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Ten Mentors from the Bible

*A Bible Study to Help You Let Them Mentor You*

By Debbie Salter Goodwin

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Ten Mentors from the Bible

*A Bible Study*

by Debbie Salter Goodwin

I love people stories. There’s something real and raw about following a story that hasn’t been scripted or edited. I learn from their mistakes and victories. I share some of their hopes and dreams. I probably see more of myself in their flaws than in their flourishing.

If I’m smart, I consider where their choices led them and see where I am making choices that might not take me where I want to go. However, it is easy to make them cardboard cutouts so we can tell the parts of the story we like the best.

So many have been my teachers many times over. I have some of their blind spots. I have made the same relationship blunders. I also speak too quickly and sometimes run away from opportunity. They all have lessons to share.

I’m going to review ten Bible characters who have mentored me as I have studied their stories. They all have a center stage moment. What they did and how they did it has been in automatic replay in Sunday School lessons, sermons, and bedtime Bible stories. What I am learning as I study their stories, is that each had issues. They were too loud or too slow or too insecure or too independent. Too something. They all became project people God had to warn and shape and put in time out. In other words, they were real. The miracle is that God used them all to bring Jesus to us. The miracle is that they became fully God’s in the same way I can. And when I understand that, growth begins.

In the following pages, I will share a thumbnail sketch of the character and the major lessons I learned that have impacted my life. Following the sketch is a short Bible study aimed to help you go deeper and find your own lessons.

With me? Let’s start with Sarah.

Background pattern

Description automatically generatedEsther: God’s Star Power

**What matters most?**

How we begin our stories? Or how we finish them?

Esther reminds me that there are clues in the way our stories begin that, if we let them, will help us develop the story God wants to write through us.

Such is the story of Esther, orphaned girl, who was raised by her cousin, Mordecai. They were living in Persia even though their people had been allowed to return to Israel. Mordecai had a good job as gatekeeper and probably wanted to give Esther more opportunities than she would have had if they joined the repatriation group in Israel.

Esther’s life changed dramatically when she won the Miss Persia beauty pageant and was added to the King’s harem. But living in luxury was a dream-breaker for Esther. Her dream of a Jewish husband and family life was ripped from her as she was “taken” into the palace with little more than what she could carry. Was it a blessing to be pampered with potions and clothing and maid service? Or was she living the curse of all her broken dreams?

I find one answer God embedded in her name. Her Persian name comes from *Ishstar,* which means star. Esther was born to be a star. Not the kind that takes bows at center stage for stellar performance. The kind of star that shows up in night sky. You know, don’t you, that stars shine best in a dark night. The darker, the better.

Well, Esther was living in a dark time. The king that kept her hostage was arrogant, impulsive, and hosted orgies. And then there was Haman, who wanted to wipe out all Jews.

So that’s where the lessons start.

1. **We always have the choice to shine or whine.**

Separated from family and friends, Esther could have whined with a pity party. But Esther didn’t respond as a victim of someone else’s choices. She continued to allow God more control in her circumstances than what she had wished for. She shined.

1. **The place of our greatest fear can become our shining moment.**

Esther had to approach the King without invitation as the first part of a plan to plead for the lives of her people as well as her life. It carried a probable death sentence. Instead, the King raised his scepter to allow her safe approach. Fear didn’t have the majority vote for Esther; God did. No matter how we try to control fear, it controls us more than we realize. Esther reminds me that fear is a weak opponent in the face of God’s direction.

1. **God fights our enemies better than we can.**

This may be the most important lesson I learned from Esther. Do you realize that Esther did not fight her enemy? Haman tricked the king into signing a law to annihilate the Jews. For Esther to bring her enemy down, she only had to invite him to dinner. God did the rest. Haman hung on the gallows he built for Mordecai!. It reminds me of the line from the Psalms*: You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.* We fight too many battles on our own when all we need is a dinner table where God is the host!

Paul echoed Esther’s story for us when he wrote to the Philippians:

*Do everything without complaining or arguing,*

*so that you may become blameless and pure,*

*children of God without fault*

*in a crooked and depraved generation,*

***in which you shine like stars in the universe.***

*Philippians 2:14-15*

Where are your shining moments? Where has obedience brought God’s best answer? Where are your opportunities to shine today? Darkness isn’t so dark when the stars are out.

