

LIFE LESSONS FROM

WOMEN

IN THE

BIBLE

RHONDA HARRINGTON KELLEY



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ABOUT THE STUDY

Life Lessons from Women in the Bible will give you opportunities to explore the lives of women in the Bible and to apply the lessons you learn to your life. This Bible study will be helpful to new Christians who want to begin studying God's Word, as well as to mature Christians who desire a deeper understanding of God's Word.

Life Lessons from Women in the Bible is a six-week, interactive Bible study with five daily lessons each week. Each week's study will focus on women of different ages and stages of life. Each day you will examine a specific woman in the Bible to learn a particular life lesson. While every life has many facets, you will examine only one specific life lesson from each biblical woman you study. The daily lessons, to be completed on your own, should take no more than 20 minutes. You will read about the woman from Scripture, learn about her culture, and meet her family. Learning activities focus on the woman's life and testimony and help you apply what you learn. Not all of the women are positive role models, so examine their actions by God's Word and learn from their mistakes. Esteem the godly women and follow their examples.

Following each week of individual study, it is recommended that you gather with other women who are also studying this material. Small-group discussions will give you the opportunity to learn from the insights of others and will motivate you to learn more. Group involvement also promotes accountability and provides encouragement. Enlist a volunteer to lead the group discussion. A leader guide is provided in the back on pages 146-158 of this book.

The introduction to each week's material suggests a life verse for the week—a Scripture that reinforces an important life lesson. Read this verse frequently during the week from several different Bible translations. Write it in your own words so that the verse becomes more meaningful to you. Try to memorize each life verse to hide God's Word in your heart and to apply it in your life. As you seek to live a godly life, allow each life verse to guide you and draw you to Him.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rhonda Harrington Kelley was called by God to minister to women. She came to know the Lord personally as a young girl and grew spiritually with the encouragement of her Christian parents, her Sunday School teachers, and her Girls in Action director. As a teenager, Rhonda dedicated her life to special Christian service.

Rhonda grew up in New Orleans, Louisiana, where she graduated from John F. Kennedy High School. She received her BA and MS degrees in speech pathology and audiology from Baylor University in Waco, Texas.

In 1983, Rhonda earned a PhD in special education/speech pathology from the University of New Orleans. Her career in speech pathology included clinical work in both hospital and private-practice settings. Rhonda served for 15 years as the director of the Division of Communicative Disorders at Ochsner Medical Institutions in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Rhonda and Charles S. (Chuck) Kelley Jr. married in 1974 after dating for 4 years at Baylor University. Since 1975, they have lived in New Orleans, Louisiana, where Chuck serves as the president of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. In addition to her responsibilities as the president's wife, Rhonda is a teacher, an author, and a speaker. The focus of her ministry has always been women. Women in the Bible have greatly influenced Rhonda's life. As a young girl, she memorized Proverbs 31:10-31 and sought to become that godly woman. Her greatest desire is to equip women to develop a personal relationship with the Lord and live a godly lifestyle.

WEEK 1

WOMEN IN THE BIBLE



This Week's Life Verse

This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did.

ACTS 9:36

WOMEN LIKE YOU AND ME

The Bible is truth. It records the stories of real people, including many interesting women. Woman is first mentioned in Genesis 2:22-23 when she was created by God, “taken out of Man.” Designed as man’s counterpart, woman complements him in many ways. Created in God’s image, woman has equal worth and value, as well as a unique role and function in God’s plan.

The Bible mentions 187 women by name and includes hundreds of nameless women described as daughters, wives, mothers, widows, and so on. From these women of the Bible, women today can learn valuable lessons. Whether you are young or old, single or married, a mother or childless, a homemaker or a business-woman, you can clearly see God’s pattern for godly living in the lives of Old and New Testament women.

Many women in the Bible are best known for their relationships—whom they married or to whom they gave birth. Lessons about marriage and parenting can be learned from them. Other Bible women teach valuable life lessons about personal character and godly womanhood. Let’s examine several Bible women as individuals to learn about Christian virtues. We can learn from these women of old because, after all, they were women like you and me.

