israelite spies and Rahab, the unlikely hero who saved them.

Rahab had a couple of things working against her. First off, she was a prostitute—not always good superhero material. Second off, she lived in Jericho, a city about to be attacked by Joshua and the army of Israel. But out of nowhere, the craziest thing happened to her. She got caught up in the incredible grace of God.

Joshua had sent two spies into Jericho to check things out before Israel attacked. The spies decided to hide out for a while in Rahab's "house of business." Obviously they weren't the best spies, because the king of Jericho heard about their hideout and sent his troops after them.

Now, Rahab lived on the outskirts of town. More specifically, she lived near the top of the city wall. And when the troops got there they questioned her about the spies. Rahab responded: "Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they had come from. At dusk, when it was time to close the city gate, the men left. I don't





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Rahab: An Unlikely Hero

know which way they went" (Joshua 2:4-5, NLT). Nice alibi, but totally not true. She was actually hiding the spies under a pile of dried plants up on her roof! So at this point in the story, Rahab's list of immoral or illegal activities included: prostitution, perjury, aiding and abetting criminals and treason against the king. Not a great resumé (or rap sheet) for a superhero, is it? But hold on, I'm finally getting to the really good part.

When the soldiers left, Rahab made a deal with the spies: If she helped them escape, in return, they would spare her and her family when the attack on Jericho began. As she secretly lowered them down the city wall, the spies told her: "We can guarantee your safety only if you leave this scarlet rope hanging from the window" (Joshua 2:18, NLT). The siege started soon after the soldiers' great escape. Before long, Jericho was overtaken and no one was left standing—except for those in the house with the scarlet rope hanging from the window.

When the dust of battle cleared, Rahab left her former life of prostitution and went to live among the Israelites. She eventually married one of them and became the mother-in-law to Ruth, another "unlikely hero."

Rahab's amazing story and influence doesn't end with the Old Testament, however. Matthew 1:5 mentions her again as a part of the Royal Lineage of Jesus and she shows up again in Hebrew 11:31 as one of the great heroes of the faith. That's quite a legacy for such an unlikely hero. Now I'm not sure if you think of yourself as a superhero. Odds are, you probably relate more to someone like Rahab (minus the prostitution part). You may think you're





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Rahab: An Unlikely Hero

nothing special. In fact, there are probably days when you feel pretty far from God. But if God used Rahab to play a part in history and to pave a way for Jesus, why couldn't he use you? I'll bet there are ways God is calling you right now—not to put on the superhero tights and mask, but to respond to whatever he asks, just as you are. There may never be a movie made about you, but you may just go down in history as another unlikely hero who was totally faithful to God.

Jarrett is the Teaching Pastor of Axis, a gathering of 20-somethings at Willow Creek Community Church. When not teaching at church, he can be found in his garden shaping tiny bonsai trees into exact replicas of the original members of 'NSync. This article first appeared in the September/October 2005 issue of CAMPUS LIFE.

Reflect

- *The author mentions that as far as heroes go, Rahab had a few things "working against her." How can you relate? What things do you feel work against you as a leader?*
- *Rahab responded to the situation God had placed her in. How are you looking for and responding to the opportunities that are before you right now?*



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Making A Mark

Mary Magdalene

Meet the real friend and
follower of Jesus.

by Liz Curtis Higgs



Sas she the wife of Jesus, the mother of his children, or the Holy Grail, as *The Da Vinci Code* claims? Or the repentant prostitute of *Jesus Christ Superstar*, throwing herself at the Master's feet, singing, "I Don't Know How to Love Him"?

According to Scripture, Mary Magdalene was none of the above. And more than the above.

We find her story in all four gospels, where she's mentioned by name 14 times—significant, since many women of the Bible are nameless.





Women of the Bible

Mary Magdalene

Here's her eye-opening, one-line biography: "When Jesus rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had driven seven demons" (Mark 16:9). Possessed by Satan, she was repossessed by Christ, then privileged to witness his resurrection. Oh! She has a story, all right—but not a scandalous one.

The Many Marys

So how did we get so off the mark on Mary Magdalene?

Well, she *was* from Magdala, a town known for vice and violence. Additionally, there are *seven* Marys in the New Testament: Mary Magdalene; Jesus' mother; Clopas's wife; Mary of Bethany; John Mark's mother; a diligent worker; and James and Joses' mother, who's also called "the other Mary."

