

Women of the Bible

A 15-Day Devotional



Women of the Bible

Welcome to our study of several of the women of influence in the Bible. These women all had distinct and different roles in the story of God's redemptive covenant with man. Some were women with a past, and some seemed to have known God all their lives. But God found a way to use them all to accomplish his will. Women play many roles in our current society, all important. And while we live in a time that somewhat politicizes the power of women, we want to spend this time looking at what God has placed in the Bible to teach us about our roles as women.

One of the most popular and recognized scriptures in the Bible regarding the identity of women is Proverbs 31: 10-31. While this scripture speaks explicitly to a "Wife of Noble Character," I would ask that you consider this scripture as it applies to most of your roles that you can identify in your life.

In preparation for this study, please consider doing two things: First, begin thinking about and identifying your roles in your family, your work, your circle of friends, and your church. Some examples may include mother, daughter, sister, friend, caregiver, student, boss, teammate, Bible study leader, etc. Secondly, read the scripture found in Proverbs 31 and begin applying it to each of these roles. As you join us on this journey through some key women in the Bible, I hope that you will start to see yourself in the stories, developing ways you can work on those "noble character" traits that are so dear to the heart of God.

May the Lord bless your time as you join us on this journey! Proverbs 31:30

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Sarai (Sarah)

Meaning of her name: "Princess"

Who she was: Sarah was Abraham's wife in the Old Testament.

Synopsis of her story: God was gracious with Sarah and gave her a child in her old age, without regard to what she did to deserve the blessing. When she found out what the Lord had planned for her and Abraham to be parents, she laughed.

Application for us: Our lack of faith does not prevent God from keeping his promises and accomplishing what he plans, and it is perfectly fine to take delight in that.

Quote: Genesis 21:6 – "God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me."

Read her story: Genesis 18: 1-15, Genesis 21: 1-7

Questions to Ponder:

1. What is a desire of my heart that is so seemingly difficult that it makes me laugh to think of it becoming a reality? Is it something that God and I can take delight in together? How should I pray about this?

2. When has God accomplished His plan in my life when I lacked faith?

Notes:

Rahab

Meaning of her name: “a new future for a woman with a past”

Who she was: Rahab was a prostitute within the walls of Jericho, who helped Joshua and the Israelites.

Synopsis of her story: Rahab had heard about the God of Israel and what he had done on behalf of his people, thereby recognizing that he is the one true God. The stigma of her past became overshadowed by the honor given to her by God, as she was to be in the lineage of Jesus (Matt 1:5). Rahab chose faith over fear, and it led to the deliverance of her family.

Application for us: Through Rahab, God confirms that he is the Savior of all people, for all time and in all circumstances. We can take comfort in that; knowing that he will do the same for us; no matter what we have done.

Quote: Joshua 2:11 – “When we heard of it, our hearts melted and everyone’s courage failed because of you, for the Lord your God is God in heaven and on the earth below.”

Read her story: Joshua 2: 1-24, Joshua 6:17-25

Questions to ponder:

1. What situation do I need to face without fear but in faith, trusting that God will provide the solution?

2. Have I let the darkness in my past overshadow my ability to take action towards God’s deliverance for me? How should I face that to grow my faith? How should I pray about this?

Notes:

Deborah

Meaning of her name: “bee”

Who she was: Deborah was leader and a prophetess.

Synopsis of her story: Deborah was one of the wisest people in all of Israel, so she became a judge (usually an exclusively male role). Her leadership showed that wise women can be a profound influence on men and a nation.

Application for us: The Lord gives gifts and callings to all his people. If we assess our talents, seek Godly counsel, move in confidence to the best of our ability; God will empower, equip and affirm us.

Quotes (from the song of Deborah):

Judges 5:7 – “Village life in Israel ceased, ceased until I, Deborah, arose, arose a mother in Israel.”

Judges 5:31 – “So may all your enemies perish, O Lord! But may they who love you be like the sun when it rises in its strength.”