Let God use you as one of his stars.



Learning from Esther . . .

Use Esther 2:7 to list everything you know about Esther at the beginning of her story:

Esther 2:8 describes the event that changed her life? How much choice did she have?

**Esther’s Choices**

Where were Esther’s choices and how did she respond to them?

Esther 2:9-

Esther 2:13-15

Esther 2:20b

Esther 4:8-16

**Where God Stepped In**

Use the following verses to remind you where God showed up, though He was never named in this book.

Esther 2:21-23

Esther 4:15-16 (Hint: How did Esther decide on a plan?)

Esther 5:1-3 (See also 2:17)

Esther 5:11-14

Esther 6:1-11

Esther 71-3, 5, 6, 9

Esther 8:2, 5, 8

**Finding My Lessons**

How does Esther’s story remind me . . .

* To shine for God wherever darkness exists? What does that mean for me today?
* That small details in the hands of our resourceful God bring more possibilities than I can think of?
* That God always raises his scepter to me and encourages me to ask whatever I need to ask?
* That I don’t ever have to fight an enemy alone?
* That my place of greatest fear could be where God wants me to shine?

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**How do you tame a princess?**

Sarah has always been treated as a background character as we tell God’s story of developing a people set apart for God’s purpose. Because of that, we usually focus on Abraham. He’s the one who received God’s message to relocate. Sarah is the one who packed up the tent. He’s the one God showed how big his family was going to be by pointing to the stars. Sarah is the one who lived with barrenness in a culture that considered it God’s punishment.

Sarah had two big things against her from the beginning: she was a woman and she was childless. She had no currency in the culture.

But did you know she is mentioned more in the Bible than any other female character? More than Mary, the mother of Jesus! That was the first reason that made me realize I had only surface knowledge about this hidden woman.

When I dug deeper, I found a clear message about God’s use of this flawed woman as a full partner in the promise He made to Abraham. It startled me that I had not heard it before. God had always planned that Sarah would participate fully in the covenant. Afterall, Abraham couldn’t create this star family without a God-chosen partner.

Two lessons stand out in Sarah’s story:

**1. God won’t prevent our willful, self-protecting choices.**

She was strong-willed, no doubt about that. But God saw it as a characteristic He wanted to tame and redirect. First, she had to taste the pain of her own destructive choices. Her “answer” to help God give Abraham a family was to use Hagar as a surrogate. But I guess they didn’t sign a contract because Hagar tried to become number one wife over Sarah. Sarah suffered much at the hand of Hagar and it all came because she thought she had a better idea than God.

My takeaway is simple. *Always* let God choose for me. *Always* recognize that His choices move me toward His promises. I don’t claim a promise anymore. I claim God’s choice. When I do, promise always follows.

**2. In our most vulnerable times, God acts for us.**

Twice Abraham tried to pass Sarah off as his sister. It was his way of trying to protect himself, but not by God’s idea. It is true that Abraham had a target on his back when he crossed into Egypt with a beautiful wife when he needed food during a famine. Pharaoh didn’t think twice about killing a husband to add a beauty to his harem. A sister was fair game. Do you realize that God sent a message to the pagan Pharaoh that something was wrong? Who was God protecting? Sarah! Why? Because He had chosen her as a partner in the covenant God made with Abraham. He was protecting His investment.

God won’t save us from our willful ways. We have to say “no” to them with His strength. But in our most vulnerable places, He steps in with resources, strength, options we couldn’t bring about. He will protect His investment. But we must let Him.

So when the hard places come where I can’t find the exit, I am learning to turn it over to God and let Him open the right doors. It’s not always escape; sometimes it is empowerment. Sometimes it is another opening. Sometimes it involves just waiting it out. But it always shows me a better way in the end.

Learning from Sarah . . .

Sarai’s name (before God changed it) means princess. What words do you connect with princess? Put a + beside the words that have positive possibilities, and a – beside the more negative ones. If you think it could be used either way, use both: +/-

Add Genesis 12:11 to what you are learning about Sarah and describe the woman you see emerging.

**Sarai’s Choices**

What were Sarai’s choices and how did she use them?

Genesis 12:10-20

Genesis 16:1-6

Genesis 17:15

Genesis 18:10-15

**Where God Stepped In**

Read Genesis 17:15 again. What message did God send in renaming her?