Two thousand years of art and literature haven't helped her cause. Mary Magdalene often is depicted as the unnamed prostitute who washed Jesus' feet with her tears (Luke 7:37-50), or the woman caught in adultery (John 8:2-11), or as Lazarus' sister—who was from Bethany, not Magdala—who anointed the Lord's head with costly perfume (Mark 14:3-9, John 11:2). Fascinating women, all—but not our Mary M.

The real Mary Magdalene led the faithful sisters in financing the Lord's work "out of their own means" (Luke 8:3) and following Jesus wherever he went.

For her devotion alone, Mary Magdalene serves as a fine role model for twenty-first-century believers. Follow her



to the tomb on Easter morning, and you'll learn the greatest lesson Mary M. has to offer.

Go and Tell

When Mary Magdalene "saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance" (John 20:1), she hurried to Jerusalem and convinced Peter and John to see the empty tomb. I might have started with a lesser disciple, but this leader among women went right to the top. Clearly they respected her, because they wasted no time running back with her.

Finding it empty, the two disciples returned to their homes, while Mary remained weeping outside the tomb, unwilling to abandon her Lord. Such faithfulness was soon rewarded. Two angels in white appeared, followed by a stranger whom she mistook for a gardener, until the moment he spoke her name: "Mary" (John 20:16).

Her response was immediate. And it wasn't "Honey" but "*Rabboni!*" The meaning is "my great teacher," and the nature of their relationship is clear: teacher and student, leader and follower, but not husband and wife.

Before he returned to his heavenly home, Jesus had an assignment for Mary Magdalene: "Go ... to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God'" (John 20:17). Did she ever! With her own eyes, she'd seen him. With her own ears, she'd heard him. With her own hands, she'd touched him. And so she proclaimed, "I have seen the Lord!" (John 20:18). A personal, undeniable testimony, setting the example for us all.



Women of the Bible

Mary Magdalene

Two thousand years ago Mary Magdalene heeded the command of Jesus to go and tell. May we follow in her footsteps, seeing the Christ with new eyes, then declaring his glorious truth to a world longing for answers.

Liz Curtis Higgs is the author of 26 books, including Unveiling Mary Magdalene (WaterBrook Press). Visit her website: www.LizCurtisHiggs.com. This article first appeared in the May/June 2006 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN.

Reflect

- *Considering "Mary M's" background and later life-transformation, in what ways can you relate to her?*
- *What strikes you most about the way Scripture remembers Mary Magdalene? Is there anything in her legacy you would like to see lived out in your life?*



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Getting Personal

The Trouble with Rachel



She had it all... and still wanted more.

by Liz Curtis Higgs

We've all met someone like her: lovely face, perfect body, interesting career, devoted husband. The kind of woman who seems to have everything. In Haran of old, her name was Rachel.

Her story opens like a fairytale: Jacob, her cousin, dutifully labored seven years for her hand in marriage, "but they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her" (Genesis 29:20). *Uh-oh*. With such blessings heaped in her corner, we *know* trouble is on the way.





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The Trouble with Rachel

Sure enough, on Rachel's wedding night, Jacob unwittingly married her older sister, Leah, thanks to their father's scheming. Though Rachel became Jacob's second wife, Leah was the fertile one, bearing four healthy sons, one after another.

"But Rachel was barren" (Genesis 29:31). So few words, so much sorrow. Across the centuries we empathize with our infertile sister, especially those among us who've known this particular heartache.

The Drama Queen

Had Rachel rested in the abundance of Jacob's love, waited patiently for the Lord to open her womb, and involved herself in the lives of Leah's children, we'd applaud her as a timeless role model, showing us how a godly woman handles such a difficult situation.

Ah, but Rachel was a flawed human being, just as we are, and so she "became jealous of her sister" (Genesis 30:1). Though Rachel was strikingly beautiful and deeply loved, those joys weren't enough. She wanted what her sister had.

Shakespeare called it "the green sickness"—jealousy, covetousness, envy. Rachel isn't alone in her sin; we've all succumbed to the temptation of jealousy.

