

Woman Who Dared to Stand Alone

by Gail Keffer

The Bible is full of many women; each is different. Many have a major part in the story of God's creation and love. We do not all play a major role in the overall picture of life here on earth. But, each of us is unique to God who cares not only for each of us as individuals, but also for the lily of the field and the sparrow.

Many recent Bible scholars have noticed that Jesus referred to as many females in the parables as he did to males, and he worked with many women in his ministry. We will attempt to study some of these women in the series of devotionals and see how each of them tells us something about ourselves and spreading the love of God. Are we different than they were? We are all God's creation and while he loves each of us and forgives us, he knows our ways, and knows our weakness before we can acknowledge it or ask for forgiveness. But, we must remember that he also knows our talents and our strengths. We are each unique and blessed just as the people were in their day and so will the people of tomorrow be blessed. It is difficult to accept at times the people that God chose to do the work. They were just as human as we are!!!

Sometimes we tend to think that everyone in the Bible was a saint. They weren't. They had human frailties just as we do, but through their frailties, God was able to use them to spread the Good News.

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Abigail

“And when Abigail saw David, she hasted, and lighted off the ass, and fell before David on her face, and bowed herself to the ground.” I Samuel 25:23

Abigail is often referred to as a woman of integrity. The Bible tells us she was beautiful, prudent, had great courage, and was godly. That is quite a list of attributes for a woman whose story only takes a few verses in the Bible.

She was the wife of Nabal, an evil and selfish man who had great wealth, but thought only of himself. We know nothing of her lineage. We meet her after Samuel had died and David asks her husband for food in a strange country. He refused and acts like he knows nothing of what David's men had done to protect him earlier. However, when they return one of the servants tells Abigail what has happened. David and his men had protected her husband's men and sheep, but now when David and his men needed help, her husband, Nabal, mistreated David's men and would not help them.

Abigail had not heard David's men when they talked to Nabal's men, but she knew that Nabal was wrong. She and her maids made ready food and drink and took the provisions to David and his men. This was a dangerous journey for her to take. She was going against her husband's wishes, and went into a ravine and faced an army of men. David had already decided that he wanted nothing to do with any of these people after he had protected them and they were unwilling to share some of their feast with his men. When Abigail meets David she falls at his feet and apologizes for her husband's actions. David felt that God has sent her and offers God's blessing on her as she returns home.

When she returns home, Nabal is having a banquet so she didn't tell him what had happened. In the morning when she told him, he had a heart attack and died.

When David hears that Nabal has died, he sends for Abigail to be his wife. Again she and her maids get on their donkeys and go to David. She marries David and has a son to him.

She realized the danger in going against the wishes of her husband, but had the courage to do what was right. She was courageous because she stood for the right and risked her life for others. As a result of her actions much bloodshed was avoided. She was faithful to God and to David who later became king.

Prayer: Dear God, we know you have promised to be with us always, but we often turn and run when you are there to lead us and stand with us because we fail to have enough faith. Help us to have that faith and realize your presence each day in situations, and not feel that we are ever alone. Amen.

1. Are we willing to display the integrity and courage in our lives that Abigail had?
2. Can we stand up for God's ways in a non-physical way by speaking out against injustice and interceding for the people who are oppressed mentally, physically, and emotionally?
3. Abigail had many fine qualities. Which of her qualities can we take from this story to make our life and that of the people around us better?

Lydia

”And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, who worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul” Acts 16:14.

Paul was given a vision to go to a Roman colony, Philippi, Macedonia. When he got there he knew no one except the other men who had traveled there with him - probably Timothy and Silas. Paul heard there was a prayer meeting of women down by a river, he thought he should go and he did. At this meeting, he met Lydia, a merchant, who made and sold purple cloth. Purple dye was supposedly very hard to make, and purple fabric was always in demand for royalty so she had a good business. Lydia was known to be a believer in Jesus Christ. Her people probably met by the river because only men were able to have meeting in the tabernacle. She was strong enough in her belief to look over that detail and witness wherever she was. She was eager to witness to other women.

Lydia listened closely to what Paul had to say and asked to be baptized. She invited all of them to her home for lodging and food. Although they were hesitant at first, they went and found her to be the believer that she said she was. They continued there for many days preaching the word of God.