DAY 1

RUTH: A FAITHFUL WIDOW

The Old Testament Book of Ruth records the story of a young woman from Moab who chose by faith to follow the God of her mother-in-law, Naomi, instead of the gods of her ancestors. The Book of Ruth, named for its heroine, teaches many virtues of womanhood. While numerous life lessons can be learned from Ruth, abiding faith is her strongest legacy.

Read today's background Scripture, Ruth 1–4.

Ruth's Legacy of Faith

Though a Gentile from Moab, Ruth became an ancestor of King David and Jesus Christ (see Matt. 1:5-16). Ruth was born in Moab, the narrow strip of fertile land to the east of the Dead Sea. This well-watered area between the salty sea and a dry desert provided excellent conditions for farming and raising animals. The bounty of this land led Naomi and her family to Moab to escape the famine in Judah.

Ruth, whose name means “something worth seeing” or “friendship,”¹ grew up worshiping other gods but later chose to follow the one true God. She married Mahlon, the Hebrew son of Naomi and Elimelech. Another son, Chilion, wed a Moabitess named Orpah. After the deaths of all three men, Naomi decided to travel home to Judah to live out her days with family. She encouraged her daughters-in-law to return to their families, but at that point Ruth chose by faith to follow Naomi. A true friendship developed between the two women which was strengthened by a mutual faith in God and love of family.

Read Ruth 1:6-18 to examine Ruth's personal testimony of faith. How did Ruth demonstrate her faith?

What do you understand faith to be?

Ruth 1:16-17 is known as one of the greatest statements of commitment and faith in history. Hebrews 11:1 defines faith as “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” Ruth completely trusted in the God of Naomi, though she could not see Him and did not know her future. You can have that same kind of faith in a God who loves you and has a perfect plan for your life.

Ruth's Life of Faith

Ruth's faith demanded action in her life. By faith alone she left her family in Moab and followed Naomi to Judah. She trusted God to provide for them and later married Boaz, her kinsman-redeemer. Ruth turned to God to know what to do, where to go, and whom to marry.

In chapter 2 Ruth meets Boaz, and in chapters 3 and 4 her future is secured. Review these chapters; then number the following events in the order of their occurrence.

- ___ Boaz condoned Ruth's gleaning and provided her meals.
- ___ Boaz married Ruth and fathered Obed, an ancestor of David.
- ___ Ruth gleaned grain in the field of Boaz, Naomi's relative.
- ___ Ruth appealed to Boaz as her kinsman-redeemer (see Deut. 25:5-10).
- ___ Naomi proposed the plan for marriage.

In this great romance of the Old Testament, Ruth went to Boaz's field to pick up grain. Boaz, a relative of Naomi, condoned Ruth's gleaning in the field and provided meals for the widows. Pleased with the meeting, Naomi proposed a plan that would lead to Ruth's marriage to Boaz. Ruth appealed to Boaz as her kinsman-redeemer. According to Jewish law, the nearest male relative was obliged to marry the widow of his relative (see Ruth 3:9-12; 4:7). Sometimes a correlation is made between the redemption of Ruth by Boaz and the redemption of sinners by Christ.

Ruth lived her faith. As a result, God blessed her and her descendants. The rewards of her faith were without end. Her faith was a blessing to Naomi, who was cared for with love; to Boaz, her devoted husband and provider; and to her children and grandchildren, through whom the Messiah was born. Her faith is also a blessing to us today as recipients of God's gift of salvation through Jesus Christ.

Ruth's Lesson of Faith

Although Ruth's family followed false gods, Ruth personally accepted the true God by faith because of the example of her mother-in-law, Naomi. Like Ruth, you must trust in the Lord for your own salvation.

Have you trusted in God for your salvation? If so, when did you first profess faith in Jesus Christ?

Think of women who have been godly examples in your life. Thank God for the influence they have had in your walk of faith.

I am grateful for my personal testimony of faith. As a 6-year-old, I chose to follow the God of my parents. While their lives of faith were powerful examples to me, I had to make a profession of faith for myself. In childlike faith I asked Jesus to come into my heart. My godly family nurtured my faith and challenged me to live my faith in my actions. I am grateful for the faithful women who have influenced my life, and I pray that God will use my life of faith to influence the women in my world.

Faith was available to the Gentiles of Moab as well as to the Jews of Judah (see Eph. 3:6). God graciously offers salvation to all through the blood of Jesus Christ. Faith is not inherited and is not exclusive. That's why Christians are commanded to share the gospel with all people.

When was the last time you shared with someone what Jesus Christ means to you?

Ruth's faith was in God, not in herself or her circumstances. She was young, innocent, and weak. Her circumstances were tragic, hopeless, and insufficient, but God was the all-knowing, all-caring, all-sufficient Provider. God provides for those who have faith in Him.

How has God provided for you since you accepted Jesus by faith?

Ruth's faith demanded obedience. She followed God to Judah and to the field of Boaz. Her life of faith is an example to all believers. Faith must be lived in our actions, not just spoken with our lips.

How does your faith influence your actions?

The Lord blessed Ruth because of her faith. Her blessings overflowed to Naomi, Boaz, and Obed. She was one of five women included in the lineage of Jesus Christ (see Matt. 1:2-16). In fact, blessings have been experienced by Christians throughout the ages because of Ruth's faithfulness. The Lord will reward your faithfulness as well.



DAY 2

ABIGAIL: A WISE BEAUTY

Abigail was a beautiful, intelligent Hebrew woman trapped in a difficult marriage. Her husband, Nabal, was a wealthy, cruel descendant of Caleb. Though her husband didn't deserve her respect, Abigail was a devoted wife. She wisely committed herself to the marriage, and she wisely counseled David at a crucial time.

Read today's background Scripture, 1 Samuel 25:2-42.

A Wise Woman

The Scripture describes Abigail as both beautiful and wise. Unfortunately, she married a man who is not described as graciously. Abigail, whose name means "my father rejoiced," was the daughter of Nahash. She was married by arrangement to Nabal, a wealthy landowner and shepherd. His name means "fool" or "rude and ill-bred."

List the words used in 1 Samuel 25:3 to describe Abigail and Nabal.

Abigail

Nabal

Other verses in 1 Samuel 25 give additional descriptions of Nabal: selfish, unwilling to share (v. 11); immoral, unspiritual; foolish, scoundrel (v. 25); drunk, glutton

(v. 36). Abigail is described as wise, “a woman of good understanding” (1 Sam. 25:3). She wisely managed her household and saved the lives of her servants by giving David and his men food. She put the security of her servants before her own safety. Her wise actions preserved both herself and her household.

A Wise Wife

Though her husband acted foolishly, Abigail was wise. When Nabal refused David’s request for food, Abigail intervened and delivered food to David and his men, averting his plan to kill Nabal. She wisely kept her actions a secret from her evil husband. Though she planned to tell Nabal of her actions later, she changed her mind when she found him drunk (see 1 Sam. 25:36). The next morning Abigail told her husband about David’s plan to retaliate and her provision of food. The Bible says, “His heart died within him” (1 Sam. 25:37). He probably had a heart attack or a stroke, and he died 10 days later (1 Sam. 25:38).

Like many women today, Abigail found herself in a difficult marriage. Biblical instruction to wives is submission to husbands, but a believer must first be submissive to God. Nabal was an ungodly man whose defiant actions would have brought retaliation from David on his entire household. Abigail wisely submitted to God’s leadership and not to her husband’s poor judgment. Her actions were in the best interest of all, even selfish Nabal.

Through the years, I have had several Christian friends who were married to difficult men. What a test to their patience and their faith! Each time the godly wife has surrendered herself to God and submitted herself to her husband, God has honored her commitment. In one instance, the unsaved husband trusted Jesus as his Savior. In several marriages, rededication to Christ brought about changes in their hearts. In one case, unfortunately, the husband left his wife and children. Christian women today must seek wisdom from God in life and relationships.

Read in 2 Samuel 14:2-24 the account of another wise woman David encountered.

The Wise Woman of Tekoa possessed unusual perception and dramatic persuasive ability. When David faced a difficult dilemma, God spoke through this wise woman in a memorable way. Her brilliant presentation, one of the finest speeches in the Bible (vv. 13-17), moved David to compassion. As a result, David forgave his son for the murder of Amnon who violated Tamar, though the father and son never truly reconciled. This wise woman tactfully convinced David to call Absalom back to Jerusalem.

A Wise Decision

Abigail's wisdom was also evident in her interaction with David. When Abigail delivered the food to him, she defused his anger with a humble confession and a generous gesture. She asked for forgiveness and praised his tolerance while arguing that it would be wrong to seek vengeance against her husband's household. Foreseeing the consequences of such needless bloodshed on his future leadership as king, Abigail was immensely wise in her approach with David.

First Samuel 25:29 contains an interesting Hebrew saying: "The life of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of the living with the LORD your God." These same words often mark Jewish tombstones, referring to life beyond the grave. The image comes from the custom of bundling valuable possessions to keep them from being broken. Abigail was saying that David was in God's bundle and was securely protected even though someone was pursuing him to take his life.²

In 1 Samuel 25:32-33, David blesses Abigail for her courage and wise counsel: "Blessed is the LORD God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me! And blessed is your advice and blessed are you." David recognized Abigail's wisdom. After the death of her husband, Nabal, David married her (see 1 Sam. 25:39b-42). Abigail was certainly influential on his future leadership as king.

Wisdom is a gift of God. Describe a time when God gave you wisdom to offer help or to deal with a difficult situation.

Thank God for giving you wisdom. Pray that He will give you wisdom to face each day's circumstances.

DAY 3

GOMER: AN EXAMPLE OF HOPE

Many tragic situations seem hopeless. Many rebellious people seem beyond hope, but with God we can always have hope. The Bible contains accounts of circumstances and people with no hope in sight. God, in His sovereign power, intervenes and renews hope.

Gomer, the adulterous wife of the prophet Hosea, is a biblical example of a woman who seemed beyond hope. As you read about Gomer's return to God and her husband, Hosea, you will see a glimpse of God's unconditional love.

Read today's background Scripture, Hosea 1–3.

Hope Is Born

In the land of Israel during the time of the Old Testament prophets, Hosea, a devoted servant of God, married Gomer, an immoral woman. Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim, whose name means “given to sensuality,” is described as “a wife of harlotry” (Hos. 1:2). She gave birth to three children during her marriage to Hosea: Jezreel, Lo-Ruhamah, and Lo-Ammi. The hope of a fruitful ministry seemed to be dashed for the young preacher when his wife left him for an adulterous lifestyle. Hope for her own faith also seemed to falter when she turned her back on God and her marriage.

Gomer's sinful rebellion symbolized another situation in the Old Testament. Read Hosea 2:16,9-20. What do you understand to be the message of Hosea and Gomer's marriage?

Marriage is meant to be forever and should be loving as well as faithful. Although their circumstances were real, Hosea and Gomer's situation also symbolized the adulterous life of the nation of Israel. While Gomer committed physical adultery, Christians often experience spiritual adultery—unfaithfulness to God.³ However, there is hope in God's love.

Hope Is Lost

Hosea must have felt hopeless as Gomer lived a publicly immoral lifestyle. When his children rebelled against God, he must have been devastated.

Hosea 2 openly discusses the consequences of adultery. How does adultery harm a marriage relationship?

To the people of Israel, this marriage had no hope. The godly prophet may have been counseled by concerned friends to divorce his sinful wife. That would certainly be common advice today. However, Hosea loved his sinful wife and his children, like God loves His children, unconditionally.

What does the Bible say about divorce when a spouse commits adultery? Read Deuteronomy 22:22 and Matthew 19:8-9, then respond here.

Mosaic law permitted divorce only in cases of infidelity, though later Jesus emphasized the permanence of marriage.

Divorce is common today. Almost half of all marriages end in divorce, including Christian marriages. When marital problems arise, Christian couples must follow biblical guidelines for marriage—a faithful union for a lifetime. Hope is not lost because God can restore and rebuild broken marriages. He paid the price to redeem His people and forgive their sins (see Titus 2:14). The reunion between Hosea and Gomer is an example of hope.

Hope Is Restored

Because the prophet Hosea had faith in God, he did not give up on his marriage. How could he have hope in such a situation? His hope was based on God's unconditional love. Though it is difficult to have hope when facing life's challenges, God is the God

of hope. *Hope* is best defined as the certainty that God has something better for you. With his faith in God, Hosea lived to see his marriage restored.

God told Hosea to marry Gomer, to bring her home, and to redeem her as his own. The marriage of Hosea and Gomer was restored. Hope was reborn, but the Lord gave specific terms for the reunion.

Read Hosea 3:3-5 and identify the terms of the reunion.

Hosea required Gomer to return to him, to their children, and to God. He expected her to live a godly life. Reconciliation is a prominent theme in the Bible. God wants His children to be reconciled to Him and to one another.

Read the following passages. Then list the requirements for reconciliation to God and others.

Jeremiah 3:13-14; 4:1-2

Hosea 2:14-20

Romans 12:14-21

God wants His children to obey Him and to live godly lives, but human nature is sinful. Rebellion against God and ungodly behavior are natural to all people. The Bible reveals the only acceptable response to sin. Read 1 John 1:9 which says: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Gomer discovered the joy of forgiveness and restoration through the Lord.

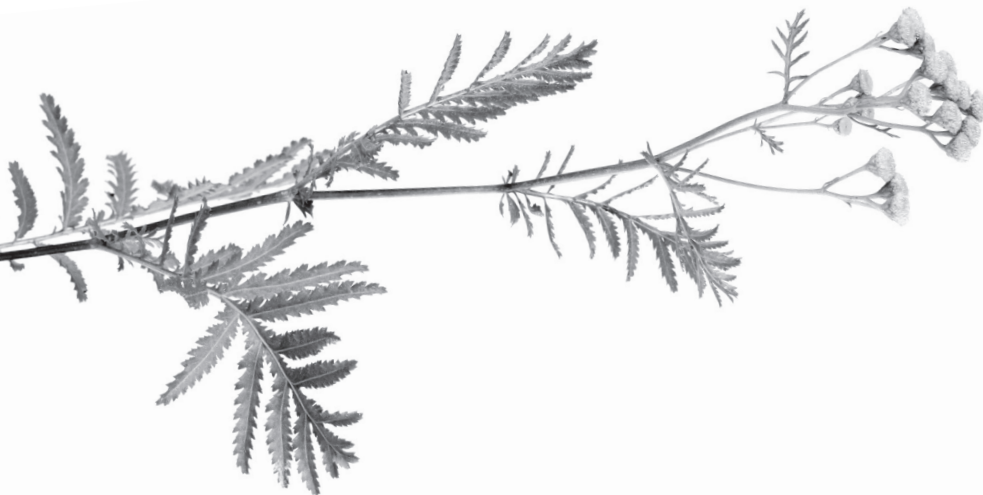
There are many illustrations today of people who have rebelled against the Lord and lived ungodly lives. Some calloused sinners seem beyond hope. But, God gives

hope to all, even in the most ungodly situations. The testimony of Iris Blue offers hope to Christians today. Raised in a religious home, Iris rebelled as a teenager, getting involved in drugs, robbery, and prostitution. She spent years in prison before she came to know the Lord. According to Iris, her life was changed when she prayed to receive Christ. She “knelt down a tramp and stood up a lady.” Her testimony of hope is recorded in the book she co-wrote, *Iris: Trophy of Grace*.⁴

Do you have unconfessed sin in your life that is keeping you from enjoying a closer relationship with God? If so, write a prayer of repentance and pray it to Him right now.

Is there a broken relationship in your life? Resolve to be reconciled with this person. Write what you need to do to bring about reconciliation. Ask God to help you be reconciled.

The Book of Hosea ends with a final call to repentance. When the sinful people turned from wickedness, Hosea’s message and Gomer’s life became ones of hope. Hope is available today even for those who have sinned grievously against God.



DAY 4

MARY AND MARTHA: SISTERS WHO WORSHIPED AND SERVED

The names of Mary and Martha are usually linked, but they were very different individuals. One was not better and the other worse. They were two women with different spiritual gifts and different personalities. While Mary worshiped Jesus, Martha served Him. While Mary sat sweetly, Martha bustled around the house. Yet both women had great spiritual insight in recognizing Jesus as the Messiah and sought to honor Him in their own ways.

Read today's background Scriptures, Luke 10:38-42; John 11:1-44; 12:1-8.

Sisters Who Loved Jesus

Mary and Martha were born in Bethany, a town near Jerusalem, and were two of Jesus' closest disciples. He often visited in the home of Martha, Mary, and their brother, Lazarus. The two sisters were opposites in personality, as dissimilar as brothers Esau and Jacob in the Old Testament. Martha was the typical older sister who mothered Mary: "While Martha was practical and unemotional, Mary was impassioned and imaginative."⁵ Let's consider how they demonstrated their love for Jesus.

You have read the accounts of the three encounters between Jesus and these sisters. Review Luke 10:38-42 and answer the questions below.

How did Martha serve Jesus?

How did Mary worship Jesus?

Both women loved the Lord, but they expressed their love in different ways. Martha chose to serve Jesus and His disciples, while Mary worshiped. Martha warmly welcomed Jesus and began preparing food for the guests, while Mary sat at Jesus' feet, hungry to hear His teachings. When Martha complained that Mary was not helping her with the meal, Jesus lovingly reminded Martha of eternal matters and encouraged her to affirm Mary: "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:41-42). Although Jesus did not condemn Martha's unselfish service, He praised Mary's loving worship. He reminded Martha of the most important priority: to love and worship Him.

Think about your service for the Lord. Are you so busy serving that you don't have time to worship Him? In the space provided below, write ways you can worship God in addition to serving Him.

Sisters Who Loved Their Brother

From the accounts in Scripture, it is apparent that these sisters loved their brother, Lazarus. John 11:1-44 gives the account of the death of Lazarus. The sisters sent for Jesus when Lazarus got sick because they were confident in His healing power. Unfortunately, he had died by the time Jesus reached Bethany. As Jesus talked with Martha, she declared, "I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world" (John 11:27). It is clear that Martha recognized Jesus as the Messiah.

In this most dramatic miracle of Jesus, Lazarus was raised from the dead. He had been dead for four days (v. 17). It is interesting to note that, according to Jewish tradition, the soul stayed near the body for only three days.⁶ Jesus knew that Lazarus was dead before He arrived in Bethany, demonstrating His omniscience (vv. 14-15). When He raised Lazarus from the dead, Jesus demonstrated His omnipotence (vv. 41-44).

Read John 11:38-44. Summarize the account verse by verse in the spaces provided below.

v. 38

v. 39a

v. 39b

v. 40

v. 41a

v. 41b

v. 42

v. 43

v. 44a

v. 44b

The sisters were together at the tomb when Jesus arrived. They saw His compassion for Lazarus and heard His pleas to God. Then, the loving sisters witnessed their brother's restoration to life and the conversion of many others who saw this miracle of Jesus.

Sisters Who Worshiped and Served

The final encounter of these two sisters in the Bible is recorded in John 12:1-8. Again Martha was serving others, having prepared dinner for Jesus and His disciples. While Martha served, Mary anointed Jesus' feet with expensive perfume and wiped His feet with her hair. This act revealed that Mary also recognized Jesus as the Messiah. With actions symbolic of preparing a body for burial, Mary sacrificed her most valuable possession to express her love and devotion to Jesus.

The anointing of the feet of Jesus instead of His head reflected Mary's humility. Only the lowliest servant attended the feet of guests, which would be dirty and dusty from walking in the unpaved roads of Israel.⁷ When Judas Iscariot who later

betrayed Jesus objected, Jesus praised Mary for her actions (see John 12:4-7). We read in the Matthew account of this incident that Jesus also praised Mary's act of honor in preparation for His death and burial.

Read His words: "Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her" (Matt. 26:13). How have you humbly and sacrificially expressed your love for Jesus?

My sister, Mitzi, and I love and serve the same Lord, although we have different gifts and personalities. During our teenage years, I often thought of myself as a Martha and of my sister as a Mary. It seemed that I was always in the kitchen helping my mother serve the food while Mitzi was in the dining room talking with guests. Like Martha, I often complained to my mother that my sister had left me to do the work alone, although I never had the nerve to complain to the Lord! Wisely, my mother reminded me of the importance of Christian fellowship and suggested that I refocus my priorities.

God has called many to serve Him. He chooses to work through all believers who serve Him unselfishly with their spiritual gifts. No matter what your spiritual gift is, use it selflessly to bring glory and honor to God, as Mary and Martha used their different gifts to honor the Lord. They are wonderful examples for Christian women today.

How do you use your spiritual gift(s) for God's glory?

Whether you identify more with Mary or with Martha, you can worship the Lord and serve others in Christ's name. Name ways you will do this with the help of the Holy Spirit.

DAY 5

DORCAS: A GENEROUS DISCIPLE

Little is known of Dorcas's personal background. She lived among Greeks in the first century in Joppa, a city located about 35-40 miles northwest of Jerusalem along the Mediterranean coast. It was a major seaport near modern Tel Aviv in Israel. While her Greek name was Dorcas, her Hebrew or Aramaic name was Tabitha. Both names are mentioned in Scripture. Dorcas was named for the gazelle, a small, swift animal that symbolized beauty in the Middle East. This disciple of Joppa is not known to have a husband or children. She is known for only one thing—her “good works and charitable deeds” (Acts 9:36). What a great reputation to be known as a generous disciple!

Read today's background Scripture, Acts 9:36-42.

A Generous Spirit

Unselfish generosity is not a common quality. In fact, most children are innately selfish and stingy. The early vocabulary of young children includes words like “me,” “my,” and “mine.” A child's world is self-centered and self-seeking. People have a strong natural desire to accumulate more for self. They must be taught to give to others and share.

Dorcas was a generous, giving person. Though she had little, she shared with others who had greater need. As a result, she was deeply loved and appreciated.

In Acts 9:36-42 what words indicate Dorcas's generosity to others?

Another generous disciple mentioned in Scripture is the widow with two mites (see Mark 12:41-44; Luke 21:1-4). Though she had only two small coins, she didn't hoard them for herself. She gave them graciously and without a show. Jesus contrasted her life with the scribes who sought recognition, aspired to positions, and stole from the helpless. Her humble generosity is a testimony to all believers.

Do you know some generous givers? Unselfish saints? As you write their names below, thank God for giving them generous spirits.

Pray that God will give you a generous spirit like the one reflected in these words by David Livingstone: "I will place no value on anything I may possess except in relation to the Kingdom of Christ. If anything I have will advance the interests of that Kingdom, it shall be given away or kept, only as by giving or keeping it I may promote the glory of Him, to whom I owe all my hopes in time and eternity."⁸

Generous Gestures

It is one thing to want to give and another thing to actually give. Dorcas had a generous spirit that led to generous gestures. Acts 9 reveals a practical response to tangible needs. Dorcas not only saw physical needs and wanted to help, she actually did something. The Scripture actually states that Dorcas was full of good works and charitable deeds "which she did" (v. 36). Widows in Joppa needed clothes. Dorcas used her creative ability as a seamstress to make garments for the widows. She gave generously from love.

God has made specific provision for widows. The New Testament teaches that God's people are to honor, provide for, and care for the widows among them (see 1 Tim. 5:3-16). The generosity of Christians is part of God's plan for their care.

What does your church do to minister to the widows of your congregation?

Individual believers like Dorcas or church bodies as a whole can reach out in love to those in need. In some churches, the deacons assume responsibility for the care of widows. In other churches, Bible study groups minister to widows. One church I know sponsors a widow's tea every Christmas to honor faithful women who have lost their husbands and to provide an opportunity for fellowship.

The Old Testament describes another widow who was cared for by the generosity of others. Read 1 Kings 17:8-16 and discover how the widow of Zarephath trusted God for her provision. God used the prophet Elijah to promise sustenance. Scripture says that the widow and her household had enough food to eat for many days. Be sensitive to the needs of people around you and respond with generous gestures.

List ways you can be more generous in giving to others in need.

Generous Blessings

The Bible teaches generosity in giving, but it also teaches generosity in receiving. A godly Christian not only gives sacrificially but also receives abundant blessings. Isn't that just like God? He doesn't ask of us anything He hasn't already given. After all, God is the Giver of all things. He has blessed us abundantly.

Dorcas was blessed abundantly by her generous giving. The widows returned her generosity with love, gratitude, and respect. At her death, they were filled with grief. As they testified of her generosity, Peter was deeply moved. God used Peter to restore life to Dorcas, an act that drew attention to God's power and led many to believe in Christ. Further blessings resulted for the widows and for all believers!

Paul reminds us in Ephesians 3 that God blesses us more abundantly than we could ever ask or think. Read verses 20-21, then name ways God has blessed you and your family. Stop and thank God for His abundant blessings.

My precious mother-in-love, Doris Kelley, was a humble and generous disciple of Christ. She was an orphan raised by her grandparents in San Antonio, Texas. At the age of 20, she married Charles Kelley of Piggott, Arkansas. They raised five children and were active members of First Baptist Church of Beaumont, Texas. Mom Kelley worked with Papa in his funeral home business before they retired. They gave sacrificially of themselves and their finances to the Lord's work. They encouraged and supported many individuals in need. As she grew older and her health declined, Mom Kelley continued to give what she could to family and friends. She gave of herself, writing many notes and making many phone calls. She gave of her resources, sending checks for birthdays and Christmas. She was a blessing to many who loved her in return. Mom Kelley's generous spirit leaves a powerful legacy today.

Dorcas lived a life of generosity to others and experienced God's abundant blessings. Are you sincerely willing to share what you have with others? Follow the example of Dorcas and give generously to others as God has given abundantly to you.

Women in the Bible provide examples of godly living for women today. Ruth's life of faithfulness challenges us to live for God every day. The tragic story of Gomer offers hope to Christian women facing rebellion. Mary and Martha of Bethany used their spiritual gifts to teach us to worship the Lord and serve Him. And, the generosity of Dorcas motivates us to minister to others. May you be women of faith and hope!

1. W.F. Wilkinson, *Personal Names of the Bible* (London: Alexander Strahan Publisher, 1865), 460. Quoted in Herbert Lockyer, *All the Women of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1988), 144.
2. Dorothy Kelley Patterson and Rhonda Harrington Kelley, eds., *The Woman's Study Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995), 487.
3. Ann Spangler and Jean E. Syswerda, *Women of the Bible: A One-Year Devotional Study of Women in Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999), 281.
4. Ron Owens and Iris Blue, *Iris: Trophy of Grace* (Garland, TX: Cross House, 2010), vii.
5. Edith Dean, *All the Women of the Bible* (New York: Harper Collins, 1955), 177.
6. Dorothy Kelley Patterson and Rhonda Harrington Kelley, eds., *The Study Bible for Women* (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2014), 1392.
7. Ibid, 1389.
8. David Livingstone, as quoted by Gien Karssen, *Her Name Is Woman* (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 1975), 155.