Did she rail at Leah? She did not. Did she shake her fist at God? She did not. Instead, Rachel demanded of her husband, "Give me children or I'll die!" (Genesis 30:1). Boy, does *this* drama-queen statement sound familiar. Substitute any number of options for the word *children*, and I've probably said it in the same strident tone of voice: "Give me _____ or I'll ... I'll ..."





Women of the Bible

The Trouble with Rachel

Expected to fix a situation beyond his control, Jacob lost his temper. "Am I in the place of God, who has kept you from having children?" (Genesis 30:2).

Ouch. Though his assessment was accurate—only God could solve the problem—Jacob had clearly run out of patience.

Baby, Baby

Desperate for a baby, Rachel pushed her husband into the arms of her maidservant, Bilhah, and insisted, "Sleep with her so that she can bear children for me" (Genesis 30:3). Canaanite customs allowed such a solution ... *but Rachel wasn't a Canaanite!* How easily we adapt to the ways of the world when we want, want, want.

Jacob complied with her wishes, and so did Bilhah. Soon Rachel's servant bore a son, whom Rachel was quick to claim and name, declaring, "God has vindicated me" (Genesis 30:6). Biblical commentators hear more than a little self-congratulation in her words. She gave no credit to Jacob or Bilhah, and she reduced God to One who did her bidding: "He has listened to my plea" (Genesis 30:6). Finally, a son in her arms. Rachel truly had it all now ... or did she?

Apparently not, since Bilhah gave birth to a second son, prompting Rachel to crow, "I have had a great struggle with my sister, and I have won" (Genesis 30:8). Sadly, Rachel's victory dance spurred her older sister to follow in her footsteps. Leah, too, gave her maidservant to Jacob as a wife. When we see others getting what they want, by whatever means, it's hard not to say, "Me too."





Women of the Bible

The Trouble with Rachel

Still determined to bear her own children, Rachel made her sister a shocking offer, giving up a night with Jacob in exchange for a handful of mandrake plants, believed to make a woman fertile.

Once again, Rachel depended on earthly wisdom rather than heavenly guidance. And once again, Rachel didn't get pregnant, yet Leah did, giving birth to two more sons and later a daughter. All the wanting in the world won't make wishes come true.

God Remembered

When Rachel finally gave up trying, "God remembered Rachel" (Genesis 30:22). He never forgot her, of course. Instead, the Lord waited until she came to the end of herself, then "listened to her and opened her womb" (Genesis 30:22).

God listens still. For our heartfelt confessions, our humble requests. For our admission that we need him more than we need anyone or anything else. At the birth of her son, Joseph, Rachel finally remembered the One who remembered her: "God has taken away my disgrace" (Genesis 30:23). In its place, he gives us mercy. In its stead, the gift of grace.

*Liz Curtis Higgs is the author of 26 books, including *Bad Girls of the Bible* (WaterBrook Press). Visit her website: www.LizCurtisHiggs.com. This article first appeared in the May/June 2006 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN.*



Reflect

- *Green is associated with fertility and life, but in Rachel's case, the color was most unflattering. Whom do you envy and why? What antidote does 1 Corinthians 13:4 suggest for combating envy, and how might that apply to your roles as a leader?*
- *Consider the story of Hannah in 1 Samuel 1:1-20. How do you approach God with your desires? What can you learn from Hannah and Rachel about trusting God with your desires?*



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The Hard Way

Bad Girls of the Bible

Here's what they have to
say to you.

by Liz Curtis Higgs



1. Be in Charge of Distributing Information

Few of us have made it our ambition in life to be a Bad Girl. Even Jezebel and Delilah, those hussies from the pages of the Old Testament, probably didn't set their sights on being evil when they were sweet young things.



I grew up in a Good Girl home. Maybe you did, too. Nice town, nice parents, all the right friends, all the right activities. But when I hit my mid-teens, suddenly that charming small town became stifling. Those National Honor Society pals were nerds. Being good was a snooze. I threw caution—and everything else—to the wind, and pursued a party lifestyle with gusto for a full decade.

In my search for joy, I settled for fun, the kind that came in a bottle, a pill, or the arms of a stranger. Such fun is temporary at best; it's risky, even dangerous, at worst. Not to mention breaking the heart of the One who made us in his image.