One day, on their way to prayer, they noticed a girl possessed of demons was following them. The people in the town were taking advantage of her and making money on her saying she could tell fortunes. Paul knew she was possessed by demons. However, she began to believe in what Paul was saying and was going around saying "These men are working for the Most High God. They're laying out the road of salvation for you!" Acts 16:17. When Paul realized how she was being used, he told the demons to leave her, and they did. The ones who were exploiting her realized that she was no longer making money for them. Furthermore they realized that the cause of their loss was the strangers who were having prayer meetings, namely Paul and those traveling with him.

The men, who were losing money, sought out Paul and Silas, roughed them up and took them to the town square. The judges, agreeing with the influential business men, put Paul and Silas in prison.

About midnight, Paul and Silas were singing a hymn when there was an earthquake. Paul and Silas were free to run. The jailer drew his sword and would kill himself as he would be blamed for the prisoners escape. Paul and Silas told him to stop because they were all still there. He asked what he had to do to be saved. Paul told him that he needed to believe in Christ. That day he and his family were baptized. Paul and Silas, with the help of food and lodging from Lydia, continued to bring people to Christ until their work was finished there.

Because Lydia had taken him in and believed in his Jesus Christ, the church took hold in Philippi, Macedonia. When he was released from jail by God's power, he went back to thank Lydia. She was one lady that helped in a major way to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Prayer: Heavenly Father you have told us that we only need to believe and you will be able to help us so that we too will one day see you face to face. Help us to believe and be strong like Lydia and her people and welcome those who do not know You as their Savior. Amen

1. Lydia was in the right place with the right attitude to help. How can we be this kind of helper?
2. How big should our vision be to help others know about Christ? Can we dare to make a mistake?
3. Just as the spirit led Paul to Lydia, who can it lead us to see? Can we witness at work?
4. How can God use us for this type of ministry

Mary and Martha

“Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met him: but Mary sat still in the house.”
John 11:20

Mary and Martha, the sisters of Lazarus, are often mentioned although there is very little about them in the Bible. Maybe they are in the Bible because they exemplify the difference in siblings in addition to their devotion to Jesus. Many think that Martha was the older one of the sisters and it was her home so she was concerned about all the guests. Mary was the younger and perhaps more scholarly. Martha was the one in the kitchen, worrying about details. Mary was more interested in being with Jesus. Once when Jesus was at the house, Mary poured expensive perfume on Jesus' feet and wiped them with her hair as a symbol of her love for him. Martha was frustrated because there was work to be done and Mary was doing something that Martha thought was unnecessary. Judas also was upset with the perfume being used on the feet of Jesus. He said the money would have been better used if the perfume had been sold and the money given to the poor.

Mary gave her complete attention to Jesus. Although Martha also loved Jesus, she was concentrating on making sure everyone was fed. She played the role of a hostess to all people. Mary felt that the attention should all be on Christ. Jesus even told Martha that she worried too much. Both Mary and Martha showed great faith when their brother, Lazarus, died. Jesus told Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die" John 11:25-26 Martha responded with a confession of her own. "I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, He who comes into the world" John 11:27. Martha may have been serving her guests, but she knew that Jesus was someone special and acknowledged that to Jesus.

We can decide which is right. Most scholars seem to think that Martha had her priorities in the wrong place. Mary was concentrating on the guest, Jesus. Martha was concerned about the world people that were there. Mary was so willing to please Jesus that she even poured the expensive perfume on his feet and dried his feet with her hair. Martha was in the kitchen preparing food for the guests. Some seem to think that these sisters are in the Bible to remind us that we sometimes serve other people and think that our works are more important than our worship of Jesus.

Both of them showed extreme faith that Jesus would be able to bring their brother, Lazarus, back to life even though he had been dead for four days. They both summon Jesus to come so their brother will not die. Martha is the first to run out when she see Jesus approaching, but Mary's faith is just as deep.

The two women were courageous because they were openly acknowledging Jesus as the Son of God in an area very close to Jerusalem. But they loved Him even in the face of danger for their own lives. Their faith told them there was more to life than time on earth even at that early time.

Prayer: Dear Lord, many times we criticize others for their way of worshipping. Help us to know that you love us just as we are, and will continue to love us and help us to do your will if we only ask. Help us to realize that we need to balance our lives just as Mary and Martha learned. Amen

1. Should our love of Christ take precedent over our love of our fellow human beings? Is this a different kind of love? Is it wrong to be a Martha? Is it wrong to be a Mary?
2. In addition to their love of Jesus, what does this story tell us about ourselves? How does this story apply to the verse, "Love the Lord with all your heart, and your neighbor as yourself"?