Read her story: Judges 4 and 5

Questions to ponder:

1. What is God asking me to do for Him that may be outside of my “comfort zone” or my traditional roles? How will I answer Him in obedience?
2. To whom do I turn for counsel if I need a ministry partner? Am I choosing to work alongside Godly people in the tasks I undertake?
3. How should I pray about these things?

Notes:

Naomi

Meaning of her name: “pleasantness”

Who she was: Naomi was the mother-in-law of Ruth and Orpah; all three became widows.

Synopsis of her story: Naomi was a Godly woman of character and became Ruth’s mentor. Naomi recognized the blessing that God was sending and encouraged Ruth to act upon it. God used Naomi to bring together his perfect plan through Ruth and Boaz (a kinsman-redeemer).

Application for us: When we earnestly pray and seek God, with a heart to obediently follow his lead, we will likely recognize the hand of God in our lives. Even as a mother-in-law or other family leader, women have a profound influence on family decisions.

Quote: Ruth 2:20 – “...She added, ‘That man is our close relative; he is one of our kinsman-redeemers.’”

Read her story: Ruth 1-4

Questions to ponder:

1. What has been a low point in my life when I did not know what to do? Who might have been watching my decisions and learning from me? What influence did I have, and is there anything I would now do differently?

2. Is there a current family decision in which I need to seek God’s hand and direction, asking how I should influence the decision, if at all? How should I pray about this?

3. To whom should I be a mentor? Is there a physically or spiritually younger woman who may need my companionship?

Notes:

Ruth

Meaning of her name: “female companion”

Who she was: Ruth was one of Naomi’s daughters-in-law, widowed.

Synopsis of her story: Ruth was a Moabite woman who chose to stay with Naomi, Naomi’s people, and Naomi’s God after she, Naomi, and Orpah were widowed. (Orpah, Naomi’s other daughter-in-law, had chosen to return to the Moabite people.) When Ruth decided to trust these people, she also decided to give her life to the God of Israel, rejecting her Moabite roots and their gods.

Application for us: Find and accept the counsel of a Godly mentor who is looking out for our best interests, helping to guide us toward a closer relationship to God. Jesus is our Kinsman-Redeemer, and he will advise, protect, and provide for us for the rest of our lives. Be willing to reject the world’s ways and follow God.

Quote: Ruth 1:16 – (to Naomi) “But Ruth replied, ‘Don’t urge me to leave you or turn back from you. Where you go, I will go, and where you stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God.’”

Read her story: Ruth 1-4

Questions to ponder:

1. Who are my mentors, and who are theirs? Am I relating to other women who will give me Godly counsel and lead me in the direction of my Kinsman-Redeemer (Jesus)? Do I need to seek out a mentor, and what steps should I take?

2. What do I need to do in my life to discover ways to be obedient to the leading of God? In what areas of my life might I face rejection or hardship, keeping me from following wholeheartedly after God? How should I pray about this?

Notes:

Hannah

Meaning of her name: “gracious”

Who she was: Hannah was the mother of Samuel after being barren. It had always been the desire of her heart to have a son.

Synopsis of her story: Hannah prayed so fervently for a son that she was thought to be drunk, only mouthing the words of her prayer. If the Lord would allow her a child, she vowed to give him back to the Lord. She was willing to fulfill her vow, no matter how difficult. Because she was allowed to have Samuel, she did just as she had promised and gave him to be raised in the temple, so the Lord blessed her with three more sons and two daughters.

Application for us: Prayer is effective and loaded with grace. We can do what we know to do in the situation, but fervent and meaningful prayer unlocks the power and presence of God himself.

Quote: 1 Samuel 1:13 – “Hannah was praying in her heart, and her lips were moving, but her voice was not heard.”

Read her story: 1 Samuel 1:1 – 2:21

Questions to ponder:

1. What are the desires of my heart? Am I willing to pray so fervently about them that others may look upon me with confusion?
2. What act of obedience do I need to fulfill in my life that may cause me emotional hardship like Hannah, who left her son to grow up away from her?
3. How should I improve my personal prayer life?

Notes:

Abigail

Meaning of her name: “my father is joy”

Who she was: Abigail became one of David’s wives after her husband Nabal (“a fool”) died.

