



# WOMEN *of the* BIBLE

A Yearlong Study  
of 52 Remarkable  
Women

INSPIRING STORIES,  
DEVOTIONS,  
AND REFLECTIONS

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*Ann Spangler and Jean E. Syswerda*

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**Excerpt!**



# Contents

<i>Introduction</i> . . . . .	13	Huldah . . . . .	242
Eve . . . . .	17	Esther . . . . .	250
Sarah . . . . .	25	The Woman of Proverbs 31 . . . . .	259
Hagar . . . . .	32	The Shulammite Woman . . .	267
Lot's Wife . . . . .	40	Gomer . . . . .	276
Rebekah . . . . .	47	Elizabeth . . . . .	283
Rachel . . . . .	55	Mary, Mother of Jesus . . . . .	291
Leah . . . . .	64	Anna . . . . .	301
Tamar, Daughter-in-Law of Judah . . . . .	71	The Woman of Samaria . . .	308
Potiphar's Wife . . . . .	79	The Woman Who Lived a Sinful Life . . . . .	316
The Mothers of Moses: Jochebed and Pharaoh's Daughter . . . . .	86	The Woman with the Issue of Blood . . . . .	324
Miriam . . . . .	93	Herodias . . . . .	332
Rahab . . . . .	100	Joanna . . . . .	340
Deborah . . . . .	108	The Syrophoenician Woman	347
Jael . . . . .	115	Martha . . . . .	355
Delilah . . . . .	122	Mary of Bethany . . . . .	363
Naomi . . . . .	130	Salome, Mother of the Zebedees . . .	372
Ruth . . . . .	138	The Widow with the Two Coins . . . . .	381
Hannah . . . . .	146	Mary Magdalene . . . . .	388
Michal . . . . .	153	Dorcas . . . . .	397
Abigail . . . . .	161	Lydia . . . . .	404
The Woman of Endor . . . . .	169	Priscilla . . . . .	411
Bathsheba . . . . .	176	<i>Appendices</i>	
Tamar, Daughter of King David . .	185	All the Women of the Bible . . . . .	422
The Wise Woman of Abel . .	191	Timeline of Women of the Bible . . . . .	428
Rizpah . . . . .	199	Women in Jesus' Family Tree . . . . .	429
The Queen of Sheba . . . . .	206	Women in Jesus' Life and Ministry . . . . .	430
Jezebel . . . . .	213		
The Widow of Zarephath . .	220		
The Shunammite Woman . .	227		
Athaliah and Jehosheba . . .	234		



# Theme Index

- Abuse, 184, 189, 190, 205  
Adultery, 72, 176, 276  
Angels, 34, 40, 124, 230, 284, 292,  
296, 341, 350, 374  
Beauty, 50, 70, 122, 125, 176, 150  
Betrayal, 122, 276  
Birth, 20, 25, 27, 48, 55, 64, 70, 71,  
87, 140, 147, 176, 283, 289, 291  
Bitterness, 33, 132, 155, 168  
Blessing, 49, 54, 76, 85, 144, 261,  
281, 284, 402  
Burial, 27, 64, 199, 202, 365, 390,  
397  
Childlessness, 25, 48, 55, 146, 149,  
227, 283  
Choices, 42, 82, 156  
Comfort, 69  
Dancing, 93, 96, 154, 156, 160,  
214, 334  
Demons, *see* Witchcraft  
Dignity, 281  
Dissension, 65  
Dreams, 31, 79, 172, 279, 293  
Erotic love, 268, 273  
Faith, 32, 86, 95, 101, 106, 107,  
110, 149, 168, 171, 204, 222,  
226, 258, 291, 316, 325, 330,  
341, 347, 354, 356, 381, 403,  
404  
Forgiveness, 18, 94, 98, 99, 183,  
218, 246, 248, 249, 278, 281,  
315, 316, 322, 337, 369  
Friendship, 63, 137, 355, 392, 414  
Genealogies, 71, 77  
Gift-giving, 207, 208, 212, 370,  
382, 388, 392  
God remembers, 62  
God's direction, 174  
God's faithfulness, 34, 53, 57, 109,  
136, 141, 204  
God's grace, 22, 103, 124, 218, 249,  
318, 337, 388, 396  
God's jealousy, 243, 276  
God's judgment, 22, 41, 215, 218,  
244, 278  
God's love, 133, 273, 274, 278, 395  
God's mercy, 45, 219, 244  
God's power, 76, 171  
God's protection, 34, 37, 162, 235  
God's provision, 34, 151, 222, 225,  
226, 279, 386, 387  
God's purposes, 264  
God's timing, 30  
Grandchildren, 140  
Healing, 94, 189, 325, 326, 329,  
340, 342, 347, 350, 355, 387,  
392, 411  
Heaven, 297, 318, 346  
Hopelessness, 33, 87  
Hospitality, 41, 227, 230, 319, 355  
Humility, 291, 318, 379  
Idol worship, 213, 216  
Illness, 324, 326, 329, 340, 342,  
347, 350, 388, 397, 411  
Jealousy, 25, 64  
Jesus' lineage, 65, 73, 140  
Jesus' love, *see* God's love

