

Our Bible Sisters:

Deborah – Responding to God’s Call

Participant’s Guide

This Bible study was written by Marilyn Miller, a staff minister at Abiding Word Lutheran Church in Houston, TX. The theological content was reviewed by Professor Lyle Lange.

Our Bible Sisters is a series of one-hour studies that may be used separately or in any combination. Each looks at a different woman of the Bible, highlighting God’s faithfulness in her life, with applications to the lives of all Christian women today.

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Deborah – Responding to God’s Call

Opening Prayer

“God is faithful! Even in the dismal 350 year period of the Judges, when Israel was pulling away from God, he remained faithful to them. During Joshua’s time Israel saw victory after victory, but in the period of the judges they saw defeat after defeat. God used their trials to call them back to himself. He would always faithfully provide a deliverer.” (Barber, pg 53).

The Setting

1. Scan Judges 2:1–3:6. What cycle do you see during the period of the judges?
2. Read Judges 5:6-8 and 21:25. What was the land of Israel like at the time of Deborah?
3. Many of us may have experienced such desperate times in our life or in the life of someone you love. Why would God allow such a horrible situation in our life?
4. What valuable life lesson do we learn from verse 7?

Deborah's Life

5. Read Judges 4:4-5. Besides being a mother in Israel (Judges 5:7), what else do we learn about Deborah?

6. Read Judges 4:6-10. What do we learn about the plan for deliverance from Sisera's army?

7. Why might Barak have responded as he did in vs 8 and what can we learn from this?

8. What can we learn about God's calling of men and women from Deborah's response to Barak in vs 9-10 and 14?

The rest of the story: God caused a heavy rain and the enemy army was caught in a great flood. As the chariots got bogged down, the army ran and the Israelites killed them. Sisera stopped at the camp of a friend to rest. Jael, the wife of the friend, drove a stake through his head as he slept. This humiliating death began a cycle of peace and rest for the Israelites. (Judges 4:15-24, 5:4,20-22)

9. Is there or has there been something in your life that feels like 900 iron chariots standing in wait to destroy you?

If Deborah were here, what advice might she give you about:

- Our attitude in times of trial?

- Being prepared to respond?

- Responding to God's call?

10. As a New Testament believer, what are some practical applications of this advice?

Additional Scripture to study: Read Ephesians 6:10-18 (the full armor of God), Psalm 32:5 (confession of sins), 1 John 2:5-6 (obedience to God's Word), Hebrews 13:15-16 (confessing Jesus)

11. Do you see any evidence in your own life of the "sin cycle" we see in Judges? Do you tend to wander and take your relationship with God seriously only when he sends chastening circumstances your way?

Closing Prayer/Meditation

I Hear the Savior Calling, CW 560 vs. 3

*I hear the Savior calling!
The gospel comes to me.
My eyes once closed in blindness
Are opened now to see
That I myself was helpless
To live eternally,
But, dying, Christ did save me,
And now he calls for me!*

Some thoughts for personal/group prayer:

Thank you for loving and caring for me.

Make me sensitive to your chastening hand.

Help me run to you, not from you.

Empower me to be faithful and obedient, ready to follow your calling.

References:

Barber, Wayne; Rasnake, Eddie; Shepherd, Richard. Life Principles from the Women of the Bible, Book 1

Gurgel, Richard; Wendland, Kathie. Heirs Together of God's Gracious Gift of Life. Page 125-6

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Lockyer, Herbert, All the Women of the Bible.

Our Bible Sisters:

Elizabeth – Singing the Songs of Salvation

Participant's Guide

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Elizabeth – Singing the Songs of Salvation

Opening Prayer

Some days it's difficult to sing. Life is tough, circumstances seem overwhelming, and disappointments crowd our minds. As Luke first introduces us to Elizabeth, this might describe her life. Elizabeth and her husband, Zechariah, were living in Judah under the oppressive Roman rule of the infamous Herod. Elizabeth was about 70 years old and barren. But they remained faithful to their God and were filled with the hope of a Savior.

Read Luke 1:5-63.