Oh, when I think of the shallow relationships, the misspent dollars, the wasted years! I was a woman without hope—a Bad Girl by choice—convinced that if I could just find the "right man," he would save me from my sorrows.

One wintry day in 1982, I met that "right man"—Jesus—who willingly gave up his life to set me free from my own foolishness. Me! Sinful, disobedient, rebellious Liz. My Christian friends who'd shared their hearts, their hugs, and their lives with me now shared the truth with me: I was a sinner in need of a Savior.

Finally, I understood the depth of my badness and the breadth of God's goodness, and embraced his gift of grace with both hands. I was a Bad Girl for a season, but—thank God!—not forever.





Women of the Bible

Bad Girls of the Bible

My life as an FBG—Former Bad Girl—is one reason I've always been intrigued by those "other" women in the Bible. Rather than the Good Girls—Esther, Ruth, Mary, Lydia—it was those Bad Girls I understood best.

Many of them had notorious reputations but no name: Lot's wife. The woman caught in adultery. Potiphar's wife.

That last story—of an Egyptian temptress married to the head of Pharaoh's bodyguards—is one tawdry tale. We want our kids to read the Bible, but think twice about starting with Genesis 39 and the story of a wife who decided she could ignore her marriage vows and graze in greener pastures.

Joseph, her husband's Hebrew slave, was indeed "well-built and handsome"—a stud muffin of a guy—but he wisely resisted her provocative invitations, one after another. Ten points for Joe. Zero for Mrs. P.

What can you learn from a woman like her? How not to get yourself in such a situation. We can't assume that because we're happily married our head won't be turned by the appeal of a muscle-bound delivery guy or a cute carpenter working on our new deck. It happens to Christian women every day—with tragic results.

Those of us who aspire to be Good Girls need to remember these words: "Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil" (Ephesians 5:15-16).



In other words, when that handsome hunk is building your deck one humid afternoon, don't decide the weather's perfect for parading around in your new short-shorts.

Delilah's another woman who taught me how not to go about developing a healthy, loving relationship. Her boyfriend, Samson, was less like the godly Joseph and more like a biblical Paul Bunyan. The big guy's exploits included tearing apart a lion with his bare hands and carting a heavy city gate on his broad shoulders for 40 miles (Judges 16). That's what I'd call a *high-risk* boyfriend!

Delilah chose cold silver over warm-hearted romance and turned Samson over to his enemies, the Philistines, for a huge sum of money. For the record, Delilah wasn't the one who cut off his seven braids. My guess is, if Samson awoke mid-snip, Delilah didn't want to be the one caught cutting off his source of power.

I could easily condemn Delilah's manhood-robbing actions if I hadn't done some sadly similar things to my own dear husband, Bill, early in our marriage. Bill had just finished a one-year teaching position and was looking for a new job. I vividly remember stomping in the door after work one day and demanding, "So, have you made any calls? Gone on any appointments? Is this what being the head of our household means to you?"

Heavenly Father, forgive me for being an insensitive ignoramus. Earthly husband, forgive me for ... well, the same thing.



Here's the lesson I learned from Delilah: Women who want a happy home need to keep the scissors out of reach. How many among us have snip-snip-snipped at our man's sense of worth by undermining him with not-so-gentle jabs at his masculinity:

"If only you could provide more for our family ..."

"Well, my father could fix anything ..."

"Is *that* the best you can do?"

The world cuts our men down enough. We should be ready with emotional bricks and mortar to build our men up, since "the wise woman builds her house, but with her own hands the foolish one tears hers down" (Proverbs 14:1).

Then there's the baddest babe of them all: Jezebel. Potiphar's wife loved men. Delilah loved money. Jezebel loved power. Not the kind conferred by God, like Samson's. This was power she created herself, the hard way: one dead prophet at a time.

When her husband, King Ahab, couldn't talk his neighbor into selling him his vineyard, Ahab pouted and refused to eat. Soon the king developed a queen-size headache when Jezebel showed up and taunted, "Is this how you act as king over Israel?" (1 Kings 21:7).

All the cosmetics in the world couldn't make up for Jezebel's ugly, manipulative attitude toward her husband. Make no mistake, Jezebel had a lot going for her, but her gifts were



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surrendered to the false god Baal. She used her bright mind to devise wicked schemes, her courage to commit murder, and her leadership skills to take over the throne. In other words, she was a Queen with Attitude.