Refer to Genesis 18:10-15 about what Sarah overheard. What chance was God giving Sarah and how did she respond?

Abraham tried to pass Sarah off as his sister a second time. Read Genesis 20:3-9 What did God do to protect Sarah?

Read Abimelech’s words to Sarah in Genesis 20:16. What might these words have meant to Sarah?

How did Sarah respond to the birth of Isaac? (Genesis 21:1-7) What change do you sense in Sarah?

**Finding My Lessons**

How does Sarah’s story remind you . . .

* of God’s protection in your life, even when you have been self-protecting or controlling?
* that your weakest place is not how God measures your potential?
* how blaming keeps God’s best out of reach?

What have you learned because of the way God showed up for Sarah?

How will you apply your lessons to a situation you can’t handle alone?

How might it help you move forward?

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Description automatically generated**David: A Heart for God

**What characteristic does God value most?**

We give personality tests. We find a number on enneagram scale. We ask about past performance. We dig into how a person handles conflict. And still, we can make big mistakes.

God looks to one place . . . the heart. Which direction does the heart turn *first*? Success? People pleasing? Self-protection? Goals? God?

Paul called David, “A man after [God’s] own heart.” (Acts 13:22) David’s heart grew toward God as David wrote and sang about his God. He understood God was the all-powerful Creator of beauty and complexity yet One who listened and acted in behalf of the people He made. David saw himself as one of the sheep in God’s pasture, as one cared for, fed, and led to safety.

When God called David to be king, he called the boy with a heart for God. When I read the story of David fighting enemies bigger and stronger than he was, being pursued by a paranoid king, hiding in caves and depending on people he gathered around him; I see a picture of God using a simple shepherd boy because his heart was turned toward God, first.

The first time I studied David’s story, scene by scene, I was taken by the phrase, “he inquired of the Lord.” He didn’t depend only on military intelligence. He didn’t try to outwit anyone. He simply asked God what he was supposed to do. The God who had whispered to his heart on the hillside was the same God who instructed every strategic move he made.

That is, until he stopped asking God. He didn’t ask God about Bathsheba. He didn’t ask God about his parenting. He didn’t ask God about his marriages. When he stopped asking God for details, he got into big trouble.

So how did David get one of the most celebrated places in the lineage that brought us Jesus? Because David shows our deep need to be rescued from self-centered slides away from asking God what to do. Because David is one of us, flawed, needy, with an imperfect performance record before God. Because David demonstrates the difference between a heart turned completely toward God and a heart that needs Someone to save him from himself.

Through Jesus, we come from David’s line, too. We have divided hearts that needs to be made whole again. We couldn’t have learned it from a perfect person who did everything right. We needed a David to remind us that God’s mercy runs deep, but we do have to ask for it. David wasn’t perfect, but his heart never hardened against God.

What would David say to us today? I think he would say, “Always inquire of the Lord!” I think he would remind us of the importance of confession for the big *and* little things. I think he would tell us to live a life for God so that at the end, there are no regrets.

Only God can direct a life of no regrets.

Learning from David . . .

Write a brief description of David by listing the characteristics found in the following scriptures: 1 Samuel 16: 10-12, 13, 18

**David’s Choices**

How did David decide who his enemies were? 1 Samuel 17:37 vs 2 Samuel 18:1-4

How did David decide who tomarry: 1 Samuel 18:17-19 vs 2 Samuel 4:12-13

What is different between how David made decisions in these verses: 1 Samuel 23:1-2, I Samuel 30:7-8 . . .

Compared to how David made decisions in these verses: 2 Samuel 15:13-15 and 19-20 (Hint: what’s missing?)

How did David decide about Bathsheba? 2 Samuel 12:7-9, 12 vs I Samuel 11:2-5

**Where God Stepped In**

Where did God interject His perspective and instructions and why?

1 Samuel 16:7, 13

2 Samuel 7:8, 16

2 Samuel 12:1, 13-14

**Finding My Lessons**

How does David’s story help me . . .

* practice asking God for direction about choices that change actions or direction for me or someone else?
* confess and repent without blaming or making excuses?
* refuse to let my best ideas be the only standard for my decisions?
* believe that God will use my obedience to protect me from being destroyed by the consequences of disobedience?