Naomi

“The town women said to Naomi, "Blessed be GOD! He didn't leave you without family to carry on your life. May this baby grow up to be famous in Israel! He'll make you young again! He'll take care of you in old age. And this daughter-in-law who has brought him into the world and loves you so much, why, she's worth more to you than seven sons! Naomi took the baby and held him in her arms, cuddling him, cooing over him, waiting on him hand and foot. The neighborhood women started calling him "Naomi's baby boy!" But his real name was Obed. Obed was the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David. Ruth 4:14-17 The Message

Someone once said “Life is like a grindstone, it can either grind you down or polish you.” The choice is yours. God can change our bitterness; God can help us accept that things could be a lot worse, and sometimes we even see blessings after hardships. This was the choice left to Naomi.

During the time of judges there was a great famine in the land of Judah. Naomi, her husband, Elimelech, and their two sons Mahlon and Chilion heard that there was food in Moab so they moved there. It was only a journey of approximately 40 miles but the terrain was rough. The hardest part may have been that they had lived in a land with their people who worshipped the God of Israel, but the Moabites worshipped a god called Chemosh and God had warned the Israelites not to mix with them.

While they were there the sons married two Moabite girls, Orpah and Ruth. Most of us have heard more about Ruth. After they had been in Moab for approximately ten years, all three of the men died and left Naomi with only two daughters-in-law. The three widows were very close but they were left with no means for support. Naomi could not own land as a woman, so they had only the mercy of others. Naomi heard that things had returned to normal in Judah and she wanted to return home to Bethlehem because that was her home. She told both of the daughters-in-law to stay with their people, but Ruth went to Judah with her. Now Ruth was the one in a strange land. She married Boaz, a kinsman of Naomi.

Ruth and Boaz had a son and so Naomi took great joy in this as she helped to raise the child, Obed. He would become the grandfather of King David in the lineage of Mary. Naomi was blessed in her grief as she helped others through theirs she was also strengthened.

Prayer: Dear God, you have given us so much and yet we always want the good, but don't stop to realize that we must also have the sorrows to help strengthen us in our relationship with you. Help us to depend on you and know that you will be there to help us and give us strength for those days when all seems to go wrong. Amen

1. Do you believe that God can change the bitterness of your hard experiences? Explain.
2. Knowing that nothing can bring back a loved one you have lost, have situations following this allowed you to let God change your sorrow?
3. Do you believe that God is in control of all circumstances?
4. Was Naomi's faith in God a vital part of her acceptance of her situation in life?
5. Can we sometimes have people who are like family and be closer to us than our blood relatives?
6. This passage speaks of the kindness of in-laws. When there are so many “bad” things said about in-laws are you fortunate enough to be able to say good things about yours?

Rahab

“Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.” James 2:25-26 KJV

One day two spies from the Israelites came to the home of Rahab, a prostitute. Rahab knew that these men were from the Israelites and that they were people of God. She also knew that God had been with them in other battles. The people in Jericho knew that the Israelites had set up camp just across the Jordan River. The two men were scouts for an army that was going to come and destroy the town. Evidently Rahab also had a feeling that she needed to change her ways. Word got out that the two men were in the home of Rahab, but when the king sent his men to seek them, Rahab told them that they had been there, but they were gone. Actually they were hiding on her roof.

Rahab’s house was built into a wall that surrounded the city so it was easy access, but also easy to escape! Jericho was an important town, and actually had two thick walls; protection seemed secure. After the king’s men left, Rahab went to the roof and told the two spies what had happened. Before the men left, Rahab asked them to protect her and her family during the battle. They told her to have her family in her house, and when the army came they would save that house from destruction. Rahab was to place a scarlet rope in the window so they would know which house to save.

While they were spying, an angel appeared to Joshua, the leader of the Israelites, and told him how to “fight” the battle. The army was to march around the city wall for seven days with trumpets. On the seventh day when they sounded a long blast all the people were to shout and the walls would tumble down and all the people and animals would be killed except for the house of Rahab. God would protect her and bless her for helping the people of Israel. Joshua told the army to do as he had been told by God, and the battle of Jericho happened as God had said. The Israelites were able to continue to the Promised Land. And Rahab and her family went to dwell in Israel. The genealogy in the Bible tells us that Rahab was actually a many times great grandmother of Christ.

There are a couple instances in this story of God’s faith in some very unlikely people, and also their faith in God that he would protect them. How could Joshua believe that marching around a city and yelling would make all those walls fall down? How could Rahab, a woman of the street, believe that all the walls would fall down except those in her home if she tied a scarlet rope by her window? We learn that if you are willing to be a part of God’s kingdom and confess your sins and try to make things right, he will use you in a way that we could never imagine. We may not have the walls of all the houses around us fall down, but He will be with us because he has given us that promise.