Jezebel didn't offer advice or seek it—she simply took control. That's what jezebels do best. Our pastor has counseled many a modern Ahab who's been run over by a domineering wife. While none of us has killed a prophet, more than one woman among us is guilty of slaughtering her spouse's self-confidence with a verbal blow. But could it be our strong-willed nature—and not his weak-willed one—that makes our man appear less than capable?

Jezebel was a gifted woman who had every opportunity for greatness, yet she threw her chances out the window to embrace a god who—when push came to shove—couldn't save one of his most devoted followers from a terrible end (2 Kings 9:33).

These three ancient women were "bad to the bone," yet their stories live in the Bible so we can learn from them, even if it's what not to do.

As for this Former Bad Girl, I rest in the assurance that "no one is good—except God alone" (Mark 10:18). I'll give him my very best—and count on grace for the rest.

*Liz Curtis Higgs is the author of **Bad Girls of the Bible** (WaterBrook Press). Visit her website: www.LizCurtisHiggs.com. This article first appeared in the May/June 2006 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN.*



Reflect

- *Be honest with yourself: which of the three "bad girls" that the author focused on can you relate to the most? How?*
- *How can you apply the lessons learned from these biblical bad girls' lives to your marriage? To your role as a mother? To your role as a co-worker, boss, or ministry leader?*



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Bringing It Home

It's the Little Things That Count



Nobody notices those behind-the-scenes good deeds of unsung spouses—until now.

by Rachael Phillips

The ring of evil green lights glimmered through midnight blackness from the ceiling of the hotel room. I held my breath, not daring to move a muscle. One minute. Two. An hour. An eternity. Finally, I could bear it no more. I gently nudged my husband, Steve, who'd been lost in peaceful slumber.

"Mygwtzx... ?" he mumbled, then turned over and drifted off again.

In terror, I elbowed him harder.





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"What the—?" Steve half-rose from his pillow.

"Shhhh! Quiet! They'll hear you!"

"Who will hear me?"

I trembled. "The Communists," I said.

Complete silence. Then, "Why would the Communists listen to us sleep?"

"I don't know. But look at those green lights! I know they're listening."

The bedside lamp went on. With spiky hair and incredulous glare, Steve resembled an indignant triceratops roused from his sleep. But he explained calmly that the evil green lights indicated the presence of the hotel's sprinkler system, and no, they had nothing to do with the Communists, voyeuristic or otherwise. I'd been dreaming.

After 27 years, Steve's an old hand at dealing with my temporary night psychoses. He's scared off screaming fighter jets who buzzed through our small Midwestern neighborhood (in actuality, snowplows). When nightly thumps and bumps convinced me an army of burglars coveted our obsolete VCR and ancient TV, his courage knew no bounds. When pink-raincoat-clad people carrying a black coffin followed me on a mad chase through ghostly hallways (a combination of too many old Doris Day movies and PBS Mystery programs), he dispelled them with a single thrust of razor-sharp logic.

Although Steve doesn't remember including this service in his wedding vows (I think it falls somewhere under "for worse"), he's never once hinted about having me committed.





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Surely this unequivocally qualifies him for an Unsung Spouse Award.

Unlike the Oscars, these unique awards aren't given to the gifted and the beautiful on television before huge audiences of unnaturally thin and gorgeous people in scanty clothing. Instead, only the winner's spouse and God witness the Unsung Spouse Awards ceremonies, which celebrate the unnoticed and unappreciated heroes and heroines of marriage. Even the spouse doesn't show up at times! But in unseen timeless reality, thousands of angels raise their wings in salute to these masters of meekness. Music and rainbow laser lights explode from every side as God himself applauds and high-fives the champions, which include:

The woman who maintains regular correspondence with her in-laws, as her husband hasn't yet discovered the inventions of e-mail, telephone, ink pen, or paper.

The man whose wife believes cars run on gasoline fumes. He fills her tank and charges her cell phone batteries so hatchet murderers won't find her stranded along the freeway at 11 P.M.

The woman who buys, wraps, and delivers Christmas presents for her husband's employees, his parents, his siblings, his children, and him, yet makes a big deal of his single late-Christmas Eve purchase for her.