1. What do we learn about Elizabeth and her husband?
2. It appears Elizabeth and Zechariah had prayed for a son for many years. At this age, they would have assumed God had said "No" but his answer had really been "Not yet." Now he was answering this deep-seated prayer. (vs. 8-13) Do you feel comfortable sharing a time when you waited patiently, or not so patiently, for God to answer your prayer? Are you still waiting? Have you lost hope?
3. Can you imagine Zechariah coming home, trying to tell Elizabeth what had happened using notes and hand gestures! What was Elizabeth's response? (vs. 14-25)

4. Has God ever answered your prayers with a WOW, far beyond anything you could ever have imagined?

5. In Elizabeth's sixth month, Gabriel comes again, this time to Mary. Mary didn't question in unbelief but rather in bewilderment – "How will this happen?" Why might the angel have mentioned Elizabeth at this time? (vs. 26-38)

6. Read vs 39-45. What do you think Elizabeth was thinking when she asked "Why am I so favored?" (vs. 39-45)

7. What do we learn about Elizabeth from vs 45?

8. How did Mary respond to Elizabeth's blessing? Think of how Elizabeth's words encouraged this response from Mary. (vs. 46-55)

9. What more do we learn about Elizabeth from her response to the people? (vs. 57-63)

Read Zechariah's song in vs 68-79.

10. Picture Elizabeth listening to her husband. What might she have been thinking?

11. Elizabeth was bitterly disappointed as she grew older without a child, and finally to a point where it seemed it would never happen. Yet she accepted her situation and continued to worship and praise God. How can we also be content with our lot in life?

12. What can hinder us? Read 1 John 1:5-9.

13. Do you have a song in your heart? Is there something or someone dampening that song, filling you with worry instead of peace, making you fearful instead of confident? Stop, confess your sins and talk to the Lord about these things – let him answer your prayers in his time and in his way.

For further meditation:

On your own, meditate on these passages that will help you keep a song in your heart:

- 1 John 1:9-10
- Colossians 3:16
- Ephesians 5:18-21
- Philippians 4:4-9

Closing Prayer/Meditation I Will Sing My Maker's Praises CW 253 vs. 1

I will sing my Maker's praises

And in him most joyful be,

For in all things I see traces

Of his tender love for me.

Nothing else than love could move him

With such deep and tender care

Evermore to raise and bear

All who try to serve and love him.

All things else have but their day;

God's great love abides for aye.

References:

Barber, Wayne; Rasnake, Eddie; Shepherd, Richard. Life Principles from the Women of the Bible, Book 2

Lockyer, Herbert. All the Women of the Bible

Prange, Victor H. People's Bible Commentary – Luke

Our Bible Sisters:

Eve—Experiencing God’s Forgiveness

Participant’s Guide

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Eve—Experiencing God’s Forgiveness

Opening Prayer

Read Genesis 1:27 and Genesis 2:18-25

1. What do we know about how and why Eve came into the world?

Read Genesis 3:1-6

2. What do we learn about:
 - Satan’s approach from 3:1?
 - Eve’s response in 3:2-3?
 - Satan’s enticement to sin in 3:4-6?
 - Adam’s role in this first sin?
3. From these verses, what 4 or 5 lessons can we apply to our own lives today?

Compare Genesis 3:6 with 1 John 2:16

4. What parallels do we see in Satan's temptations?
5. Compare this also to Jesus' temptation in the wilderness in Matthew 4:1-11. How did Jesus withstand Satan's temptations?

Read Genesis 3:7-8

6. What was Adam and Eve's response to their sin?
7. Why is hiding the worst thing we could do when we sin?

Read Genesis 3:9-11

8. How does God confront us when we sin?
9. What is God's response when we confess our sins?
10. What is our response to be?