What did David learn that God values the most? Psalm 51:6

How might you personalize this promise from Isaiah 55:3

A hand holding a candle

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**What do you need to know before you say “yes” to God?**

The simple answer is she couldn’t. Mary came into parenthood by the same door we all enter, the door marked unprepared. I have come to understand that it wasn’t what Mary knew about parenting that made her the one to mother God’s Son, it was what she knew about the One who recruited her for this responsibility.

I have rehearsed Mary’s story over and over, the high points of confirmation, the low points of frustration bordering on disillusionment, the deepest pain any mother can suffer to a place of understanding how her story was bigger than her part in it. Mary mentored me in ways I am still trying to give words to. Here are two key lessons that impacted every part of my motherhood all the way to living its legacy today.

**1. Mary said *yes* to God before she said *yes* to what He was asking.**

When I understood my journey as a parent wasn’t going to be what I would have called “normal,” I wanted God to do something that would give me back the journey I thought I signed up for. It felt too hard and I felt unprepared. While I can’t remember the moment I connected to Mary’s response, I can tell you that her words pulled me through every educational, medical, and emotional maize we struggled with. “May it be to me as you have said.” This sentence stopped my “I can’t” thinking and reminded me that God oversaw the journey and that He was resourcing it. I could say *yes* to Him when everything in me wanted to shout “no” to some new loss, diagnosis, or crisis. Starting with what I thought I could handle was backwards. Starting with what God could handle carried me through.

**2. Mary had to submit to God’s purpose for the son she raised.**

It helped me to know that Mary didn’t get everything right and she had questions. She didn’t understand why they had to go back to Jerusalem to find the son who should have told them where he would be. She didn’t understand his answer, that he was doing his *Father’s* business. However, I believe it was a chance for Mary to get back on board with the bigger mission God had asked her to do: to raise *His son* according for *His* purpose. Was it a coincidence that the verse that follows this parenting lesson for Mary sounds like it helped her take another look at what God was asking of her? I think she returned to Nazareth editing her dreams and refining her energies to help Jesus grow “in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.” (Luke 2:52)

More than once, I had questions about what God wanted to do with Lisa. Everything I thought she *could have done* was blocked by some challenge or disability. It took me a long time to understand that God’s plan for Lisa was bigger than my ideas. It was another way to learn what the words “May it be to me as you have said,” meant. They weren’t just for submission to God at the beginning of a parenting journey. They required submitting every detail of *my* hopes and dreams for Lisa so that I could cooperate fully with God’s purpose for Lisa. It was a prayer that turned me inside out more than once, but always gave me a deeper understanding of God’s love for Lisa and for me.

Mary’s model led me through some of my darkest moments as a parent. She gave me a picture of submission that was deeper than a one-time offering at the beginning of her journey. She taught me that the gift of submission is release. It is the gift of letting go of anything that holds parent or child back from understanding and living God’s purpose. It is the rhythm of giving back to God again and again, the child/ren He loaned us so that we could co-parent with Him. Understanding that will always give you something to *treasure* in your heart, as well.

Learning from Mary . . .

How does the Bible identify Mary?

Luke 1:26-27

Matthew 1:16

Matthew 1:18

**Mary’s Choices**

Using the scriptures below, identify the choices Mary had in responding to the God’s message to her through Gabriel. What was her attitude?

Luke 1:38

Luke 1:48

Luke 2:19

How did Mary and Joseph raise Jesus?

Luke 2:39-40

Where was Mary after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus? Acts 1:14

**Where God Stepped in**

Luke 1:26

Luke 1:35

Luke 1:37

**Finding My Lesson**

What role has God “favored” me with?

How do I separate my dreams from God’s dreams for my child/ren, grandchildren, or me?

How do I co-parent (or co-aunt/uncle or co-grandparent) with God?

Where am I trying to say “yes” to a time, role, or responsibility *before* saying yes to God?

What characteristics of God help you say *yes* to Him, even when the way ahead is unknown, difficult, or unwanted?

How is Mary’s statement “May it be to me as you have said” a statement of ultimate submission? Where are you afraid to say it?

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Description automatically generated**Mary and Martha: Who’s in Charge?