The hi-tech Knight in Shining Armor who protects his family from Internet spam, viruses, hackers, porn mongers, and other cyber villains. Even if his wife calls him at work, weeping because she deleted all their financial programs





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and 20 years' worth of his golf score records, he talks her through recovery steps over the phone. He doesn't mention firing her, although the thought occurs to him.

The pastor's wife who listens with a smile as other churchwomen tell her how wonderful her husband is.

Best of the Bible's Unsung

Surprisingly, the Unsung Spouse Awards have existed for centuries. If we read between the lines, abundant examples leap from the pages of the Bible, including these unsung spouses from the Old Testament:

Mrs. Noah. She took a yearlong cruise with her husband, sons, and daughters-in-law, caring for Noah's personal zoo, including lions, tigers, and bears—oh, my!—as well as snakes, mosquitoes, and tarantulas—OH, MY! (Why God found the latter indispensable will be one of my questions when I get to heaven.)

The unnamed wives of Shem, Ham, and Japheth. For years, these women hardly saw their husbands, who spent every spare moment with their father, Noah, building a huge boat in a desert. These women supported their husbands and accompanied their rather strange father-in-law on a long, questionable voyage. Their faith saved their lives and those of future descendants—including ours. No doubt God bestowed a special blessing on these wives, and plans a grand prize for their eternal future—which probably isn't a free cruise.

Sarah, the Mae West of the Old Testament. Her husband, Abraham, tried to pass her off as his sister to protect his





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own skin. Twice. She let him live. (Give Abraham credit, though, for living with a 90-year-old pregnant woman.)

Hannah's husband, Elkanah. He wasn't Mr. Sensitive in regard to their blended family and her low self-esteem because she lacked children. But when Hannah determined to give their miracle child, Samuel, to God's service, Elkanah supported her decision, an unusual reaction in a patriarchal system that valued, above all, its sons.

Boaz. A wealthy, powerful man who honored faith and virtue in Ruth. He ultimately married her, though she was a foreigner—an anathema to a respectable Jewish man. Neither he nor his heirs have sued because Ruth's name is stamped on the Old Testament book, rather than his. At least, not yet.

Lappidoth and Shallum, the respective husbands of the judge Deborah and the prophetess Huldah. I can't recall hearing a sermon preached on either of these men. Yet, despite their lack of positive press, they ring true. Lappidoth did not object to his wife's running off to battle with General Barak, a timid Don Knotts-style soldier who refused to go to war without Deborah's presence. And we find no evidence Shallum interfered with his wife's ministry, although she sometimes made politically-incorrect statements.

Hosea, the patient, forgiving prophet. He should receive highest honors, as his wife had far more guy friends than girl friends.





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And what about these New Testament spouses? The unnamed wives of the disciples, who kept the home fires burning while their husbands followed the young revolutionary named Jesus around Palestine for three years. Likewise, husbands such as Clopas and Cuza, the spouses of Mary and Joanna, dealt with the unrest and downright danger their women faced, not to mention juicy rumors that no doubt surrounded them, as they followed Jesus.

After exploring the Unsung Spouses' Roll Call of Faith throughout the Bible, my own position as Chief Guardian of the Toilet Paper Spindle seems less demeaning, while my husband's role as Great (and Only) Changer of Light Bulbs grows in importance. After all, Jesus always noticed seemingly "little" things about people. Cups of cold water, sparrows, snotty-nosed little kids, and blind beggars all interested him. He recognized extravagant love housed in brown-paper packages, such as the lunch of fish and bread the little boy gave up. Like the widow who gave her pennies to God.

Jesus also admires married love that wears baby drool, shovels snow before daylight, heats and reheats dinner, and actually reads the insurance policy. In his eyes, the first are last and the last are first. All who take cold showers—not because of a raging libido, but because someone else hogs the hot water—stand in God's Unsung Spouse Awards line.





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And near the head of that line, receiving a movie star's adulation, is my husband, Steve, in beige cardigan and sensible shoes—my mighty Defender Against the Communists.

Rachael Phillips, author of Billy Sunday (Barbour Press), lives with her family in Indiana. This article first appeared in the fall 2003 issue of MARRIAGE PARTNERSHIP.

