



Womanhood

HIDDEN JEWELS

CHARACTER STUDIES OF SOME LESSER KNOWN WOMEN IN THE BIBLE

IN THE WORD
together
BIBLE STUDIES

Ever feel unappreciated as a woman? No matter your stage in life, now is your time to shine. From September through December 2010, four gifted writers offer us glimpses of little known women in the Bible—hidden jewels—women just like you.



BEVERLY BRANTLEY introduces us to two jewels in unusual settings: Jael, a woman whom God used to help deliver the Israelites from the hands of the Canaanites, and Phoebe, a New Testament lady who braved many obstacles to deliver Paul's letter to the Romans. Beverly and her husband Charlie are active members of First Free Will Baptist Church, Tampa, Florida, involved in visitation ministries, helping the sick and home bound of the church. Avid bowlers who love to fish, the Brantleys also enjoy family—six children, 10 grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren—with two more on the way. Bev says, "I am so thankful God allows me to have a small part in sharing the gospel through the written word."



JOAN SHIELDS lends us a brief glimpse of a brilliant solitaire—the woman of Zarephath. This widow's unswerving faith in the face of incredibly dire circumstances serves as a testimony to us all. God faithfully supplied for her and her son, as she faithfully ministered to God's servant, Elijah. Joan and her husband Jimmy live near Florence, Alabama, and attend Antioch Free Will Baptist Church where Jimmy serves as pastor. She works full-time and enjoys spending her free time reading, writing (both music and literary compositions) and working in the church.



DIANE THOMAS BRIDGMAN invites us to observe a rock of wisdom as we study the life of Abigail. A woman in a difficult marriage and life-threatening situation, she displayed great wisdom and honor in her dealings with King David. Diane is a member of Grifton Free Will Baptist Church in Grifton, North Carolina. A longtime WNAC participant, Diane has been active in every level of WNAC and currently serves as state WAC coordinator. She is married to Richard Bridgman and manages the Evergreen Cemetery.



CHRISTINA HOPPER of Northport, Alabama, displays a gem of godliness, offering relevant principles from the life of Anna. This quick look at the older Jewish woman who faithfully anticipated her Messiah deliberately corresponds with the height of the Christmas season. Christina is a member of Sulphur Springs Free Will Baptist Church, where she serves in a number of capacities. She also writes WNAC's online Bible studies for teens and YWAC groups.



HOW DO I USE THIS STUDY FOR A WAC MEETING OR A WOMEN'S GROUP?

Because every group is unique, we offer multiple ways to use "Together in the Word" within your women's group meetings. Evaluate your group. What works best for your women? Here are some suggestions.

If women like variety and creative presentations... use the WNAC Program and Plan Book as a presentation guide. Consult the WNAC website for resources.

If women enjoy discussion and interaction... utilize the free downloadable facilitator's guide at www.wnac.org. Discuss the weekly questions along with the designated life application questions.

If women prefer to just read aloud... allow ladies opportunity to present the material—one section at a time. Use the life application questions, but omit the fill in the blank sections if women are uncomfortable with these.

HOW DO I USE THIS STUDY FOR MY PERSONAL DEVOTION TIME?

Each section includes a Scripture passage and interactive questions. Even if your time is limited, you can easily read the passage and a portion of the study, work the related questions and reflect on the application.

Visit wnac.org/twg for a daily devotional relevant to the current study.



Unusual Settings

Jael AND PHOEBE



FOCUS: God desires us to shine, even when we as women find ourselves in unusual and challenging situations.

FOOTPRINT: Judges 4; Romans 16:1-2

FACETS: “Blessed above women shall Jael...be. He asked water and she gave him milk; she brought forth butter in a lordly dish” (JUDGES 5:24-25).

“I commend unto you Phebe our sister...for she hath been a succourer of many, and of myself also” (ROMANS 16:1-2).

FORTUNE: “We never know how high we are, Till we are asked to rise. And then if we are true to plan, Our stature touch the skies”—Emily Dickinson.

I NEVER THOUGHT I WOULD EVER _____. How would you complete this sentence? All of us find ourselves in unexpected situations, facing circumstances—whether delights or dilemmas—we never dreamed or imagined. These out-of-comfort zone experiences test and reveal our inner character.

The Bible mentions Jael and Phoebe, two hidden jewels, whom God placed in unusual settings. As we read and recall their stories, imagine how they might fill in the blank to complete that same sentence.

Jael, THE OVERLOOKED

In Old Testament times, during the days of Deborah, the Canaanites greatly oppressed Israel. A thorn in the flesh of God's people, Jabin the king ruled with both an iron fist and iron weaponry. Through God's anointing, Deborah, Israel's judge, deemed they should go to war, and she prepared Israel for battle. The only glitch in her plans came when her general, Barak, refused to go into battle unless Deborah went also.