**How do you decide who’s in charge?**

I love my sister. We grew up practically joined at the hip. One of our favorite activities to share has always been time in the kitchen. We looked for from-scratch recipes. We decorated Jell-0 salads and cakes. We were a power team in the kitchen. I remember laughter, not bossiness. I remember cooperation.

So when my brother married in August and my sister hosted the family reception, I came in early to help her prepare for the big day. It was better than a road trip together. We measured and mixed. We talked and laughed. We fell back into the rhythm that two hearts linked by blood and memories knew so well. The result was a masterpiece, a spread fit for royalty. But for me, the result was that magic of fitting back together, two puzzle pieces separated by time and distance and life’s responsibilities, coming back together to fit perfectly.

So what happened to the sisters, Mary and Martha, in the story that Luke records? (Luke 10:38-41) They had the chance of a lifetime to prepare a meal for Jesus and his disciples. When did each forget the other? When did Martha think Mary was losing sight of the task? When did Mary assume that Martha didn’t need her? When did the separation begin?

I’m a Martha from the get-go. I look for jobs to be done. I’m not a stand around, conversation consumer. So I understand Martha. But there are days when I am Mary and all I want to do is sit and reflect. I want to be where deep conversations take me to new understandings. I don’t want to be bothered by what someone else says I have to do.

So who was in charge in that Bethany kitchen? Whose rights mattered the most?

To malign either sister’s basic approach is a poor rendering of the lessons we need to learn from these sisters. Of course we can’t take the words of Jesus lightly. There is reprimand for Martha. But how did he say it? With frustration and angst and put down? I don’t think so. I think he said it with love and compassion and understanding. I think he knew what Martha intended and appreciated every pro-active way she had prepared for this family meal among friends. But he wouldn’t let Martha’s frustration in the moment get in the way of a lesson she needed to learn. She had lost perspective, the big picture, balance, and maybe most of all, her ability to relate to her sister or Jesus. She forgot she wasn’t in charge.

Ultimately, all authority we think we have is delegated authority. It’s never ours to begin with. There’s always someone or Someone to answer to for the way we use authority. I’ve had to learn that lesson more than once when my one-note work had the potential of creating more dissonance than harmony. It comes down to self-centered disillusion, doesn’t it? We can be so consumed with our way that we don’t see another’s important viewpoint. It’s not about unity at all costs. It’s about unity that matters. Unity that brings peace. Unity that doesn’t just get *my* job done, but gets a bigger job done that I can’t do by myself.

These sisters keep teaching me these lessons:

**1. Harmony isn’t one-note work.**

Harmony comes when many notes work together. It takes learning to acknowledge when you begin blaming instead of naming your own shortcomings. Never lose sight of the symphony you can be a part of.

**2. Look for relationship not rights.**

I’ve seen it in committees, families, and churches. People come together to push their ideas and end up pushing people away. No one wins. And maybe that’s the biggest part of the problem: it should never be about winning. Even if we are the *appointed* leader, we come under the authority of Jesus in the way we handle that leadership.

My bottom-line lesson is that Mary’s action tames my Martha bent and Martha’s work ethic protects me from Mary’s blinders. I need both. Charles Wesley said it perfectly in one of his hymns:

Faithful to my Lord’s commands,

I still would choose the better part;

Serve with careful Martha’s hands,

And loving Mary’s heart.

Your Turn to Learn from Mary

What are the basics you learn about Mary and Martha from these scriptures?

Luke 10:38-39, John 11:1-2, John 12:1-2

**The Sisters’ Choices**

Use the scriptures to identify each sister’s choice. Identify contrast by placing *vs (versus)* between the columns. Identify the same response by connecting the columns with a double-sided arrow

**Martha Mary**

Luke 10:38 Luke 10:39

Luke 10:40-41 Luke 10:42

John 11:3 John 11:3

John 11: 21 John 11:32

John 12:2 John 12:3

**Where Jesus Stepped In**

Read Luke 10:38-42

What was Jesus trying to teach?

How did he adapt to each sister’s needs?

How were Jesus’ words more positive than negative?

Read John 11:33-35, 38

What did it mean to the sisters to see Jesus weeping?

What opportunity did Jesus give to the sisters and their friends?

**Finding My Lessons**

How do I invite Jesus into my home and life? What restrictions have I placed?

Where have I asked Jesus to come, but I feel like he waited too long?