14. What have you learned about Eve that you will carry away from this study?

Closing Prayer/Meditation

I Will Sing My Maker's Praises CW 253 vs. 1

*I will sing my Maker's praises
And in him most joyful be,
For in all things I see traces
Of his tender love for me.
Nothing else than love could move him
With such deep and tender care
Evermore to raise and bear
All who try to serve and love him.
All things else have but their day;
God's great love abides for aye.*

References:

Jeske, John C., *The People's Bible – Genesis*

Lange, Lyle W. *God So Loved the World – a Study of Christian Doctrine*

Barber/Rasnake/Shepherd, *Life Principles from the Women of the Bible*

Our Bible Sisters:

Miriam—Trusting God with Your Position in Life

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Miriam—Trusting God with Your Position in Life

Opening Prayer

Someone once said, “The hardest instrument to play is second fiddle.” This was the assignment that God gave to the woman, Miriam. Though she was the oldest child in the family, Miriam grew up in the shadows of her two younger brothers, Aaron and Moses. She would become one of the most prominent and respected women in Israel, but she would struggle with following the lead of her baby brother... She served as a faithful public servant. But it was also Miriam who became jealous of her brother’s position and publicly voiced her dissent... Her life is an example of how God deals with those who will refuse to trust authority he places in their lives.

(Barber, page 23)

The Scene

Egypt is under a new pharaoh. The Israelites, slaves of the Egyptians, are growing rapidly in number and their masters fear they will become too populous and powerful. Pharaoh orders that all Israelite boys be killed at birth. In this setting Moses is born.

1. From Exodus 2:1-10, what do we learn about Miriam’s role in keeping him safe?

2. Why were Miriam’s actions so important in the young life of Moses?



Miriam's Family

3. What do we know about Miriam's family?
 - Her siblings? (1 Chronicles 6:3)
 - Her parents? (Exodus 6:20)
 - Her position in the family? (Exodus 7:7)
 - Her husband?
 - Family occupation?

Miriam's Leadership

4. Miriam grew into a role of responsibility and leadership. What did she do after God separated the Red Sea so that the Israelites could escape from Pharaoh? (Exodus 15:19-21)
5. By this time she would have been about 90 years old. Here she is called a prophetess. What is a prophet or prophetess?
6. Micah 6:4 also tells us she had a special calling from God—note that God says “he sent her” to Israel. Quickly scan 1 Chronicles 6:2-30. Do you see anything significant in the inclusion of Miriam in this list?

Miriam's Attitude

As the Israelites continued their march through the desert, they quickly forgot about their dismal lives in Egypt and complained. Read Numbers 11:1-4, 11:10-20 and 11:31-33 to see the difficulty Moses had leading the Israelites.

7. What changes in leadership did God make in 11:16-17 and how might this have affected Miriam's attitude?

8. Read Numbers 12:1-2. What do we learn about Miriam's actions and her motives from these verses?

9. Compare her attitude with that of Moses given us in Numbers 12:3.

God's Response

10. Read Numbers 12:4-16. When and how does God begin dealing with the controversy?

11. What is the main point of God's message to Miriam and Aaron?

12. Why might only Miriam be struck with leprosy?

13. Was there any consequence for Aaron?

Proper Attitude

14. What if Miriam really could have done a better job than the 70 elders that Moses named? Would she then have been justified in her attitude and comments?
15. What are the proper attitudes to keep in mind when we think about the leaders God places in his church, workplace and home?

God-given Roles

16. We can use the word vocation to describe the roles God gives us in life. Martin Luther once said, "Every ox wants a saddle and every horse a plow." What did he mean?
17. Talk about a time when you were tempted to covet another's position or under-appreciate your vocation. How did that affect your attitude?
18. Contrastingly, talk about a time when God blessed you with contentment in your role. How did that impact your contentment?

Repentance

19. Read Numbers 12:11-12. What does this tell us about repentance?

20. What do we learn about the consequence of Miriam's sin from Numbers 12:13-16?

21. Do you think she was repentant?

22. Read 1 John 1:8-9. When we repent of our sinful attitudes and actions, what is God's promise to us?

Lessons from Miriam's Life

23. God shows us the gifts he gave Miriam and her faithfulness in using them. He also shows us her sins. What might we learn from Miriam's story?

Closing Prayer/Meditation

What God Ordains is Always Good CW 429 vs. 1

What God ordains is always good;

His will is just and holy.

As he directs my life for me,

I follow meek and lowly.

My God indeed In ev'ry need

Knows well how he will shield me;

To him, then, I will yield me.

For further thought:

In the coming days, make a list of the various vocations God has given you. Pray that God would strengthen you for faithful service and contentment in those roles. Pray for the leaders in your church, pray for the leaders in your workplace, and if you are married, pray for your husband's leadership in your home.