Sisera, a powerful general, led the mighty Canaanite army—900 iron chariots and the soldiers to man them. Barak knew good reason for fear, but Deborah knew God would go with them. When Barak asked her to accompany him into battle, Deborah agreed to go but warned him that a man would not win the battle. She told Barak, “...the Lord shall sell Sisera unto the hand of a woman” (Judges 4:9). Barak probably thought this hand would be Deborah's; and as long as she was with him, all would be well. But God had another woman in mind. Her name was Jael.

Jael was a tent dweller, the wife of Heber, a Kenite. The Kenites, descendants of the Midianites and of Moses' father-in-law's family, had long been allies of the Israelites. Yet, for some reason they had joined forces with the Canaanites to fight this battle. Heber worked as a traveling metal smith. Following the custom of the day, his wife bore responsibility for setting up and taking down the tent as they traveled. The Israelites and the Canaanites would meet for battle on Mount Tabor. Jael stayed with the tent, while Heber checked out the battle site.

Fortunately for Israel, God came to His people's rescue and sent a massive rain storm in the valley beneath Mt. Tabor. The heavy iron chariots of the Canaanites became so bogged down in the mud, the soldiers panicked and began to flee for their lives. Sisera, viewing the battle hopeless, fled the scene as well. Fearful of the men pursuing him, when Sisera came to Jael's tent and saw her waiting at the door, he felt no such fear from her. He knew her husband had pledged friendship to his cause; he assumed Jael had also.

Jael invited Sisera into her tent, gave him warm milk to drink and covered him with a nice, soft blanket. He commanded her to stand watch at the door and tell anyone who came looking for him that she had not seen him. Jael waited for the milk and the nice, warm bed to take effect; soon Sisera fell asleep. “Then Jael Heber's wife took a nail of the tent, and took an hammer in her hand, and went softly unto him, and smote the nail into his temples...so he died” (Judges 4:21). Didn't see that one coming, did you?

METAL WARS

The only metal available to the Israelites was copper, a metal too soft for making a good sharp sword or a chariot.



FITTINGS: (Week One)

Pray, asking God to speak to you through His Word.

1. Jael's actions definitely demanded boldness. Does being bold always mean stepping outside our role as women in God's plan? _____

2. God's Word applies to women as well men. The Holy Spirit endows believers with a righteous boldness that allows us to stand for the right and not be afraid or back down when confronted by evil. Read 2 Corinthians 10:1-4. What is the real battle? Describe our weaponry. _____

3. Reread Judges 4. Write down every element in this story that appears either as a woman's idea or anything that hinged directly upon a woman's actions. _____

4. Little things matter. Even a word spoken at the right time and in the right spirit can make a huge difference. Read Proverbs 15:7. Can you think of any life-changing words (wise or foolish) you have spoken or someone has spoken to you? _____

5. Do you ever feel overlooked? What are some mundane things in your life that God could use mightily? _____

LITTLE THINGS

God swings big doors on small hinges. Small things can forever change lives. Warm milk and a blanket, a hammer and a tent peg—the mundane became mighty with Jael. The same is true in our lives. Whether a hug or a card, a look or a listening ear, little things matter.

Uncovering the hidden jewel

Jael the overlooked played a small part in God's greater plan for Israel's victory over the enemy. Think of often overlooked roles held by women in your church. How can you encourage them and remind each one of her part in God's greater plan?

JAEI, THE UNDERTAKER

Now what kind of lessons do we hope to glean from this unusual setting? We know the Word of God contains no idle Scriptures. Every detail and every action recorded reveals God's direction and instruction. Barak and Deborah called Jael, "...blessed above women..." (Judges 5:24). These words of praise hardly seem fitting for a woman who just murdered a man she lured into her tent and soothed to sleep. Yet God's people—His leaders—called her blessed.

How do we resolve the accolade with the action? Her undertaking freed Israel from terrible oppression. If Sisera had won the battle, no doubt, hundreds of Jewish girls would have been captured, raped and possibly murdered (Judges 5:30).

Bible scholar Warren Wiersbe says, "Jael was not a 'Lady Macbeth' who murdered her guest for her own personal gain. There was a war going on, and this courageous woman finally stopped being neutral and took her stand with the people of God."

Now, the story of Jael gives us neither biblical license to kill nor to be deceptive, just as the story of Rahab does not encourage lying or prostitution. Jael's unusual setting does reveal that God's ways are not always our ways. We can learn much from this woman whom the Bible calls "blessed."

Jael teaches us to take a proactive approach for our future and the future of our family, church and country. The old adage, "Stand for something or you'll fall for anything," holds more truth today than ever before. False doctrines and hidden agendas threaten our children and those around us who remain lost without Christ. We, as women of God, possess a powerful voice in our family units. We must boldly speak up and "tell it like it is," unafraid and unashamedly tackling the tough issues of our day.



Stay informed. Know what is happening in the world around you. Listen to your children or grandchildren when they are talking to others and gauge their thoughts. Make sure their reasoning lines up with Scripture. Engage yourself with your children's friends. Chart the places they go together. Monitor your children's music and TV time. Be discerning—undertake to know the Word and seek to “rightly divide” it. Don't hesitate to speak up when you discern something is not right.