Synopsis of her story: Abigail was beautiful, capable, and intelligent, and had learned to act quickly and decisively. David realized that the Lord had used Abigail to save him from a wrong decision that would have placed him outside of God’s will and favor. She recognized, respected, and acknowledged who David was in the Lord, prophesying God’s provision on David.

Application for us: Godly women have a great influence on men. Our challenge is the same: to use our wisdom, influence, and capabilities in the service of the will of God.

Quote: 1 Samuel 25:28 – “...for the Lord will certainly make a lasting dynasty for my master because he fights the Lord’s battles.”

Her prophecy: 1 Samuel 25:29 – “...the life of my master will be bound securely in the bundle of the living by the Lord your God.”

Read her story: 1 Samuel 25

Questions to ponder:

1. I, too, am capable, intelligent, and strong. How am I using my wisdom to think through situations and carry out God’s wishes? Am I willing to speak up respectfully and mindfully when I need to, to be obedient to the Lord?

2. What influence do I have on the men in my life; my family, friends, coworkers, associates? How am I using that influence to serve the will of the Lord? How should I pray about this?

Notes:

Esther

Meaning of her name: “star”

Who she was: Esther was a beautiful young Jewish maiden (her family was in exile in Persia) who became the wife of King Xerxes of Persia after he became frustrated with his wife, Queen Vashti.

Synopsis of her story: Esther’s beauty was flawless, both inside and out. However, her courage and compassion were what eventually won the King’s heart. Her inner beauty had prepared her to be an instrument in God’s hand for saving his people in a time of great peril. Because of what Esther did, the Jews were saved, and the Feast of Purim was established.

Application for us: God took care of Esther, and he will take care of us too. We should ask the Lord to help us to develop an inner beauty and strength of character by which we will be known.

Quote: Esther 4:16 – “...When this is done, I will go to the King even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.”

Read her story: Esther 1-9

Questions to ponder:

1. Submission can be a difficult task. How can I practice submission in my life while also growing my strength of character in the Lord? Do I need to ask God for wisdom relative to speaking my mind?
2. In what areas of my life do I need to find compassion for helpless people and be able to speak up in their defense?
3. What are the admirable and Godly attributes that I see in Esther’s story that I need to pray about and ask for God’s guidance in my own life?

Notes:

Mary (Mother of Jesus)

Meaning of her name: “bitter”

Who she was: Mary was a young Jewish virgin who was betrothed to marry Joseph, a descendent of David. She was chosen by God to be the mother of Jesus.

Synopsis of her story: The angel Gabriel who told her that she would conceive a child and that he would be the son of the Most High God, visited Mary. Mary exemplifies believing in faith and has an extraordinary story as the mother of God. Encounters with angels, with the Holy Spirit, with God and the Son Jesus all confirmed her faith and her obedience to what God instructed.

Application for us: Faithful obedience as Mary’s is the evidence that we are spiritually connecting to Christ and believing God will do what he says. Spiritual maturity is not age-dependent. God uses real people of all ages to accomplish His will and equips them for what they need to do.

Quote: Obedience – Luke 1:38 – “‘I am the Lord’s servant,’ Mary answered. ‘May it be to me as you have said.’ Then the angel left her.”

Quote: Praise – Luke 1:46 – “And Mary said: ‘My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me - holy is his name.’”

Read her story: Luke 1-2; Matthew 1: 18-25

Questions to ponder:

1. I believe IN God, but do I really believe God? How can I grow my faith to the point of Mary’s; when she heard from God, she said, “Yes, Lord” with no questions asked?
2. When I pray for God’s leading and guidance, am I ready to follow what he says to do? What should I do within my spirit to help me be able to say “Yes, Lord” when he calls me?
3. How should I pray for God to help me increase my faith?

Notes:

Elizabeth

Meaning of her name: "God is my oath"

Who she was: Elizabeth was the wife of Zechariah and, in her elder years, conceived and became the mother of John the Baptist. She was also a close relative to Mary, Mother of Jesus.

