

Our Bible Sisters:

Elizabeth – Singing the Songs of Salvation

Leader'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-emeritus David Valleskey.

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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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 filled with the hope of a Savior.

Read Luke 1:5-63.

1. What do we learn about Elizabeth and her husband? (vs. 5-7)

Lived in Judea at the time of Herod; both descendants of Aaron, and Zechariah was a priest; upright in God's sight and kept his laws; "well along in years" and had no children. Not being able to bear children was a disgrace in that culture and Elizabeth most likely had a sense of shame. Note that "blamelessly" in vs 6 does not mean they were sinless but rather that they were faithful and sincere in their walk with God, trusting in him and his ways. What a special commendation to be recorded for posterity!

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)

She received the news with belief, not unbelief. She withdrew into seclusion when she discovered she was pregnant. It would have been a very treasured time as the miracle of the Lord began growing in her body, replacing her disgrace with a very special role in the coming of our Savior. The Lord had answered her prayers in a very loving, personal way, far beyond anything she could ever have imagined.

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)

Gabriel emphasized just how miraculous Elizabeth's pregnancy was. This must have given Mary some comfort and solid evidence that his next statement "For nothing is impossible with God" really was true. Her pregnancy would also be a miracle. With the thoughts that must have filled Mary's heart and mind over the next months, she would need this reassurance.

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

When she became pregnant, she thought she was experiencing the grandest miracle possible. Now, by revelation of the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth knew that Mary would be the mother of our Savior. This is an even greater miracle. For a woman whose ancestors had looked for this Savior for thousands of years, one can only imagine the explosion of joy she felt. The baby within her was leaping with the same joy that had her heart bursting. The Holy Spirit had connected the dots for her – her son, John, would prepare the way for Mary's Son, the long-awaited Messiah.

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

Elizabeth had a believing heart and she recognized the same surrendering belief in Mary. She recognized God's hand in all of this and set about humbly obeying, accepting whatever he put in her life.

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

Mary immediately focused on the Lord. This wasn't about her or Elizabeth but about the fulfillment of God's promise of a Savior for all mankind. With humility and gratitude she recognized the mighty things God was doing for and through her. Mary was a young woman and Elizabeth was well along in years. The intense joy and immediate blessing that came from this mature woman must have helped this young woman put into words the joy and amazement that had been growing in her heart since the day Gabriel came to her. Elizabeth, more than anyone else, could begin to understand Mary's joy.

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

She was emphatic about John's name. For the past 9 months she had been in seclusion, focusing on this great miracle. There was no way she was going to name him anything but what Gabriel had said to name him. Her bold statements weren't accepted by the people and they turned to Zechariah, who agreed with his wife. She wasn't concerned because she knew God wanted the child to be named John.

Read Zechariah's song in vs 68-79.

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

The ancient promises must have taken on new meaning for them as the events of the past months unfolded. The first words she heard from her husband in these many months were joy-filled, Spirit-filled praises. What did God now have in mind for her precious John? He was about to accomplish mighty things through this child, the messenger of the Messiah. She certainly shared the words of praise and thanksgiving being sung by Zechariah.

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?

In John 8:12 Jesus tells us to walk in his light and then we will never walk in darkness. We walk in his light when we study and meditate on the Scriptures, when we are strengthened by Christ's body and blood, when we focus on doing God's will, trust in his promises and believe he will always do what is best for us. When he consumes our life, we have no time for bitterness and disappointment.

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

When we choose sin and step out of fellowship with God, we lose the joy of our salvation (though not necessarily our salvation). Not repenting of our sins leads us to discontent and loss of hope. God's forgiveness and cleansing allows us to experience the joy of his light, a fullness of life and a song in our heart.

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:

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Lockyer, Herbert. All the Women of the Bible
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