References:

Lockyer, Herbert. All the Women of the Bible

Barber/Rasnake/Shepherd. Life Principles from the Women of the Bible

Our Bible Sisters:

The Proverbs 31 Woman – Setting God-Pleasing Goals for Your Life

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The Proverbs 31 Woman – Setting God-Pleasing Goals for Your Life

Opening Prayer

“Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight.” – 1 Peter 3:3-4.

Our study today will define this in more detail.

1. Read Proverbs 1:2-4. What is the purpose of the book of Proverbs?
2. Read Proverbs 31:1 and 10-31. This portion of Proverbs is attributed to King Lemuel. We do not know for certain who King Lemuel is; however, ancient rabbis considered this to be a pen name taken by Solomon. The description of the ideal woman is a message directed to King Lemuel by his mother, describing what he should look for in a woman he wishes to take as a wife. A woman fitting this description is indeed rare and someone to be greatly treasured. She is a true gift from God.
3. Let's discover some of the things about the character of the Proverbs woman. What do we learn about the source of her strength from vs 25? What impact does this have on her?
4. What do we learn about the way she speaks from vs 26?

5. Now let's discover something about the labors of the Proverbs woman. She is both a homemaker and a business woman. The two do not have to be at odds with each other as long as both are surrendered to God. Work is a blessing from God, whether parenting, working in the business world, homemaking or providing a service. What do we learn about:

Her attitude toward work from vs 13?

The quality of what she does from vs 14?

Her preparedness from vs 15, 19, 21?

Being an economic asset to her family in vs 16 and 24?

How she cares for herself from vs 17 and 22?

6. All women have relationships to manage and our Proverbs woman is no different. God made us to be social and has given us the ability to communicate. Because of her relationship with God, she is able to manage all of the relationships in her life. What do we learn about her:

Relationship with her husband from vs 11-12, 23?

Heart for serving from vs 20?

Relationship with God from vs 30?

7. From vs 28-31, how could anyone begin to live this type of life? What are the rewards that result?

8. If we look at the Proverbs 31 woman and say there's no way any woman could ever be like this, we're defeating ourselves. If we look at her as what God wants women to develop into, then we can find the grace to begin the journey. The first step in change is not gritting our teeth and trying harder to be perfect. It's not about commitment. It's about surrendering to Christ. Surrendering is admitting that we cannot do this with our own strength; we must have God's help. How can each of these passages help us lean on Christ instead of going it alone?

- Galatians 2:20

- Isaiah 64:6-8

- Ephesians 1:3

- Philippians 4:13

- 1 Thessalonians 5:24

- 2 Peter 1:3

You might want to write down one of these passages, or another one, that you feel will help you remember this fundamental truth – that the Proverbs 31 woman is what God wants us to become and we can do this with his help. Post it where you will see it regularly and include it in your prayers.

9. Read Proverbs 31:10-31 again. Looking back over your life, short or long, how can you see God at work in one of these areas? In which would you like to especially grow in the year ahead?

- Development of your character?

- Your labor or work?

- Your relationships?

- Your spiritual life?

For further personal study:

Keeping a journal may be a useful tool. In your personal time over the next days, ask God to lead you as you look at yourself honestly. Use these questions and search the Scriptures to find additional verses to help you grow:

- What do I need to change in my priorities or my attitude?
- Where do I need to ask for forgiveness?
- What should I begin doing or quit doing?
- What changes do I need to make to my worship, devotion and prayer life to be a woman who truly fears the Lord?

Closing Prayer/Meditation

Brothers, Sisters, Let Us Gladly CW 484 vs. 1

*Brothers, sisters, let us gladly
Give to God our all, our best—
Service hearty, thorough, honest,
With a living love impressed.
All our duty, all our striving,
All our time to him belong;
Praise him, then, with true devotion;
Come before him with a song.*

References:

Barber/Rasnake/Shepherd. Life Principles from the Women of the Bible

Ehlke, Roland Cap. People's Bible Commentary - Proverbs

Lockyer, Herbert. All the Women of the Bible

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Sarah – Learning to Wait on God’s Timing

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Sarah – Learning to Wait on God’s Timing

Opening Prayer

The Setting

1. What do we know about Sarah’s background? Read Genesis 11:27-31, 12:1-3, 15:5-6 and 20:11-12?
2. Read Genesis 12:10-20. What do we learn about Abram in this episode?
3. How was God’s plan superior to Abram’s?
4. What can we learn from this short story?