Synopsis of her story: Elizabeth knew the scriptures, especially the story of Sarah and Abraham, blessed with a child. She also knew that her son would fulfill the prophecy by going before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elijah to prepare the people for the coming of the Lord. Her knowledge of the scriptures and the stories affirmed her beliefs and led her into obedience to God.

Application for us: To prepare ourselves for obedience to God's call and blessings, we must carefully study the Word and commit it to our hearts. Our knowledge of the Word will prepare us for what we need to do and how we need to live.

Quote: Luke 1:25 – "The Lord has done this for me," she said. "In these days he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people."

Read her story: Luke 1: 5-80

Questions to ponder:

1. How well do I know God's Word? Am I doing all I can to learn about God and know his character and attributes? What resources do I have or need that would help in my studies?

2. Am I in the scriptures regularly (daily), and should I be in a Bible study group with other Godly women who thirst for the Word? How should I pray to God to give me a hunger and thirst for His Word so that I can recognize Him more?

Notes:

Mary Magdalene

Meaning of her name: “bitter”

Who she was: Mary Magdalene was also known as the “Mary of Seven Demons.” She was from the town of Magdala near Capernaum and healed by Jesus of her demonic possession. (Luke 8:1-3)

Synopsis of her story: Once healed, Mary became one of the several women who followed Jesus, traveling with him and the disciples and likely ministering to them. Mary was a woman of comfortable financial means and probably supported the causes of Jesus in his ministries.

Mary was with Jesus throughout his earthly ministry, with him at the cross and watched him crucified. She was the first person Jesus appeared to after he left the tomb, probably purposefully, because Jesus trusted her and had a heart for allowing women to have responsibilities. Through her loyalty to Jesus, she was rewarded with the honor of being the first one to proclaim, “He’s Alive!”

Application for us: When God calls us into his presence and trusts us with the ministry he provides for us, we should be honored by that and fulfill our purpose wholeheartedly. He will reward our faithfulness far beyond our ability to imagine or expect.

Quote: John 20:18 – “Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: ‘I have seen the Lord!’ And she told them that he had said these things to her.”

Read her story: Luke 8: 1-3; 23:55-24:11
John 20: 1-18

Questions to ponder:

1. Once Jesus healed my past, have I developed a love for God that is as pure and focused as Mary Magdalene’s? How should I pray about this?

2. Is God calling me to any ministry opportunities that I need to devote myself to, forsaking other things in my life? Am I ready to handle these in such a way that God will honor me with his favor? How should I pray about this?

3. What are some personal observations I can learn from the life of Mary Magdalene?

Notes:

Mary of Bethany

Meaning of her name: “bitter”

Who she was: Mary of Bethany was the sister of Martha and Lazarus, a friend of Jesus.

Synopsis of her life: Mary was a faithful follower of Jesus and sat at his feet to hear his teachings when he visited their home. She washed his feet with expensive perfume and wiped them dry with her hair. Her hunger and passion for the truth, along with her perception of Jesus’ need to rest, led her to spend time with Jesus, neglecting the household chores (to the dismay of her sister Martha). Mary was the “quiet one” and seemed to have a deep abiding love for Jesus and a need to care for others.

Application for us: As women, we are busy, especially when it comes to taking care of our homes and the needs of others. Sometimes our chores, conversations, and work will wait as we spend time at the feet of Jesus. He will honor us for that, just as he did, Mary. May our homes be filled with the fragrance of our dedication to Jesus.

Quote: John 12:3 – “Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus’ feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. “

Read her story: Luke 10:38-42; John 11:1-12:3

Questions to ponder:

2. What do I need to adjust in my life to be able to sit quietly at the feet of the Lord and soak in His presence? How should I pray about this?

2. What are the costly gifts that I have to offer to the Lord? Am I willing to give them to him?

Notes:

Martha

Meaning of her name: "lady or mistress"

Who she was: Martha was the sister of Lazarus and Mary of Bethany and friend of Jesus.

Synopsis of her story: Martha had a relationship with Jesus, where she was comfortable speaking her mind. She told him about her frustration that Mary was not helping with the chores, and she spoke frankly with him (but showing her faith) when Lazarus died, stating, "...if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask." – John 11:21-22

Martha knew the Lord loved her, and she had an openness to learn from him as he guided her into deeper thinking.