Where am I distracted, worried, or upset? How am I showing it?

Where does Jesus weep with me? Where should I weep with him?

What opportunities does Jesus give me to see his glory? How do I respond?

Where do I have authority? How do I practice accountability to God with that authority? Where do I need to practice more?

****Dr. Luke: Where Compassion Meets Healing

**What characteristics do you value in a physician?**

My favorite Gospel writer is Luke. He captured so many of Jesus’ stories and interactions, especially the ones about healing. I look at the stories through his inquisitive mind. I pay attention to the details he selected, especially details other Gospel writers failed to mention.

Paul called him “his dear friend, the doctor” (Colossians 4:14) Luke probably was his companion on many of his missionary trips. It never hurts to have a doctor as a traveling companion, especially if you see the insides of prisons more than Holiday Inns! Most agree that Luke wrote Acts. Luke, with his penchant for detail, tells the story of how the early Christian church formed and problem-solved.

Luke wasn’t one of the first disciples. That’s what stands out the most to me. He came along later. But his research reads like he was there. It’s what he captured about Jesus that leaves the strongest impression for me. Dr. Luke saw a connection between Jesus’ prayer and his interaction with needy people. Dr. Luke recognized how Jesus valued women and had compassion on the poor. He chronicled these interactions, probed their meaning, and gave us a picture of our Wounded Healer.

Dr. Luke was a journalist like we need today, capturing details that told a bigger story than what those who witnessed them may have understood. He retold 23 parables and 20 miracles. I can only imagine how the curious mind of Dr. Luke embraced the healing Jesus brought by word or touch. Jesus healed without a chemical, herbal concoction or surgical knife. That had to bring Dr. Luke to his knees every time he heard it.

Dr Luke is my reminder of important lessons for my life and writing:

**1. Tell the story without prejudice or agenda.**

I have trouble believing that Dr. Luke didn’t have plenty of questions about the stories of Jesus he heard. However, if he had an agenda, it was more about letting all the facts surface so that the real story could be told. He didn’t select details by bias. Can you even imagine how journalists today would have performed their selective reporting? For me, Dr. Luke is my journalistic teacher. I try to tell my stories so that God’s truth gets top billing.

**2. God has healing that medicine can’t provide.**

The stories Dr. Luke tells never denigrated medicine but lifts our eyes to healing that also comes from God. We don’t hear that Dr. Luke threw away everything he knew or stopped bringing healing from what he was taught. But I think he always did it with more prayer than before. I think he worked more closely with the Great Physician.

**3. Compassion heals, too.**

Any doctor worth his or her degree knows that. What medicine can’t do, compassion goes a long way to address. I have an image seared into my mother memories of a doctor moment. We were at a scheduled cardiologist appointment, reviewing a frightening incident where Lisa lost consciousness and we called 911. Believe it or not, the first name of the cardiologist we saw that day was Luke. Our Dr. Luke was sitting beside Lisa, asking her questions about the incident. Then, Lisa did something I had never seen her do; she reached for his hand. And our Dr. Luke, held her hand and told her how very brave she was. I saw Lisa’s face and shoulders physically relax. There was healing in that hand hold and in his simple words. We knew there was no pill to cure Lisa’s heart failure; but there was healing for her spirit.

Compassion always heals. Use it generously.

Your Turn to Learn from Dr. Luke

Use the following scripture to describe Dr. Luke:

Luke 1:3-4,

Colossians 4:14,

2 Timothy 4:9-11a

Philemon 24.

What details did Dr. Luke include in his healing stories that other writers did not.

Mat. 8:14, Mark 30, Luke 4:38

Mat. 8:2, Mark 1:40, Luke 5:12

Mat, 12:9, Mark 3:1, Luke 6:6

Mat. 9:18, Mark 5:21, Luke 8:41-42

Mat. 17:15, Mark 9:17-18, Luke 9:38

What do you learn about Dr. Luke?

Luke detailed Saul’s conversion in Acts 8:1-3, 9

What place do you believe Paul’s story played in Luke’s life?

Most believe that the first time the Acts’ writer uses “we,” it refers to Dr. Luke as a companion of Paul and writer of Acts. Using the following incidents, what did Dr. Luke learn from Paul?

