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# BIBLE WOMEN

ALL THEIR WORDS AND WHY THEY MATTER

LINDSAY HARDIN FREEMAN

Forward Movement

in partnership with the

Episcopal Church Women

*Dedicated to all women and girls  
who have been beaten, used, abused, raped, thrown away  
who have died on street corners  
in lonely fields  
on their doorsteps  
in refugee camps  
in utero  
who have spoken, screamed, or cried  
whose words were not remembered or understood  
and to those who could not speak  
who were silenced, beaten back  
their cries known to You alone.  
Restore them, Lord  
renew them  
make them whole  
on earth  
as it is in heaven.*

In *Bible Women: All Their Words and Why They Matter*, Lindsay Hardin Freeman brings to light an entirely new and in-depth understanding of the often unrecognized contribution women made in the overall biblical narrative. Freeman's very adept biblical scholarship provides what I believe to be groundbreaking work in providing greater awareness and appreciation of the importance Bible women play in our sacred story.

**The Rt. Rev. Brian N. Prior**

Bishop, Episcopal Church in Minnesota

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Author Lindsay Hardin Freeman deftly coaxes into high relief the muffled voices of women in the Bible. We see ourselves in their anguish, estrangement, and life-giving passion and meet them in those very places in our lives. Each page calls us to be a daughter of God by stepping out of the past to share our own stories of transformation and learn the ways of God from one another.

**Cynthia Carson**

Vice president, Province VII Order of the Daughters of the King  
Education for Ministry mentor, Sewanee School of Theology

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Lindsay Hardin Freeman has provided a great gift to the women of our church, and to all people searching for relevance in even the smallest of words and action. As she writes in her introduction, "Their words are meant for us." Here is a fascinating offering for group study and personal reflection from this consummate storyteller and teacher.

**The Rev. Nancy R. Crawford**

National president, Episcopal Church Women  
Eugene, Oregon

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## For reflection

1. Some say that Rebekah was a woman of deceit, yet God had told her that Jacob would be the stronger twin and the older would serve the younger (Genesis 25:22-23). Given that knowledge, and knowing she was a daughter of the covenant, did she interfere with God's work or help it along?
2. Like Mary, most mothers ponder things in their hearts. By the time Jacob and Esau were grown, Rebekah had, no doubt, pondered God's words many times. If she helped God's plan to emerge, why has she been accused of lying and interference over the years? Would the same have been true of a man?
3. What qualities did Rebekah possess in her youth that helped her in mid-life? What are the gifts you've always had that help you?
4. By acting to fulfill Jacob's destiny, Rebekah alienates her husband and other son. In that environment, life for her must have been particularly difficult. Have there been times in your life when you have put someone else's interests ahead of yours and then faced painful consequences?

**LEAH**  
*Workin'  
for love*

**PROFILE:  
MODERATELY  
HIGH**

- ▷ **READ HER STORY:** Genesis 29-31
- ▷ **CLASSIC MOMENT:** Bait and switch: when their father, Laban, shuffles Leah into the wedding tent instead of Rachel
- ▷ **LIKELY CHARACTERISTICS:** Sturdy, Fertile, Reliable, Tenacious, Heartbroken, Yearning
- ▷ **DATA:** 137 words

## Who was Leah?

The direct ancestor of many key people in scripture, including Moses, Miriam, Aaron, King David, and Jesus // Laban's daughter, a daughter-in-law of Isaac and Rebekah, Rachel's sister, Rebekah's niece, and Jacob's first wife // The biological mother of six sons and one daughter // The wife who would grow into old age with Jacob, and be buried alongside him

## What did Leah say?

When the LORD saw that Leah was unloved, he opened her womb; but Rachel was barren. Leah conceived and bore a son, and she named him Reuben; for she said, "**Because the LORD has looked on my affliction; surely now my husband will love me.**" *Genesis 29:32*

She conceived again and bore a son, and said, "**Because the LORD has heard that I am hated, he has given me this son also**"; and she named him Simeon. *Genesis 29:33*

Again she conceived and bore a son, and said, “**Now this time my husband will be joined to me, because I have borne him three sons**”; therefore he was named Levi. *Genesis 29:34*

She conceived again and bore a son, and said, “**This time I will praise the LORD**”; therefore she named him Judah; then she ceased bearing. *Genesis 29:35*

And Leah said, “**Good fortune!**” so she named him Gad. *Genesis 30:11*

Leah’s maid Zilpah bore Jacob a second son. And Leah said, “**Happy am I! For the women will call me happy**”; so she named him Asher. *Genesis 30:13*

In the days of wheat harvest Reuben went and found mandrakes in the field, and brought them to his mother Leah. Then Rachel said to Leah, “Please give me some of your son’s mandrakes.” But she said to her, “**Is it a small matter that you have taken away my husband? Would you take away my son’s mandrakes also?**” *Genesis 30:15*

Rachel said, “Then he may lie with you tonight for your son’s mandrakes.” When Jacob came from the field in the evening, Leah went out to meet him, and said, “**You must come in to me; for I have hired you with my son’s mandrakes.**” *Genesis 30:16*

So he lay with her that night. And God heeded Leah, and she conceived and bore Jacob a fifth son. Leah said, “**God has given me my hire because I gave my maid to my husband**”; so she named him Issachar. *Genesis 30:18*

And Leah conceived again, and she bore Jacob a sixth son. Then Leah said, “**God has endowed me with a good dowry; now my husband will honor me, because I have borne him six sons**”; so she named him Zebulun. *Genesis 30:20*

Here Rachel and Leah speak together:

Then Rachel and Leah answered him, “**Is there any portion or inheritance left to us in our father’s house? Are we not regarded by him as foreigners? For he has sold us, and he has been using up the money given for us. All the property that God has taken away from our father belongs to us and to our children; now then, do whatever God has said to you.**” *Genesis 31:14-16*

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## Leah’s story

**I**n fear for his life after deceiving Esau, Jacob flees to his mother’s family, where he falls in love with the beautiful Rachel. He works for seven years to earn the right to marry Rachel, but on his wedding night, father-in-law Laban shuffles Leah, the eldest daughter, into the bridal chamber instead. When the sun rises the next morning, there is no going back.

As far as Laban is concerned, it is the perfect arrangement. For Jacob and Rachel (for whom Jacob must work another seven years), it is not. Laban’s rationale is that the older sister must marry first—and more wives will produce more children, which will increase the clan’s worth.

Sharing a husband between two sisters is never a good idea, especially when said husband continues to favor the one he wished he had made love to on his wedding night. As a complicating factor, Rachel seems to be infertile and Leah produces babies like water going over Niagara Falls.

Leah bears Jacob six sons before Rachel gets pregnant for the first time with her son Joseph. Leah’s maid has also borne Jacob two sons, as has Rachel’s maid. Rachel gives birth to one more son, Benjamin, then dies just after childbirth. From the offspring of the twelve sons develop the twelve tribes of Israel. Leah also gives birth to a daughter, Dinah.

Trace Leah’s emotional state through this process, remembering that she is also responsible for naming her servant’s children. Initially, she seems to work for Jacob’s love through the offering of sons; as time goes on, she seems to find more of an emotional balance, even lightheartedness.

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## The Origins of the Twelve Tribes of Israel, in order of birth

### FROM LEAH AND JACOB

#1 Reuben (Look-It's-a-Boy!): "God has granted me children; now Jacob will love me."

#2 Simeon (God Heard): "God knows that I am hated, so he has given me this child in consolation."

#3 Levi (Connect): "Now Jacob will connect with me."

#4 Judah (Praise God): "This time I will praise the Lord!"

#5 Issachar (Bartered): "Because I gave my maid to Jacob, God has honored me."

#6 Zebulun (Honor): "This time my husband will honor me with gifts because I gave him many sons!"

(Daughter: Dinah. No recorded statement. Dinah is a silent victim of rape, whom several brothers avenge.)

### FROM RACHEL'S MAID, BILHAH, AND JACOB

#7 Dan (Vindication)

#8 Naphtali (Fight)

### FROM LEAH'S MAID, ZILPHAH, AND JACOB

#9 Gad (Lucky)

#10 Asher (Happy)

### FROM RACHEL AND JACOB

#11 Joseph (Add, as in "add another son for me")

#12 Benjamin (Rachel named him Ben-oni (Son of my Pain) but Jacob changed his name to Benjamin (Son of Good Fortune).

## Consider this

Thousands of years have passed since the story of Rachel and Leah. Yet many families experience the same dynamics: love, passion, jealousy, scheming, grief, duty, and yearning.

Leah knows, firsthand, the love and passion of which Jacob is capable—for she experienced it in his tent when he thought it was Rachel in his arms. From that point on, she sees what real love is, yet she does not receive it. By the

time of son number five, she must barter with Rachel for a night with Jacob—indicating that Rachel is in charge of Jacob's sex life. Leah's comments indicate that she yearned for Jacob's love and respect, enduring great emotional and physical labor.

After Rachel dies giving birth to Benjamin, the air seems to clear. Leah and Jacob grow old together, and there is a sense, finally, that they enjoy mutual respect, companionship, and perhaps even love. After all, they share a common story, chiseled from blood, persistence, and faith. How sweet those years must have been for Leah. Most of the "big names" in scripture are descended from her, including Moses, David, and Jesus. Let's trust she knows that; let's hope she has some happiness at last.

Who doesn't want to be loved, genuinely loved? Who wants to be forever competing for love? Even though love was not the engine for marriage in ancient times, it must have been painful to be known as second-best for so long.

## What might we learn from Leah?

- ▷ Our contributions to life may make an impact long after we are gone.
- ▷ Love isn't something that can be forced.
- ▷ Smaller goals may be in reach, even if your main goal is out of your control.
- ▷ Make the best of what you have, even if it isn't exactly what you want.
- ▷ Find worth in yourself, not in another's perception of you.

## For reflection

1. Love takes different forms, especially during a long marriage. Do you think Leah received her heart's desire during her lifetime? If so, how? If not, how did she find fulfillment?
2. Imagine the heartbreak that Leah felt when Jacob expressed rage after having been deceived by Laban. What would it have been like to be her?
3. Can you imagine bartering with your sister for a chance to be loved by your husband? Do you think Leah's perseverance paid off?
4. Are there lessons to be learned here about dysfunctional family systems in contemporary families? If so, what might they be?

**RACHEL**

*Betwixt,  
between and  
beloved*

**PROFILE:  
MODERATELY  
HIGH**

- ▷ **READ HER STORY:** Genesis 29-31
- ▷ **CLASSIC MOMENT:** Being switched for her sister on what should have been her wedding night
- ▷ **LIKELY CHARACTERISTICS:** Beautiful, Emotive, Dramatic, Spirited, Possessive, Jealous, Demanding
- ▷ **DATA:** 112 words

## Who was Rachel?

The beloved wife and first cousin of her husband Jacob, the mother of Joseph and Benjamin, the younger sister of Leah, the daughter-in-law of Isaac and Rebekah, the daughter of Laban, and the niece of Rebekah // The victim of a switch by her father so that her sister, Leah, would be Jacob's first wife // The first woman in the Bible to die in childbirth // The occupant of the oldest single memorial to a woman mentioned in the Bible, located just outside Bethlehem

## What did Rachel say?

When Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, she envied her sister; and she said to Jacob, "**Give me children, or I shall die!**" Jacob became very angry with Rachel and said, "Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?" *Genesis 30:1-2*

Then she said, "**Here is my maid Bilhah; go in to her, that she may bear upon my knees and that I too may have children through her.**" *Genesis 30:3*

## DEBORAH

*Ten thousand men and me*

PROFILE:  
MODERATE

- ▷ READ HER STORY: Judges 4-5
- ▷ CLASSIC MOMENT: Leading ten thousand soldiers into battle with Barak
- ▷ LIKELY CHARACTERISTICS: Courageous, Wise, Powerful, Diplomatic, Prophetic, Decisive, Strong
- ▷ DATA: 114 words

### Who was Deborah?

A judge and prophetess // A woman of strong faith // A brave activist // The first female warrior in the Bible // Wife of Lappidoth

### What did Deborah say?

At that time Deborah, a prophet, wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel. She used to sit under the palm of Deborah...and the Israelites came up to her for judgment. [Deborah] sent and summoned Barak son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali, and said to him, **“The LORD, the God of Israel, commands you, ‘Go, take position at Mount Tabor, bringing ten thousand from the tribe of Naphtali and the tribe of Zebulun. I will draw out Sisera, the general of Jabin’s army, to meet you by the Wadi Kishon with his chariots and his troops; and I will give him into your hand.’”** *Judges 4:4-7*

Barak said to her, “If you will go with me, I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go.” And she said, **“I will surely go with you; nevertheless, the road on which you are going will not lead to your glory, for the LORD will sell**

**Sisera into the hand of a woman.”** Then Deborah got up and went with Barak to Kedesh. *Judges 4:8-9*

Then Deborah said to Barak, **“Up! For this is the day on which the LORD has given Sisera into your hand. The LORD is indeed going out before you.”** So Barak went down from Mount Tabor with ten thousand warriors following him. *Judges 4:14*

### Deborah’s story

Deborah is no “Judge Judy” here. Being a judge in Deborah’s day was not just about resolving disputes. Rather, a judge was a top political leader; people trusted Deborah because of her intelligence, diplomacy, faith, and foresight.

And it was that foresight that sparked her story. Towns near and far are being attacked by the Canaanites, a tough and cruel people. Girls are carried off as spoils of war, towns looted, young men killed, and widows left to fend for themselves. Knowing that waiting to wage war will most likely cause the annihilation of her people, Deborah meets with Barak, the local general.

Ride out, she tells the general, for the Lord says it is time. Go to the top of Mount Tabor and take ten thousand of our best men with you. God will call out Sisera, the Canaanite general, and he will meet you there.

*For the Lord says it is time.* In these words, Deborah confirms her role both as God’s prophet and servant. No more waiting, no more hesitation; the future of Israel is at stake.

Stunned, Barak offers a rather surprising response, unusual for a male leader of his time: “I will go, but only if you go with me.” He and Deborah ride out together, wait until God tells her it is the right time to attack, and then watch as God causes a huge flood to destroy their enemies, save one man. And that man will make a deadly mistake, stepping into the tent of a mysterious—and deadly—woman. (See the next story.)

---

### Consider this

Deborah holds more political and military power than any other woman in the Bible. Warrior, prophet, and judge, she is essential to a comprehensive understanding of Judeo-Christian history. Using God as her strength and shield, Deborah was indeed “mother in Israel” (Judges 5:7). She loved her people, forecast the looming danger, took steps to fight it, and was on the front line, ready to lay down her life if need be.

There are still some people who do not trust women in leadership positions, yet this story challenges that belief. One would think that if God recognizes the leadership strengths of women, others might as well—especially over three thousand years later.

---

### What might we learn from Deborah?

- ▷ A woman of faith can lead her people to victory—and spiritual health.
  - ▷ Within the heat of battle we can find God’s voice.
  - ▷ Sometimes leadership means leading from the front lines; sometimes it means listening.
- 

### For reflection

1. Deborah is referred to as a “mother in Israel.” Why might that term have been used to describe her?
2. Reread the Song of Deborah, known as one of the oldest parts of the Bible (Judges 5). (It is not included here because she sings with Barak, a man). How does their song compare to the Song of Hannah? (1 Samuel 2:1-10) The Song of Mary? (Luke 1:46-55)
3. Deborah, with God’s guidance, knew the right time to attack the enemy. What does that mean for modern warfare? Is God’s hand involved in global violence today? If so, to what extent?
4. Collaborative leadership describes the relationship and actions of Deborah and Barak. How were they ahead of their time? Given that such a model of leadership is found in the Bible, what ramifications might that have today?

# ABIGAIL

*A woman of  
diplomacy*

**PROFILE:  
MODERATELY LOW**

- ▷ **READ HER STORY:** 1 Samuel 25; 2 Samuel 2:2, 3:3; 1 Chronicles 3:1
- ▷ **CLASSIC MOMENT:** Persuading David to relinquish his sword and not kill her household
- ▷ **LIKELY CHARACTERISTICS:** Responsible, Beautiful, Diplomatic, Independent, Discerning, Faithful, Brave, Persuasive
- ▷ **DATA:** 316 words

## Who was Abigail?

Nabal's wife, then David's // A diplomat and negotiator // A prophet // A woman marked for death // The mother of Daniel/Chileab, son of David

## What did Abigail say?

**"Go on ahead of me; I am coming after you."** *1 Samuel 25:19*

**"Upon me alone, my lord, be the guilt; please let your servant speak in your ears, and hear the words of your servant. My lord, do not take seriously this ill-natured fellow, Nabal; for as his name is, so is he; Nabal is his name, and folly is with him; but I, your servant, did not see the young men of my lord, whom you sent."** *1 Samuel 25:24-25*

**"Now then, my lord, as the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, since the LORD has restrained you from blood-guilt and from taking vengeance with your**

**own hand, now let your enemies and those who seek to do evil to my lord be like Nabal. And now let this present that your servant has brought to my lord be given to the young men who follow my lord."** *1 Samuel 25:26-27*

**"Please forgive the trespass of your servant; for the LORD will certainly make my lord a sure house, because my lord is fighting the battles of the LORD; and evil shall not be found in you as long as you live. If anyone should rise up to pursue you and to seek your life, the life of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of the living under the care of the LORD your God; but the lives of your enemies he shall sling out as from the hollow of a sling. When the LORD has done to my lord according to all the good that he has spoken concerning you, and has appointed you prince over Israel, my lord shall have no cause of grief, or pangs of conscience, for having shed blood without cause or for having saved himself. And when the LORD has dealt well with my lord, then remember your servant."** *1 Samuel 25:28-31*

**"Your servant is a slave to wash the feet of the servants of my lord."** *1 Samuel 25:41*

## Abigail's story

**O**n the run from King Saul, David has returned to his old line of work in the wilderness: protecting sheep and keeping order. Having spent more time in the fields than in towns, he is comfortable and skilled in the wild. He and his men protect shepherds and their animals from marauding bands of thieves; they also protect landowners from thugs and bloodthirsty land-grabbers. Like a mafia lord, David expects something in return: loyalty, money, food, and a place to camp with his six hundred men.

Nabal, Abigail's husband and a wealthy area landowner, is preparing for sheep-shearing season, a time of celebration, food, and drink. Respecting Nabal's stature, David sends ten polite fellows to ask for food. Pointing out that no harm has come to the Nabal's shepherds or sheep, the request seems simple:

some food for David and his men, please, in return for their safeguarding property and livestock.

Nabal explodes. “Just who is this David? Who is his father? There are many inconsequential men wandering out there and he is one...why should I give him food?”

Enraged, David straps on his sword—and orders four hundred men to accompany him. Adrenaline and anger flowing, they set out to kill Nabal and his household.

Thankfully, one of Nabal’s servants reaches Abigail first and tells her the news; immediately she understands her husband’s folly and springs into action. Soon two hundred loaves of bread, two hundred cakes of figs, and other mouthwatering provisions are loaded onto donkeys for David and his men. The caravan sets out, with Abigail in the lead.

Picture her on the road, laden down with food, meeting David and hundreds of restless soldiers behind him.

“Forgive my husband,” Abigail pleads. “He is spiteful and malicious. I did not know your men asked for food, or I would have filled their saddlebags. Have mercy on us. You are fighting God’s battles, and evil shall not be found in you. You are the prince of Israel. Because God has treated you well, show the same concern for us.”

Much as David’s singing had once pacified King Saul, Abigail’s words calm David. Taking the high road, he orders his troops to stand down.

When Abigail returns home from her successful negotiations, Nabal is “very drunk” (1 Samuel 25:36)—so drunk that she does not talk with him. Good move.

Sober the next morning, Nabal learns that his surliness with David almost cost them everything. Nabal goes white, suffering what appears to be the first official heart attack in the Bible: “his heart dies within him; he became like a stone” (1 Samuel 25:37). Yet he stays alive for another ten days, until God strikes him dead. Really dead, this time.

David soon sends his servants to collect Abigail for marriage. No doubt he could have had her through force, but her response indicates a choice. Graceful as always, she is thrilled—or sees it as her best option (which it is). “I will wash the feet of your servants,” she says, and rides to join him with five of her maids.

Eventually, Abigail and David have a son, Chileab (Daniel), of whom nothing more is known. David widens his holdings by acquiring Nabal’s land, and Abigail gains a sober spouse.

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### Consider this

**S**ome women crumble under pressure; others rise to the top, showing extraordinary grace. Abigail was not a crumbler. Had she been one, her story might have faded into obscurity, for it’s likely she and Nabal would have been bludgeoned to death.

Abigail could have approached Nabal and gotten his approval to talk with David. Or she could have panicked. She could have fled to the woods. She could have refused to listen to her husband’s servant. She could have asked David to kill Nabal and leave her alive.

But with wisdom and clarity, she acted, saving the lives of all involved. She recognized David’s sacred calling, articulated her husband’s folly, and expressed her own desire to live. Such an action exhibits what AA (Alcoholics Anonymous) calls “detachment with love”: the ability to preserve one’s sanity and balance through practical, reasoned actions, rather than losing oneself in a whirlpool of constant anxiety.

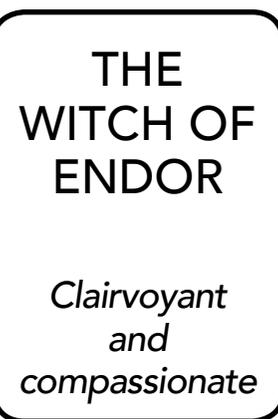
Abigail was a class act. Through the gifts of food, discretion, and discernment, she resolved what could have been a bloody crisis. She did not describe herself as a victim or present herself as a body of nerves. Rather, she acted, and is forever remembered as a woman of grace and diplomacy.

## What might we learn from Abigail?

- ▷ While anxiety may be an automatic response, it is not particularly productive in times of stress.
- ▷ We often need to act to protect ourselves and those we love.
- ▷ Clarity of vision, love, and honesty can be roads to both survival and deliverance.
- ▷ Abigail recognized God's hand at work in David's life and the ultimate role God had for him as ruler of Israel. Especially as we confront adversity, we need such spiritual discernment.

## For reflection

1. Can you remember a time when you untangled someone else's problem? What happened?
2. Abigail rose above her husband's drinking, thought clearly, and protected her household. What coping mechanisms would she have developed over the years to survive with him? Has your life been affected by someone abusing drugs or alcohol? If so, how did you find sanity, balance, and God's presence?
3. Abigail seems humbled to marry David and offers to care for his servants (washing someone's feet was a sign of respect and hospitality). Perhaps she sees herself joining David on a holy mission: to care for and protect God's people. Or perhaps she is just relieved to be alive and in safe hands. What is your sense of Abigail's motivations?



**PROFILE: LOW**

- ▷ **READ HER STORY:** 1 Samuel 28
- ▷ **CLASSIC MOMENT:** Bringing back Samuel's spirit for Saul, who learns of his imminent death
- ▷ **LIKELY CHARACTERISTICS:** Skeptical, Countercultural, Wise, Clairvoyant, Intuitive, Hospitable, Compassionate
- ▷ **DATA:** 126 words

## Who was the witch of Endor?

A woman from Endor who could summon the spirits of the dead //  
 An independent contractor (paid by the session) // A woman living alone //  
 An outcast

## What did the witch of Endor say?

**"Surely you know what Saul has done, how he has cut off the mediums and the wizards from the land. Why then are you laying a snare for my life to bring about my death?"** 1 Samuel 28:9

**"Whom shall I bring up for you?"** 1 Samuel 28:11

**"Why have you deceived me? You are Saul!"** 1 Samuel 28:12

**"I see a divine being coming up out of the ground."** 1 Samuel 28:13

**"An old man is coming up; he is wrapped in a robe."** 1 Samuel 28:14

## THE FORTUNE-TELLING SLAVE GIRL

*Demon-possessed*

PROFILE: LOW

- ▷ **READ HER STORY:** Acts 16:16-19
- ▷ **CLASSIC MOMENT:** Shouting at and haranguing Paul, Silas, and most likely Luke
- ▷ **LIKELY CHARACTERISTICS:** Sad, Persistent, Perceptive, Annoying, Mission-minded
- ▷ **DATA:** 17 words

### Who was the fortune-telling slave girl?

A slave girl, living in Philippi, who was owned by several men // A girl possessed by a spirit that supposedly gave her the ability to tell fortunes // A money maker for her owners // The last woman to speak in the Bible<sup>96</sup>

### What did the fortune-telling slave girl say?

While she followed Paul and us, she would cry out, “**These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation.**” *Acts 16:17*

### The fortune-telling slave girl’s story

**I**magine you are a girl who can tell fortunes—or sort of. Your mind is not your own; it seems to be controlled by other forces. Before it happened, you

were just like everyone else, living at home. But no longer. Several men bought you from your parents, and now you travel, telling fortunes like a gypsy, day after day, hour after hour. The men never leave you alone. One is always there to “interpret” your words, for sometimes your thoughts sound like incoherent babbling.

You do seem to have the gift of clairvoyance, ever since your mind went crazy. You sometimes see things. You sometimes understand what is on people’s hearts. And you also listen, intently. Part of you enjoys knowing secrets, but most of you longs to be normal.

And what’s with those three guys, the ones who have been hanging around the town square the last few days? You smile, but they ignore you. You wave, but they look the other way. Yet something about them sets off a clanging bell in your head. And then you know. Like you, they are also slaves, but to God.

You prance around them, “These men are slaves of God! They proclaim to you a way of salvation!” Over and over, you say it. “These men are slaves of God! They proclaim to you a way of salvation!” Day after day, you shout whenever you see them. You know you are annoying the men, but what do you have to lose? The world has already turned against you.

Finally the one who seems to be in charge cannot take it anymore. He turns to you and shouts, “I order you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her!”

And within the hour, you are acting like your old self. You are calm, happy, breathing deeply, thankful to the man who has healed you, and to Jesus, although you’re not sure who he is. Yet your owners are upset. You have lost the ability to babble and can’t see into the future. Leaving you alone, they run and drag Paul and the others into the town square, beating and mauling them.

There is nothing you can do but run. Slipping behind buildings, weaving in and out of the shadows, you flee, thankful for the one who set you free.

## Consider this

The fortune-telling slave girl is the last female to have her words recorded in the Bible. Most people then didn't know her and wouldn't have cared if she had vanished. Likewise, most people now have not heard of her.

Unbeknownst to her, and unnoticed by most of history, is the fact that her soul was clamoring for freedom. Whether that longing was God-inspired or self-generated, this girl was knocking on doors, looking to be released from her chains, both external (the men) and internal (the demon).

Who else in the Bible is like this girl, knocking to be let loose from physical or spiritual constraints? Some good examples include Hannah, in her prayerful request that God would unlock her womb; the bleeding woman, in her pursuit of Jesus after twelve years of uterine bleeding; and Mary Magdalene finding release from her own demons.

One more example that's too important to be overlooked is Eve, the first woman in the Bible to speak. Like the fortune-telling slave girl, Eve sought to be free, to step outside constraints, to know more, to be more. Like the fortune-telling girl whose actions were judged inappropriate by Paul, Eve, too, was told she was out of bounds. And yet both are part of God's story.

Women's first and last words in the Bible, then, indicate the search for freedom and the use of free will. All the way through the Bible, women knock on doors. Searching. Yearning. Reaching out. Restless.

Free will, freedom of thought, freedom of movement, freedom to know the world on one's own terms. Such is the nature of women throughout the Bible—and notice that all parts of the Trinity, all sides of God, support women in that quest. God is angry with Eve but protects her future path. Jesus reveals himself to Mary Magdalene after the Crucifixion, giving her the most precious job of all: to proclaim to the others that he has risen. And the Holy Spirit moves between Paul's surprise visit to Philippi (the course of his travels having been changed through a dream) and his annoyance at the slave girl's repeated calls to him. There does come a time, after all, when a coincidence is no longer a coincidence.

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## What might we learn from the fortune-telling slave girl?

- ▷ Persistence or dogging someone can lead to unexpected consequences.
- ▷ God works in mysterious ways in spreading the word of salvation.
- ▷ Freedom is worth fighting for.
- ▷ Free will is a gift from God.

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## For reflection

1. What caused the fortune-telling slave girl to keep shouting at Paul and Silas? Could she have seen something in them, being naturally intuitive? Or couldn't the demon help itself from bothering men of God?
2. How did her owners use her fortune-telling skills to make money? Do you think she really could tell fortunes, or did the men just interpret her incoherent sounds as prophecies?
3. How might the term "spiritual warfare" describe what was happening inside and around the girl? How can women who are trapped in harmful situations also find their way out? What part does the Holy Spirit play?

# SUGGESTIONS FOR USE

Written for both individual and group use, this book may be read cover to cover or studied thematically. While not an exhaustive list in each area, here are some ideas for retreats or weekly study:

## **Advent Studies** (three weeks)

|                           |           |
|---------------------------|-----------|
| Samson's Mother           | Elizabeth |
| Mary, the Mother of Jesus |           |

## **Witches and Prophets** (four weeks)

|         |                         |
|---------|-------------------------|
| Deborah | The witch of Endor      |
| Huldah  | The Syrophenecian woman |

## **Lenten Studies** (five weeks)

|  |                 |
|--|-----------------|
| Martha of Bethany                                    | Mary of Bethany |
| Pilate's wife  | Mary Magdalene  |
| Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome |                 |

## **The Power of Love** (six weeks)

|                      |                        |
|----------------------|------------------------|
| The real mother      | The widow of Zarephath |
| The Shulammite woman | Esther                 |
| Edna                 | Mary Magdalene         |

## **Healing from Rape, Incest, and Prostitution** (six weeks)

|                      |                                      |
|----------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Lot's older daughter | Young Tamar                          |
| Tamar                | The real mother and the false mother |
| Rahab                | Susanna                              |

**Prayer and Sacrifice** (seven weeks)

|                                       |                               |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Hannah                                | Jephthah's daughter           |
| Esther                                | Sarah, wife to seven husbands |
| Mother of seven sons                  | Mary the mother of Jesus      |
| Salome, mother of the sons of Zebedee |                               |

**Wicked and Wily Women** (seven weeks)

|                  |                       |
|------------------|-----------------------|
| Potiphar's wife  | Delilah               |
| The false mother | Jezebel               |
| Athaliah         | Herodias (the mother) |
| Sapphira         |                       |

**Diplomats and Survivors** (seven weeks)

|                         |         |
|-------------------------|---------|
| Tamar                   | Rahab   |
| Jael                    | Ruth    |
| Naomi                   | Abigail |
| The wise woman of Tekoa |         |

**Women and War** (eight weeks)

|                                |                           |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Deborah                        | Jael                      |
| Servant girl of Namaan's wife  | The woman who ate her son |
| The woman of Bahurim           | The woman of Abel         |
| The wives and women of Pathros | Judith                    |

**Sorrow and Anguish** (eight weeks)

|                |                              |
|----------------|------------------------------|
| Hagar          | Rachel                       |
| Phinehas' wife | The mother of seven sons     |
| Job's wife     | The woman caught in adultery |
| Mary Magdalene | Mary the mother of Jesus     |

**Healing and hospitality** (nine weeks)

|                                   |                         |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Sarah                             | The widow of Zarephath  |
| Edna                              | The Shunammite woman    |
| The servant girl of Namaan's wife | The Syrophenician woman |
| The bleeding woman                | Mary of Bethany         |
| Martha of Bethany                 |                         |

**Faith and Business Issues** (nine weeks)

|                       |                         |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| Shiprah and Puah      | Daughters of Zelophehad |
| Achsah                | The queen of Sheba      |
| Wise woman of Baharim | The Syrophenician woman |
| Susannah              | Sapphira                |
| Lydia                 |                         |

**Girls in the Bible** (ten weeks)

|                         |                               |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Rebekah                 | Miriam                        |
| Jephthah's daughter     | Girls fetching water          |
| Young Tamar             | Servant girl of Namaan's Wife |
| Herodias (the daughter) | Servant girls                 |
| Mary                    | The fortune-telling girl      |

**The Original Team: The Women of Genesis** (eleven weeks)

|                 |                      |
|-----------------|----------------------|
| Eve             | Sarah                |
| Hagar           | Lot's older daughter |
| Rebekah         | Leah                 |
| Rachel          | Rachel's midwife     |
| Tamar           | Tamar's midwife      |
| Potiphar's wife |                      |

**Mothers in the Bible** (twenty weeks)

|                                     |                                      |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Sarah                               | Hagar                                |
| Rebekah                             | Leah                                 |
| Rachel                              | Samson's Mother                      |
| Hannah                              | Bathsheba                            |
| The wise woman of Tekoa             | The real mother and the false mother |
| The widow of Zarephath              | The Shunammite woman                 |
| The woman who ate her son           | Job's wife                           |
| King Belshazzar's mother            | The mother of seven sons             |
| Herodias                            | The Syrophenician woman              |
| Mary the mother of James and Salome | Mary the mother of Jesus             |