Reflect

- *Which of the author's "Best of the Bible's Unsung" can you relate to and why? Which of the "Best" can you relate your spouse to, and why?*
- *How can you quietly serve those in your life this week?*



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Leadership Tools

Judge Deborah

She's the ideal role model for every women called to lead others.

by Liz Curtis Higgs



Judge Debby she was *not*, dispensing criminals with a sarcastic barb and a wave of her hand. Instead, the biblical Deborah was a renowned prophetess, an honored judge, and an ideal role model for every woman called to lead others.

Three millennia ago Deborah convened her court under a palm tree where "the Israelites came to her to have their disputes decided" (Judges 4:5). Undoubtedly their greatest disputes revolved around their oppressors, the Canaanites. Something had to be done, and Deborah was the woman for the job.





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Judge Deborah

When she ordered Barak, her secretary of defense, to amass an army, Deborah made it clear who reigned as commander in chief: "The Lord, the God of Israel, commands you" (Judges 4:6). Unlike take-charge Jezebel, who sought no one's counsel, levelheaded Deborah obeyed the Lord and insisted his will—not hers—be done. Her top leadership qualities? Read on.

Fearless in Battle

As courageous as she was wise, Deborah promised to lure Sisera, the enemy commander, to the riverside and deliver him into Barak's waiting hands.

But Barak balked. "If you go with me, I will go; but if you don't go with me, I won't go" (Judges 4:8). What's the deal? Was he a weak-kneed wimp? Or did Barak think the Lord would bless his efforts only if godly Deborah was by his side?

Whatever the case, her response was swift. "Very well," Deborah said, "I will go with you" (Judges 4:9). As her modern counterpart, former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher once quipped, "In politics, if you want anything said, ask a man. If you want anything done, ask a woman."

Deborah indeed took action, yet warned Barak that he'd forfeited any claim in the victory: "Because of the way you are going about this, the honor will not be yours, for the Lord will hand Sisera over to a woman" (Judges 4:9). Keep that prophecy in mind, and be prepared for a few surprises.



Gave Marching Orders

The two armies mustered: ruthless Sisera with iron chariots and countless men pitted against Barak with 10,000 foot soldiers and nary a chariot. Before Barak lost his nerve, Deborah told him, "Go! This is the day the Lord has given Sisera into your hands. Has not the Lord gone ahead of you?" (Judges 4:14).

Once again, Deborah resisted the urge to take credit or take charge, and made the chain of command clear. Oh, that I'd paid attention to Deborah's story a dozen years ago! In my short stint as an employer, overseeing three women who worked for me, I discovered my strong-willed nature didn't always serve me well. My management style was all about "follow me" and "do it my way." Yet as Deborah demonstrates, it's in following the Lord and doing things his way that we truly lead others.

Grand Finale of Praise

Just as expected, God's will prevailed on the battlefield: "All the troops of Sisera fell by the sword; not a man was left" (Judges 4:16). The one exception was Sisera himself, who fled on foot and sought refuge inside the tent of a woman named Jael. Hardly a safe haven, since Jael owned a tent peg, a hammer, and two strong hands ...

I'll spare you the gory story of Sisera's demise and jump to Deborah's response. When she learned her prophecy that God would hand Sisera over to a woman had come true, the sound of music rang out across the land. Her "Song of Deborah," the oldest remaining fragment of Hebrew literature, was dedicated to the One she loved: "I will make music to the Lord, the God of Israel" (Judges 5:3).





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Judge Deborah

She also sang the praises of those who served her well—"My heart is with Israel's princes, with the willing volunteers among the people" (Judges 5:9)—and she commended Jael at length, calling her "most blessed of tent-dwelling women" (Judges 5:24). A final leadership lesson from Deborah: Acknowledge the efforts of others, rather than pat yourself on the back.

Beginning to end, Deborah was God's woman. If the Lord has called you to lead others, consider taking Deborah's motto as your own: "March on, my soul; be strong!" (Judges 5:21). Even if our "army" is a small group of volunteers or a kitchen full of kids, we can learn from Deborah's leadership style by putting aside any personal agenda, listening for God's clear direction, and letting others know who's really running the show.