Sarah’s Response

5. Read Genesis 16:1-3. God had promised more offspring than stars in the sky, yet Abram and Sarai were both getting old and had no children. What are some of the things Sarai might have been thinking?

12. From Genesis 16:9-12 we learn that Hagar's child was named Ishmael and would be a "wild man" who would live in hostility toward his brothers. We see this hostility to this very day. Ishmael is the father of the Arab races and Sarai's son the father of the Jewish races. What lessons can we learn from Sarai's "solution" to her problems?

God Repeats His Promise

13. Years later, God repeats his promises to Abraham and now it is very clear, since Sarai is no longer young enough to have children, that God alone would make this happen. Read Genesis 17:1-7 and 17:15-16. What is the significance of changing their names to Abraham and Sarah?
14. Even with the name change, Sarah and Abraham still exhibit doubt. In Genesis 18:10-15, the Lord visits Abraham and once again voices the same promise he has been making for over 25 years. What is the response of both Sarah and her husband?
15. What is the significance of the words "at the appointed time" in vs 14?

16. What promises can we focus on when we are waiting on God's timing?

17. What do we learn from the Lord's words to Sarah in vs 15?

The Promise Fulfilled

18. Read Genesis 21:1-7 God keeps his promises! Sarah was 90 years old and Abraham was 100 when Isaac was born. Compare Sarah's laughter in Genesis 18:12 with that in 21:6.

19. As we read about Sarah and Abraham holding their new son in their arms and reflecting on their years of waiting, it calls to mind other faithful Christians who have been called to lives of waiting. God said in 2 Corinthians 12:9, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." How does the act of waiting show us our weakness?

20. How does the act of waiting show us God's power and grace?

21. Those who believe can trace their heritage back to Abraham and likewise to Sarah. She is mentioned alongside Abraham in Isaiah 51: 2a as well as Romans 9:8-9 as the mother of the righteous. Their faith is praised in that great chapter of heroes, Hebrews 11 (vs 11). It is clear that we are to look to Sarah as an example for our lives. What can we learn from her?

Closing Prayer/Meditation

If You But Trust in God to Guide You CW 444 vs. 1, 3, 4

*If you but trust in God to guide you
And place your confidence in him,
He'll give you strength and stand beside you
When days are dreary, dark, and dim.
For those who trust his changeless love
Build on the rock that does not move.*

*Be patient and await his leisure
In cheerful hope, with heart content;
Then take whate'er your Father's pleasure
And his discerning love have sent.
Doubt not; your inmost wants are known
To him who chose you for his own.*

*Sing, pray, and keep his ways unswerving,
Perform your duties faithfully,
And trust his Word; though undeserving,
You'll find his promise true to be.
God never yet forsook in need
The soul that trusted him indeed.*

For further study:

- In the days ahead, reflect on the situations in your life right now that require trust in God's promises and God's timing.
- Pray or journal about Genesis 18:14a, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" and 2 Corinthians 12:9, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."
- Like Sarah, we doubt but like Sarah we have the same God who is faithful even when we falter. Read the beautiful picture of how, in the end, God regards his "friend" Abraham (Isaiah 41:8-11) and the fullness of his grace as recorded in Romans 4:16-25— a message of strength and comfort and hope.

- Confess your failure to trust in this great promise and confidently ask God to strengthen you through his Holy Spirit. He will do it!

Additional references:

- Psalm 145:13-14 (for all generations, God is faithful to all his promises, he lifts up all who are bowed down)
- 2 Timothy 2:11-13 (he will remain faithful)
- Hebrews 10:23 (Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful!)

Perhaps there is someone dear to you who also needs to be strengthened in the midst of doubt. Pray for God to open your eyes to others' needs and how he might guide you, holding out the wonderful message of hope and God's promises.

References:

Jeske, John C., The People's Bible – Genesis

Lockyer, Herbert, All the Women of the Bible

Barber/Rasnake/Shepherd, Life Principles from the Women of the Bible