God's resources always far exceed what we can see or realize. Through a very brave, determined tent-dwelling woman, God subdued Jabin. Because of that, God's people lived 40 years unoppressed and the land had rest from war. (5:31)

FITTINGS: (Week Two)

Pray before you begin, inviting God's Holy Spirit to reveal truth to you.

1. God gives us a game plan for troubling times in our lives. He teaches us in His Word that we must wait on Him. He has promised us three allies if we will lean on Him. Find these in Psalm 27:11-14 and list them here. _____

2. What areas of your life have been improved because you took a stand? _____

3. Are you fearful of taking a stand or are you afraid of what others might say if you speak up? What assurance can you find in Psalm 27:1-3? _____

Psalm 27:6 also offers guidelines for our speaking up. What should be our focus? _____

4. Children, grandchildren or other young lives are watching how you handle yourself—especially in unusual settings. What positive traits do they see in you? _____

5. 2 Timothy 1:5, shares a biblical legacy of faithful, strong, Christian women. In what specific ways can you make a difference in your family? _____

Is there anything God is leading you to undertake? _____

Uncovering the hidden jewel

What would a proactive approach look like in your life? In your family? In your church? In our country? How does a woman speak up and tackle the tough issues, yet maintain a meek and quiet spirit in the sight of God and men?

PHOEBE, THE LETTER CARRIER

In 52 words, Paul described Phoebe to the saints at Rome. Paul appealed for them to “receive her in the Lord as becometh saints.” In her hands or probably under her robes, Phoebe carried the future of Christian theology, for she presumed delivered the Book of Romans to the saints in that city. No other book in the Bible so clearly spells out the truth of God's grace through Jesus Christ. In this Bible book we find the “Romans Road to Salvation.”

Paul entrusted Phoebe with a precious treasure. He had no computer or backup hard drive to store the file should Phoebe prove unsuccessful in delivering this letter. And Phoebe did not live just down

MAKE A DIFFERENCE

As we offer the mundane of our lives to God and allow Him to use it mightily, we can make a difference in the lives of our children, grandchildren and even great grandchildren.



the street or even across town from Rome. She hailed from Cenchrea, a port town near Athens. Her trip to Rome entailed 800 miles of travel—some by land and some by sea. Keep in mind that Phoebe traveled without a car or even a covered wagon. No QEII or other cruise liner took her across the Adriatic Sea into Rome. She most likely walked—or maybe she rode a donkey—and sailed on a vessel prone to shipwrecks and storms. (Paul experienced a few of these himself.)

The Bible does not mention whether Phoebe traveled alone or with servants who attended to her needs on this trip. Even with the best of traveling companions, Phoebe's route still led her through hot deserts, rough mountains and even rougher seas. Leaving Cenchrea, Phoebe would travel first by ship to the eastern coast of Italy, then overland to Rome in the western region of the country. The travel ships of Phoebe's day boasted no staterooms or formal dining areas. They were most often cargo ships, willing to take on passengers if the boat had room and the passengers had money.

Rocked by the waves both day and night, potentially miserable for several hundred miles, especially if prone to seasickness, Phoebe sailed. She would have slept on deck, possibly in a small tent or on a pallet. Eating on board (if her stomach allowed) required preparing her own meals at the hearth in the galley after the crew fixed their own meals. If she traveled alone, this meant carrying her own provisions, loading and unloading them as need be.

Scripture does not reveal whether Phoebe was wealthy enough to rent or buy a donkey for travel inland from the coast of Italy toward Rome. If not, she walked and carried her supplies along with her. Remember, there were no Holiday Inns during those days. Phoebe may have stayed in a roadside inn at night, where she would have rented not a room, but a bed. Sleeping in a room with several other travelers, she most likely would share her accommodations with other creatures—namely, bedbugs. If she decided to camp on the trail instead, that involved sleeping with one eye open, watching for thieves and criminals who preyed on unwary travelers of the day.

Through all these hardships, Phoebe forged onward. At any point in her journey she could have said, “Enough! This is too hard; I am going back home.” But she did not.

FITTINGS: (Week Three)

Pray, asking God to speak to you through His Word.

1. Have you ever felt unappreciated in your service for God? When? Are you currently feeling this way? Why? _____

2. Both Jesus and Paul were run out of many towns. Jesus even had to supernaturally escape because the town's people sought to stone him. Not many of us have been run out of town or stoned. Read about the treatment of Jesus in Matthew 8:34; 13:57, 58. Summarize the people's response. Know you are not alone in your feelings of being taken for granted. _____

3. Matthew 6:1-5 speaks of doing good works to be seen. Read the passage and note the reward for this type of service. Jesus, the great teacher, is speaking to us as well; are we heeding His warnings? Why is this such a struggle for Christians? _____

4. What are your motives for doing good works? Rate yourself by percentages in each category:
Love ____% Fear ____% Obligation ____% Responsibility ____%
Which is your highest rating? Be honest with yourself and with God. He already knows the answer anyway. _____