- Joy, 19, 23, 283, 295, 345  
 Last Supper, 367  
 Leadership, 111, 116  
 Living water, 309, 314  
 Loyalty, 131  
 Marriage, 67, 146, 161, 168, 250,  
     261, 267, 270, 276, 282, 309, 335  
 Miracles, 20, 220, 289, 325, 349,  
     363, 398, 411  
 Mothering, 294, 372, 375, 378  
 Mourning, 200, 202  
 Obedience, 32, 80, 87, 171, 197,  
     243, 279, 402  
 Occult, *see* Witchcraft  
 Power, 333  
 Praise, *see* Worship  
 Prayer, 168, 240, 306, 307, 370  
 Promises fulfilled, 27, 147, 288, 299  
 Prostitution, 72, 74, 100  
 Purity, 80, 84  
 Reconciliation, 57, 278  
 Remembering, 152  
 Repentance, 94, 99, 318, 323, 338  
 Resurrection, 345, 356, 361, 372,  
     388  
 Seduction, 80, 177  
 Sexual improprieties, 186, 187  
 Sickness, *see* Illness  
 Sin, 18, 94, 128, 177, 183, 246, 249,  
     281, 316, 322, 337  
 Sorcery, *see* Witchcraft  
 Strength, 151  
 Surrender, 396  
 Time, 270  
 Touch, 325  
 Trickery, 49, 57, 72, 122, 177, 186  
 Trust in God, 91, 171, 174, 221,  
     229, 232  
 Vengeance, 162, 167  
 Victory, 353  
 Virtue, 268  
 Warfare, 109, 115, 177, 192, 193  
 Widows, 72, 131, 220, 223, 301,  
     381  
 Wisdom, 191, 197, 206, 211, 260  
 Witchcraft, 172, 175, 412  
 Worry, 226  
 Worship, 154, 156, 158, 159, 237,  
     301, 304, 357, 365, 404

# Alphabetical Index of Women

Abigail . . . . .	161	Naomi . . . . .	130
Anna . . . . .	301	Pharaoh's Daughter . . . . .	86
Athaliah . . . . .	234	Potiphar's Wife . . . . .	79
Bathsheba . . . . .	176	Priscilla . . . . .	411
Deborah . . . . .	108	Queen of Sheba . . . . .	206
Delilah . . . . .	122	Rachel . . . . .	55
Dorcas . . . . .	397	Rahab . . . . .	100
Elizabeth . . . . .	283	Rebekah . . . . .	47
Esther . . . . .	250	Rizpah . . . . .	199
Eve . . . . .	17	Ruth . . . . .	138
Gomer . . . . .	276	Salome, Mother of the Zebedees . . . . .	372
Hagar . . . . .	32	Sarah . . . . .	25
Hannah . . . . .	146	Shulammite Woman . . . . .	267
Herodias . . . . .	332	Shunammite Woman . . . . .	227
Huldah . . . . .	242	Syrophoenician Woman . . . . .	347
Jael . . . . .	115	Tamar, Daughter of David . . . . .	185
Jehosheba . . . . .	234	Tamar, Daughter-in-Law of Judah . . . . .	71
Jezebel . . . . .	213	Widow with the Two Coins . . . . .	381
Joanna . . . . .	340	Widow of Zarephath . . . . .	220
Jochebed . . . . .	86	Wise Woman of Abel . . . . .	191
Leah . . . . .	64	Woman of Endor . . . . .	169
Lot's Wife . . . . .	40	Woman of Proverbs 31 . . . . .	259
Lydia . . . . .	404	Woman of Samaria . . . . .	308
Martha . . . . .	355	Woman with the Issue of Blood . . . . .	324
Mary of Bethany . . . . .	363	Woman Who Lived a Sinful Life . . . . .	316
Mary Magdalene . . . . .	388		
Mary, the Mother of Jesus . . . . .	291		
Michal . . . . .	153		
Miriam . . . . .	93		

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# Index of Background Topics

Angels . . . . .	296	Menstrual Bleeding . . . . .	326
Baal Worship . . . . .	216	Menstrual Cycles . . . . .	59
Baskets . . . . .	89	Money . . . . .	383
Books and Scrolls . . . . .	245	Mothering . . . . .	375
Bottles . . . . .	117	Names . . . . .	28
Burial . . . . .	202	Passover . . . . .	366
Childbirth . . . . .	20	Prophets . . . . .	279
City Walls . . . . .	104	Prostitution . . . . .	74
Dancing . . . . .	96	Ritual Bathing . . . . .	180
Demon Possession . . . . .	350	Romantic Love . . . . .	270
Disciples . . . . .	399	Salt . . . . .	43
Egyptian Life . . . . .	81	Sexual Improprieties . . . . .	187
Fabrics and Dyes . . . . .	407	Siege . . . . .	193
Famine . . . . .	133	Spinning and Weaving . . . . .	262
Festival of Purim . . . . .	255	Temple . . . . .	237
Food . . . . .	164	Temple Courts . . . . .	304
Gift Giving . . . . .	208	Tentmaking . . . . .	415
Gleaning . . . . .	141	Washing Feet . . . . .	319
Hair . . . . .	125	Water . . . . .	311
Healing . . . . .	342	Widows . . . . .	223
The Herods . . . . .	335	Witchcraft . . . . .	172
Hopelessness . . . . .	35	Women as Leaders . . . . .	111
Hospitality . . . . .	230	Women in Jesus' Life and Ministry . . . . .	392
Incense . . . . .	286	Women's Work . . . . .	358
Infertility . . . . .	149	Worship . . . . .	156
Jewelry . . . . .	50		
Marriage Customs . . . . .	69		





# Ruth

HER NAME MEANS

*“Friendship”*

**HER CHARACTER:** Generous, loyal, and loving, she is strong and serene, able to take unusual risks, dealing actively with life circumstances.

**HER SORROW:** To have lost her husband, homeland, and family.

**HER JOY:** To discover firsthand the generous, loyal, and loving nature of God, as he provided her with a husband, a son, and a home to call her own.

**KEY SCRIPTURES:** Ruth 2–4; Matthew 1:5

## *Monday*

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HER STORY

*I*t was harvest time in Israel when Boaz first laid eyes on the young woman. The sun had painted the fields a tawny gold as workers swung their sickles in even rhythms through the standing grain. According to Israel’s law and custom, the poor had the right to gather whatever the harvesters missed.

Ruth toiled quickly and efficiently, he noticed, stuffing grain into a coarse sack slung across her shoulder. Strands of black hair escaped her head covering, softly framing olive-colored skin, still smooth despite the sun. She rested, but only for a moment, her eyes wary for any sign of trouble from the men working the fields. Gleaning was rough work and dangerous, especially for an attractive young foreigner, alone and unprotected.

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Everyone in Bethlehem had been talking about Boaz's relative, Naomi, and her unexpected return. Ruth, he knew, had come with her. He had heard of their shared tragedy and the extraordinary loyalty the young woman had displayed toward her mother-in-law, even promising to renounce Moab's idols for Israel's God. A man could wish for such a friend as Ruth had been to Naomi.

Determined to repay her kindness in some way, Boaz called to her, "My daughter, listen to me. Don't go and glean in another field and don't go away from here. Stay here with my servant girls. Watch the field where the men are harvesting, and follow along after the girls. I have told the men not to touch you." The young woman smiled her agreement.

Later he spoke to Ruth again, this time offering bread and roasted grain for her dinner. When she finished eating, Boaz instructed his men to pull out some stalks of grain and strew them in her path. It was good to see her leaving that night with a bulging harvest sack.

Day after day, he watched her, aware that the wheat and barley harvest would soon be drawing to a close. One evening, Boaz and the other men were winnowing barley on the threshing floor. After he had finished eating and drinking, he lay down under the stars at the far end of the grain pile. With so many men to guard the harvest, robbers wouldn't dare approach. But in the middle of the night he woke with a start, realizing that someone *had* dared. To his surprise, he discovered the intruder was neither a robber nor a man, but a woman who lay at his feet.

She, too, was awake. "I am your servant, Ruth," she whispered. "Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a kinsman-redeemer."

He could hardly believe her words. The young woman had taken a remarkable risk, appearing at night and lying down so close to him. Quickly, he covered her, saying, "The LORD bless you. This kindness is greater than that which you showed Naomi: You have not run after the younger men, whether rich or poor. And now, my daughter, don't be afraid. I will do for you all you ask." So Ruth lay at his feet until morning, rising before the early light could reveal her presence to others.



But Boaz knew there was one obstacle that could yet spoil things. Naomi had a closer relative than Boaz, a man who could play the role of kinsman-redeemer, marrying Ruth and restoring her dead husband's name. This man was entitled to purchase a field belonging to Naomi. If he purchased the field, by law he had to marry Ruth as well. That would destroy Boaz's hope of making Ruth his wife.

Boaz wasted no time putting the case before the man, who seemed interested enough in the land. But as soon as the man discovered that marriage was part of the bargain, he relinquished his rights to the land to Boaz.

So the two were married and the older man welcomed the young woman into his home. And God blessed them with a son, whom they named Obed.

Pulling Ruth close to him, Boaz watched one day as Naomi held her grandson to her breast. Surrounded by the other women of Bethlehem, she looked young again, more like the woman he remembered when her husband, Elimelech, had been alive. He watched as the women talked with Naomi regarding the child: "Praise be to the LORD, who this day has not left you without a kinsman-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel! He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth."

Yes, Boaz thought, his Ruth was better to Naomi than seven sons. And he was grateful for the friendship between the two women. Had Ruth and Naomi gone their separate ways, his life would have been so much the poorer.

The good-hearted Boaz felt strong and young again. But even he couldn't have realized how greatly God had blessed him in the person of Ruth. For their son, Obed, became the father of Jesse, and Jesse was the father of David. In addition to being King David's great-grandparents, both Boaz and Ruth are mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus of Nazareth, who is, after all, our own great Kinsman-Redeemer, uniting us to himself, healing our sorrows, and giving us, as well, a future full of hope.

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# Tuesday

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HER LIFE AND TIMES

## GLEANNING

When Ruth and Naomi arrived in Bethlehem, it was harvest time. They would not have the opportunity to plant their own grain and harvest it. So, unless there was another way to get food, they would starve. Naomi knew the Mosaic laws and urged Ruth to follow the harvesters and “glean,” or gather, what they left behind. In this way, Ruth would be able to provide food for both Naomi and for herself.

The laws of Moses directed landowners to leave some of the harvest behind for the “poor and aliens.” As a Moabite with no one to support her, Ruth fit both categories. Harvesters were not to reap to the very edges of their fields, nor were they to go over a field a second time to pick up what was missed the first time. This grain was to be left for the poor (Leviticus 19:9; 23:22; Deuteronomy 24:19–22). This “welfare system,” set up by Moses, took care of the needy by encouraging the rich to share their bounty with those less fortunate.

But it wasn’t a handout. The poor still had to work for their food, following along behind the harvesters and picking up what was left by them. Depending on the efficiency of the field hands and the number of fellow gleaners reaping the grain, it could be difficult to do much more than survive. When Boaz ordered his reapers to purposely leave behind stalks of grain for Ruth to pick up, he went beyond the letter of the law.

Boaz also ordered his reapers not to “embarrass” Ruth were she to glean in the wrong part of the field; that is, if she didn’t follow the rules exactly. His admonishment offers a glimpse into the heart and character of this man, who took great care to follow the Mosaic law and who, with Ruth, became an ancestor of Christ.

Was it by chance that Ruth “found herself working in a field belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelech [Ruth’s father-in-law]” (Ruth 2:3)? Of course not. Even in what appeared to be a chance situation, God was at work, divinely preparing for Ruth’s

and Naomi's sustenance. Never assume that what happens in your life is merely a matter of chance or coincidence. Remember: God is at work, divinely orchestrating events to bring about his purposes in your life.

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# Wednesday

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## HER LEGACY IN SCRIPTURE

### **Read Ruth 2:1–3:18.**

1. What character qualities do you see in Ruth in chapter 2? How does she act, and what is her reputation?
2. The ultimate loyalty to her late husband was for Ruth to marry one of his relatives and have a son in her late husband's name. At what point in the story do you see Ruth decide to attempt that?
3. What risk was Ruth taking when she lay down on the threshing floor at Boaz's feet? What does this say about her?
4. Where do you see God at work in this story?
5. In what areas of your life are you called upon to be loyal? What, for you, are the risks and costs of loyalty?

# Thursday

## HER PROMISE

All that Ruth did was done for love of her mother-in-law, and for love of Naomi's God. She made a promise on the road to Bethlehem that she was determined to keep. Though it was a promise made by one woman to another, it is often quoted in wedding ceremonies as an eloquent expression of love and loyalty between spouses.

Ruth had no way of knowing that her way of blessing Naomi would eventually become a blessing in her own life. That's just the divine irony of our God, who delights so much in seeing us love and bless others that he turns that love and blessing back on us in double measure.

### Promises in Scripture

*Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God.*

—RUTH 1:16

*A generous person will prosper;  
whoever refreshes others will be refreshed.*

—PROVERBS 11:25

*Blessed are the merciful,  
for they will be shown mercy.  
Blessed are the pure in heart,  
for they will see God.*

—MATTHEW 5:7–8

*Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.*

—1 TIMOTHY 6:17–19

# Friday

## HER LEGACY OF PRAYER

*The women said to Naomi, "Praise be to the LORD, who this day has not left you without a kinsman-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel! He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth."*

—RUTH 4:14–15

REFLECT ON: Ruth 3–4.

PRAISE GOD: That he provides for those who have no one to provide for them.

OFFER THANKS: For the way God has used other women, your mother or mother-in-law, your sisters or daughters, to provide for you.

CONFESS: Any tendency to compete with other women.

ASK GOD: To help you appreciate your own mother and mother-in-law and to give you a vision of the power of two women, linked by love and faith.

### Lift Your Heart

*I*t's easy to assume the important women in our lives know how much we cherish them. But Mother's Day cards and friendship cards, nice as they are to get and give, don't really do the trick. We also need to verbalize our love sincerely and regularly. Don't wait until Mother's Day to treat your mother, mother-in-law, or an older friend to tea or a leisurely lunch. Tell her just how much you care about her. (Make sure you take time beforehand to think about all her wonderful qualities. Take notes so that you can be specific.) You might even buy a small blank book and record all the ways she's blessed you. Decorate each page with colorful stickers or stencils. Package it with scented soap and bath salts and give it as a keepsake she can treasure.

*Father, I thank you for the women who have played such an important role in my life. Please bless each one in a special way today and help me find ways to express to them my love and gratitude.*



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