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Additional Resources

Finding Contentment, a downloadable resource from the **Kyria.com**. Contentment is often robbed by unmet expectations, dashed dreams or unfulfilled hopes. Yet, contentment is our choice. Do we focus on our circumstances or on God? In this guide you'll find helpful articles that offer advice and insight on how to find true joy and contentment, no matter what your circumstances.

Life Style: Real Perspectives from Radical Women in the Bible, by Whitney Prospero (New Hope Publishers, 2004). What can you learn from women in the Bible? How to date. How to love. How to deal with a broken heart. How to stand up for your future, your friends, your faith. Enough to change your life. Scripture reveals real women with radical stories. Read a love story that would make the perfect chick flick. Overcome a bad reputation after reading how Jesus transformed a woman with the worst.





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Additional Resources

Learn how to stand up for people from a regular-girl-turned-queen who risked her life for her people. Heal your broken heart, face your future with confidence, become a leader, and experience the love of God like you've never imagined. This 12-week study works for one reader or a group, and includes a leader's guide. You'll focus on a different woman of the Bible each week, and each weekly lesson addresses current issues like identity, self-worth, body image, eating disorders, and dating.

Today's Christian Woman 6-Study Course, from the **Kyria.com**. These six Bible studies help women grow in their relationship to God and get practical, biblical perspectives on self-worth, stress, confidence, and contentment. Studies include: **Where Do We Get Self-Worth?**, **Longing to Hear God's Voice**, **Harnessing Stress**, **Finding Confidence**, **The Joy of Being Content**, and **Healthy Body, Healthy Spirit**.

Transformed Women in the Bible, Sisters in Faith Bible Studies, by Julie Allyson-Ieron (Wesleyan Publishing House, 2006). *Sisters in Faith Bible Studies* are written from one sister in faith to others about still other sisters, amazing women who touched the heart of God. These studies form a practical journey because the lives of these biblical women have great relevance to the lives women live today. Alongside the stories of biblical women, the author shares snapshots of today's women—women of faith from all walks of life who are examples of what it means to put Bible lessons into practice in real life. This volume introduces you to several women who spent time with Jesus and were never the same.



Wisdom from Women in the Bible, by Edith Deen (Harper San Francisco, 2003). Draw courage and hope from the women behind the biblical stories! Offering engaging profiles of 50 women, Deen shows how they dealt with the same issues you face today—from marriage and children to homemaking and widowhood. Their struggles and triumphs will help you see your life in a new light—the light of God's Word. 192 pages, hardcover from HarperSan Francisco.

Women of the Bible: A One-Year Devotional Study of Women in Scripture, by Ann Spangler and Jean E. Syswerda (Zondervan, 2007). Nurture your relationship with God and learn how he reveals his plan of salvation through the lives of women! Newly updated for small groups, this daily devotional examines 52 women from Scripture, incorporating personal reflection, Bible study, historical background, God's promises, and suggested prayers. A timeline, lists of women in Jesus' life, and more deepen your study.

Women in the Bible: Examples to Live By: 33 Lessons, by Sylvia Charles (Hensley Publishing, 2001). Because God teaches by example, author Sylvia Charles has taken 64 women from His Word and expertly guides you through the lessons of their lives. You learn from their successes and failures, their victories and defeats, their virtues and shortcomings. Beginning with Eve in Genesis, and ending with the Bride of Christ in Revelation, you'll learn about divine order, covenants, meditating on God's Word, spiritual warfare, prayer, marital relationships, the occult, wisdom, friends and family, revenge, and many other subjects in the lives of God's women.





Women of the Bible

Additional Resources

Women in the Bible for Dummies, by Rev. John Trigilio, Jr., and Rev. Kenneth Brighenti (John Wiley & Sons, 2005). This friendly, approachable guide introduces readers to the famous and infamous women of Scripture, describing in everyday language the contributions these women made in their time and ours. From Eve, Sarah, and Esther to Mary and Mary Magdalene, it discusses well-known women of both the Old and New Testaments, examining their role in Biblical narratives, their place in the Jewish and Christian faiths, and the lessons their stories impart to women today.





Women of the Bible
Article Title Here



A NEW DIGITAL WORLD FOR THOUGHTFUL,
INFLUENTIAL WOMEN WHO WANT MORE
FROM THEIR FAITH AND WHO WANT TO
MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN THE LIVES OF OTHERS.

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