Application for us: Many times, we are reluctant to share our deepest thoughts and feelings with God, even though he knows our innermost emotions. We should realize that the Lord wants us to be honest with him, even in our frustrations. We must believe that he is who he says he is, be open in our emotions and then be ready to follow his guidance in every situation.

Quote: John 11:27 - 'Yes, Lord,' she told him, 'I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.'"

Read her story: John 11:1-12:3; Luke 10:38-41

Questions to ponder:

1. Do I have the kind of relationship with God, where I am comfortable speaking my mind and sharing my innermost feelings with him? What have I learned from the life of Martha to develop that kind of relationship?

2. Are my priorities such that I can put God first, or am I too caught up in the "busy-ness" of life? How should I work on these priorities?

3. How should I pray about these things?

Notes:

Salome

Meaning of her name: the female form of Solomon, which means “peace”

Who she was: Salome was the mother of disciples James and John (Zebedee’s sons); possibly Jesus’ mother Mary’s sister (Jesus’ aunt).

Synopsis of her story: Salome was among the women who followed and supported Jesus in his travels and ministry. She was at the foot of the cross when he died and was one of the women who brought spices and oils to anoint his body after death.

She had a mother’s heart and was proud of what her sons and Jesus were doing. When Jesus was teaching the disciples about his earthly ministry that was ending, Salome spoke up and suggested her sons be “promoted” to leadership positions in his kingdom. She did not understand the extent to which the kingdom was being established and what it would mean for Jesus. Salome did not realize what she was asking.

Application for us: As mothers and aunts (or others who hold family responsibilities as women), we are proud of and want the best for our children – the best education, the best jobs, the best companions, the best material things. When we pray or ask for those things, we sometimes do not understand why God says no. When we remember that he has the wisdom of eternity at his disposal and is the creator of the divine plan, it all starts to make sense. We should ask for his will and his perspective on these matters involving those we hold so dear.

Quote: Matthew 20:21 – “‘What is it you want?’ [Jesus] asked. She said, ‘Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom.’”

Read her story: Matthew 20:20-24

Questions to ponder:

1. There are younger people in my family whom I love and care about, including children of my own. What is my role in their lives, and what should I be asking the Lord for on their behalf? Does my pride enter into my requests for them?
2. When I pray for family and people that I care about, do I ask for God’s will to be done in the situation, knowing that I may not fully understand the consequences of what my requests could bring? How might my requests for them affect others?
3. How should I pray about these things?

Notes:

Lydia

Meaning of her name: “bending”

Who she was: Lydia was a trader in purple cloth in the city of Philippi; a cultured and affluent businesswoman who heard Paul’s teachings; a Gentile who had accepted the Jewish faith.

Synopsis of her story: Lydia was the first Christian convert recorded in Europe and then used her wealth to help Paul and his ministry. The Lord opened her heart during Paul’s message, and she was, in turn, baptized. Paul personally disciplined her, and she then supported his work, helping lead many others to Christ. She opened her home and lent her servants to the disciples, and they stayed with her during their travels.

Application for us: Those of us with material resources can become a strong conduit of God’s provision. As we support our church, our pastors, and Godly teachers, we can become an example to others. Through our generous actions in support of God’s kingdom, we will be blessed, and we will become a blessing to others.

Quote: Acts 16:15 – (Luke, who was traveling with Paul is speaking) “When [Lydia] and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. ‘If you consider me a believer in the Lord,’ she said, ‘come and stay at my house.’ And she persuaded us.”

Read her story: Acts 16:12-15, 40

Questions to ponder:

1. How can I financially or materially support God’s kingdom work? Do I have interests to support mission work or others who are reaching into God’s world to bring forth the gospel?
2. How can I support the local church, including her Pastors, leaders, and other ministers who help bring me closer to the Lord? Am I able to show hospitality by opening my home, sharing a meal, or making a donation? Perhaps I should write a card of appreciation?
3. How should I pray about these things, and what action should I take?

Notes: