

Extraordinary Women of the Bible



A Character Study Devotional

Teen & Adult

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About the study:

Welcome to the study of Extraordinary Women of the Bible! In this series, we are taking a look at some well-known, as well as some very obscure, women of the Old and New Testament to see what it really means to be a wise and courageous woman of God! You'll probably be a little surprised to find out that Bible times were not as primitive as you think, and God used women just as much as men to do His will.

These ladies were bold and strong. Some were regular women going about their lives and jobs who stepped out in courage and risked their lives to obey God, while others were called out to be judges, leaders, and prophetesses. You'll see in some of the stories that these women were human and made plenty of mistakes along the way (like us all), but they were added to this study because of how they used their unique feminine qualities in service to God. Nowhere in the Bible does it imply that women should be in the background, never contributing.

God lifted women up and gave them important tasks for His purposes. He does the same today for anyone, male or female, who will answer the call of Isaiah 6:8—"Then I heard a voice saying 'whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' And I said here am I Lord, send me."

This study is intended to be used as a weekly devotional, studying one character/quality per week for eighteen weeks. However, it can instead be used as a daily devotional, studying one character/quality per day (excluding Sundays) for three weeks. Refer to the end of the study for a weekly scripture writing plan to correspond with each lesson.



Courage

Read: Exodus 1:15-22

Shiphrah & Puah

During the time the Hebrew people were in slavery in Egypt, Egypt was the most powerful nation in the world. That meant the king of Egypt, the pharaoh, was the most powerful person in the world. The Bible leaves him unnamed, but Egyptian history tells us that the pharaoh of Egypt during this period of time was Thutmose I. Thutmose used the Hebrews to build and maintain his empire by forcing them to endure long, difficult work days. They were beaten when they didn't work hard enough and killed for disobedience. However, he also feared how much the Hebrews were growing as a nation and worried that in time they could overthrow him. So he devised a plan. He would limit the number of Hebrew men in his nation by having the baby boys put to death! Two Hebrew midwives, Shiphrah and Puah, were in charge of all the Hebrew midwives. The midwives would be sent for if a Hebrew woman was giving birth. They would be the first person to look the baby over immediately following delivery. The pharaoh came to Shiphrah and Puah and told them that when a Hebrew baby was born, they could allow the girls to live but ordered the women to kill the baby boys. More specifically, they were to drown these babies in the river.

The two women were up against a difficult choice. Disobeying a direct command of the king could have resulted in being put to death instantly, but Shiphrah and Puah respected and trusted God more than they feared Pharaoh. These midwives understood how special life is to God and knew that obeying God was more important than following the commands of an evil king. We aren't told if Shiphrah and Puah told the other midwives of this evil plan or if they kept it to themselves in an effort to protect the other midwives. Either way, they ignored the command and allowed the babies to live. They stood strong in their faith and trusted God in their dangerous situation and in the end saved the lives of many Hebrew children, including Moses (who was born during this time period). Moses would grow up and later be very instrumental in delivering the Hebrew nation from slavery in Egypt!

Times are no different today. There have been stories of nurses in clinics who have disobeyed the doctor and saved a baby's life after discovering it still breathing

following an abortion attempt. Our society sometimes doesn't put much value on human life before birth, in 2014, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) reported that 652,639 legal abortions were performed. God hasn't changed His mind about the sanctity of life. Every life is of value, and His command, "Thou shall not murder," is not limited to after the baby is born. Life begins at conception, and life belongs to God alone. In fact, God says in Jeremiah 1:5, "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you."

God knew who we would become before we were even conceived, and He had plans for our life. We shouldn't take that lightly. We have a purpose and a reason for being born, and if we allow our lives to be used by Him, He will complete that purpose in us. How beautiful that these two ladies understood this during their time and stood firm in their faith in God, regardless of the consequences.



This story takes place around 1525 BC while the Israelites were in slavery in Egypt. King Thutmose became pharaoh after the death of Amenhotep I. Thutmose pushed the borders of Egypt further than they had ever been and built a tomb for himself in the Valley of the Kings. He was succeeded briefly by his son, Thutmose II, and then his daughter, Hatshepsut.

How this applies to my life today:

When we are courageous, we can boldly face opposition, danger, or pain knowing that God is in control of all things. Having courage doesn't mean we won't be afraid; it means we can trust in God to give us strength to handle any situation we face as long as we are letting Him lead us. Courage is not the absence of fear, but the ability to continue with what needs to be done in spite of our fear. Shiphrah and Puah were bold and courageous because they realized there was something greater at stake than their fear. They put their trust in God knowing it could cost them their lives, and that choice made a long-term impact on the Jewish nation.

While our decision to follow Christ might not put us at risk of actually losing our life, it will without a doubt cost us something. We can't come to God out of the idea that we want to benefit from being a Christian ("what will God do for me"); rather, we should approach Him with willingness to give our all to Him, at any cost. Courage can be as simple as reaching out to those in need or as bold as stepping out in faith to obey God's call on our life (especially when we don't understand what He's doing).

Additional reading / verses:

Consider the following story (from <http://faithforthefamily.com/resources/missionary-heroes/mary-slessor>) about missionary Mary Slessor (December 1848–January 1915).

“Upon arriving back in Africa, Mary was delighted to discover she had been stationed by herself in a remote village called Old Town. The first sight to greet her eyes was a cluster of human skulls hanging from a pole near her doorway. The people of Old Town were vile, with no respect for human life. When a man died, his widow became a suspect in his death. She could be tried in one of three ways. In the first, she would be made to eat poisonous beans. If she died, she was judged to be guilty. In the second, she would have boiling oil poured over her skin. If she was burned, she was judged to be guilty. In the third, a chicken was killed. If the chicken's body flopped in a certain direction, she was judged to be guilty.

“Wives found to be ‘guilty’ were executed immediately. But Mary was especially horrified with the practice of killing twins in the villages. The people of Calabar believed one of the twins to be a demon, but were unable to determine which it was. Both babies would be left to die in the jungle shortly after birth, and the mother was severely punished. Mary began to rescue these children. She quickly became the mother of dozens of condemned twins. Often she would find them, just hours old, left on bushes or in clay pots. One dark night, Mary was awakened by the howl of a panther. Outside her hut, Mary discovered the panther with a baby in its mouth. Frantically, she grabbed a burning torch and struck the panther in the head, forcing it to drop the baby and run away. Miraculously, the baby was unharmed.”

It would be unrealistic to say Mary boldly followed God and was never afraid. Reading just a portion of her life on the mission field, we can be sure she had to face her fear head on, and likely many times. It's easy to glorify missionaries (or Biblical figures) because we see the whole story, from beginning to end. But these people did not know how it would end for them. They simply took God at His word—“. . . for He has said I will never leave you or forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5b)—and that faith in Him made all the difference!

“Lord, the task is impossible for me but not for thee. Lead the way and I will follow.”

~Mary Slessor