Acts 17:16-20

Acts 16:17-18

Acts 20:7-11

Acts 20:15, 17, 23

Acts 21:10, 12-14

Acts 28:7-9

Acts 28 30-31

**Finding My Lessons**

Who has had the most impact on your spiritual growth?

What did Dr. Luke learn about what Jesus wanted to happen on earth after his resurrection?

In your opinion, is the church accomplishing Jesus’ vision today? Why or why not. What is your part?

What is the importance of a spiritual mentor and discipler in the life of a believer? Do you have one?

Whose conversion story has impacted your life and where have you shared it?

How can you use compassion as an important part of healing in your family?

**A picture containing calendar

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**What hurts you the most as a parent?**

On a day when I felt my parenting skills shriveling, when fear wrapped me in an impenetrable shroud, and I felt helpless staring into a future I knew I couldn’t make better for our daughter; I read the story of the mother who went to Jesus because her daughter was suffering. That story changed me. While it didn’t take away all my fear or change any of the hard realities we faced as we maneuvered complicated educational, medical, social, and physical challenges; this story taught me how the mother saw herself and how Jesus saw her, too.

We meet this mother when Jesus was trying to get away from the crowds. Of all things, a Gentile woman made a scene, pressed through the disciples who were trying to protect him, raised her voice and would not be silenced. There was demand and fear and determination in her voice. This mother was at the end of her rope. However, it is what she demanded first that surprised me. Read it for yourself:

*Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering . . .*

Do you hear what this mother was asking first? She asked for something for herself. She wanted mercy.

I always brought my daughter to Jesus, first. I thought that if he could heal or at least reduce some of the issues, it would help me, too. But this mother didn’t start with her daughter, she started with herself.

Now before you start thinking how selfish, let me remind you what every person hears on a plane before takeoff. If the oxygen masks come down in an emergency, place the mask on yourself first; then help your child.

Every parent feels the suffering of their child in a deep and hidden place. Nothing that wounds a child leaves a parent without a similar wound. Parents just know how to hide their wounds better. The woman in this story was uncovering her wounds. Her daughter was suffering, but she was suffering, too.

Another convicting part of this story is how the mother persisted. When the disciples tried to get rid of her, she would not be dismissed. She fell to her knees in front of Jesus. Nobody was going anywhere until Jesus addressed her. She cried again, this time even more specifically:

*Lord, help me!*

Three words, but in them was a deep cavern of grief and pain. And Jesus saw it. Saw her. He affirmed her growing faith and granted her prayer.

*Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.*

As I applied this story to my life, here is what I learned:

**1. I must acknowledge my own pain first.**

Acknowledging suffering is always the first step to healing. Hiding never heals. And we are good at hiding our needs behind what we believe to be a greater need for someone else. We like to call it humility, but it really is hiding. The deeper the pain, the more important it is to name it.

**2. Ask for mercy.**

This is not a throw-away prayer. This is a faith-prayer. When you believe that Jesus knows more about what will bring the first help to a situation, you can pray boldly for mercy. In fact, it is the strongest prayer you can pray when you don’t know what will make a difference.

Jesus healed two people that day. A mother *and* a daughter. Never forget in any time of pain or struggle, Jesus waits to hear *your* cry for help, for yourself *and* for the one you love. Sometimes his help is a promise, sometimes it is a new idea, sometimes it’s just an unmistakable relief that your pain matters to him. It always matters. Never underestimate the compassion and resources Jesus has for you and the one you love.

Your Turn to Learn from a Mother who Suffered

What do we know about this mother from

Matthew 15:21-23?

What do the following verses say about who the Canaanites were?

Genesis 10:19-20

Genesis 9:22, 24-27

Genesis 28:1

Exodus 34:11-16

Joshua 16:10

Summarize how prejudice might have developed between the Canaanites and the Jews.

**Choices**

List the actions of this mother in Matthew 15:22, 25

What obstacles did she encounter according to Matthew 15:23?

**How Did Jesus Respond?**

How did Jesus identify the woman in Matthew 15:24?

When Jesus called the woman a “lost sheep of Israel” how that enlarge the circle of Jesus’ ministry? See Matthew 15:24

Was this encounter between Jesus and the mother about prejudice or injustice?