Prayer: Dear Lord, we accept your forgiveness, but then we sin again. Help us to know that each time we sin you will forgive us, but that you will also give us the strength to be strong and do your work if we only trust and pray. Amen

1. This story does not condone the actions of Rahab, but can we accept that God gives us a fresh page each time we sin if we ask?
2. If we are told of a pending disaster either physically (a flood) or emotionally (an illness) how should we prepare?
3. Is God’s offer of salvation available to all people, of all nations, in all walks of life, provided they repent and obey Him?

Ruth

“But Ruth said, "Entreat me not to leave you or to return from following you; for where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God.” Ruth 1:16 RSV

Ruth was a Moabite. During a time when harvest was poor, Naomi and her husband and sons had moved to Moab. There the sons married Moabite girls, Ruth and Oprah. All three of the men died leaving the women alone. When Naomi said she was going back to Bethlehem, she asked her daughters-in-law to go back to their own people. Ruth replied in the words that have become so well known which are shown above. Ruth and Naomi returned to Judah, and Ruth embraced the God of Israel; the God she had learned to love and trust while she was in Naomi's family in Moab.

Once back in Judah, Naomi looked out for her daughter-in-law because she loved her very much, and also, that was the only family either one of them had. Ruth loved Naomi as a mother. Naomi had a rich relative named Boaz. To insure their future, Naomi played the part of a match-maker!

Ruth went into the fields in the spring to glean what she could that was left behind after the harvest for Naomi and herself. She was a foreigner so she could have faced much ridicule. However, Naomi had made sure that Boaz knew who she was and Boaz told her that God would protect her. He was also able to make sure she had enough grain each night for herself and Naomi. The workmen told Boaz that Ruth came early and worked hard. Boaz appreciated her work ethic and her devotion to his God. She was well accepted in the community as a hard worker.

One day, Ruth approached Boaz about a law that said a widow would be taken care of by other family members. Boaz already knew that Ruth was a hard worker, and he lost no time in checking this out with his kinsmen. So Boaz honored the family tradition to provide for the women and later took Ruth as his wife.

Ruth bore a son Obed, who became the grandfather of David and the ancestor of Jesus. So God used a Moabite woman who was willing to leave her homeland, accept a new God, and journey into what could have been unfriendly circumstances. She had great strength, courage, and the faith of the God of Israel.

Through Ruth we see much more than a story of love and responsibility for her mother-in-law. We see the benefits of trusting and following God as he provides for all of us.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we thank you for creating us in your image and for the love that you have put into our hearts. Help us to be faithful to You and let that love shine so that others may see that we share the love you have so freely given to us with others so they too may know your love and care. Amen

1. Are we ever called to go into unfamiliar situations and tell others about our God? Do we do it willingly or do we buck and make others come to us first
2. Have you ever had to move to a new part of the country, city, or even to another land? How did you adjust? Were people kind to you? Were you kind to them? What did you do to help in this transition?
3. Can you show love to a family member that needs that extra hug?
4. Do we believe that God has a plan for each of us if we seek it?

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Notes: These references are given to help continuance of study for a particular person, and although the verse is given with the particular name, the reader will find a need to read some verses on either side of the reference to put the name into context. Many books have been written on the people in the Bible and many sources are quoted every day. Some are mentioned very briefly, but they had a tremendous impact. I have tried to just list the Scripture references.

Abigail: The main story of Abigail is told in I Samuel 25:3-42, but she is mentioned in I Samuel 27:3; and I Samuel 30:5. She is also mentioned in II Samuel 2: 5; II Samuel 2:3; and II Samuel 17:25, but only briefly. Her part in the genealogy is briefly mentioned in I Chronicles

Lydia: The entire story of Lydia and her influence is told in the sixteenth chapter of Acts. That is really all we really know about her.

Mary and Martha: The main story about Mary and Martha with their brother is told in John 11:1-45. Other references include Luke 10:38-41 and John 12:1-8.

Naomi: The entire story of Naomi is told in the book of Ruth.

Rahab: The story of Rahab is told in Joshua 2:1-3; and 6:17-25. Other mentions of her are found in Psalms 87 and 89.

Ruth: The entire book of Ruth is the story of Ruth and her mother-in-law, Naomi, and Boaz.

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