How did the mother respond?: Matthew 15:26-27

How did Jesus characterize the mother’s faith? Why? Matthew 15:28

**Finding My Lessons**

What is your deepest cry right now?

What is the difference between a cry for mercy and a cry for healing?

What keeps you from taking your pain to Jesus?

What value does persistence have when you ask Jesus for something?

Where are you prejudiced toward valuing another’s pain more important than your own? Is that the way Jesus sees it?

How might your struggle help you become someone Jesus can use to bring his healing or help to

someone else?

Would Jesus call your faith “great?” Why or why not?

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Ruth: A Risk of Love

**What would you risk for love?**

I remember thinking as a young adult how I could know for sure that a marriage relationship could last for life. I had only made one lifetime commitment and that was to follow God no matter what. I had no fears following a God of unfailing love, complete wisdom, unmatched resources, and infallible faithfulness. But I also knew I had not found that in human relationships. I had been misunderstood, ignored, manipulated, betrayed, and rejected more than once.

But when I met Mark, I met a man of integrity, compassion, wisdom, and faith who had uncommon depth and humility. The only way I can describe our short courtship is to say that what we found in attraction God doubly matched in confirmation. I remember vividly on my wedding day asking myself again, “Are you sure about this?” My answer came from a deep place where God had informed and matured me enough that I could know for sure. I walked down the aisle, humbled by what God had done and have continued to find more reasons to be sure about it. Forty years of them!

That’s why Ruth’s story of love and loss and displacement and beginning again is more than a love story to me. It reminds me that life is uncertain, but God is not.

Ruth was a Moabite graft into a Jewish family. Her family heritage was based on scandal. Her family line came from the incestuous relationship between Lot and his oldest daughter. (Gen. 19:34-37) I have always seen Ruth as someone who would not let family background prevent her from becoming a woman of integrity. I believe Ruth learned to recognize truth wherever she experienced it. Married to a Jewish man, living in a Jewish household; Ruth learned about Jehovah God, the Creator and Sustainer of life, who was also a God of love.

When Ruth’s husband died with the other men in that household, her life was drastically reduced. Ruth believed that life with her mother-in-law and her God would take her farther than anything she left in Moab. She took a risk of love, informed love, lived-out-before-her-eyes love. It was that risk that that saved her life and provided another thread to weave the genealogy that would bring us Jesus.

No other story in the Bible reminds me better than Ruth’s that a lifetime commitment to a God of unfailing love is no risk. Risk is when you opt for self-determination over God-following.

Ruth’s love story is deeper than the love between a man and a woman. It is a love story of eternal implications. It is a story of possibility become promise and promise become greater possibility.

My lessons from Ruth have informed both my marriage and my relationship with God in these ways:

**1. God writes the best love stories.**

Ruth wasn’t trying to change her family story; Ruth was trying to survive. But God used her vulnerability, her love and respect for Naomi, and her simple trust in the religious beliefs she had not grown up with to give her and Naomi a life they could never have had without God. Always let God write the plot line of your story. Manipulation and self-determination are enemies of the redemption God brings into any story.

**2. God invented faithfulness.**

No human relationship will ever match the faithfulness God can bring. But get the order right. A lifetime commitment to God brings you all the faithfulness you need to take your own risk on love.

Commit to God first.

Always.

Your Turn to Learn from Ruth

According to Ruth 1:1, what time in Jewish history did this story take place?

What was a Jewish family doing in Moab? Ruth 1:1

How long was Ruth married before she became a widow? Ruth 1:4

What prompted her widowed mother-in-law to go back to Bethlehem? Ruth 1:6

**Ruth’s Choices**

What do you think Ruth learned from Naomi while married to her son?

When Naomi tried to persuade her daughters-in-law to go back to their families instead of accompanying her to Bethlehem, what did Ruth decide? Ruth 1:11-13, 16-17

What did Ruth suggest she could do when they got to Bethlehem? What was the risk? Ruth 2:2

When Naomi suggested a plan to get Ruth closer to Boaz, the owner of the fields, what did Ruth say? Ruth 3:5

**Where God Stepped In**

To whom does the story credit with ending the famine in Bethlehem? Why was this important? Ruth 1:6

During what season did Naomi and Ruth return to Bethlehem? Why would this be significant? Ruth 1:23

Who was Boaz? Ruth 2:1, 3

According to Deut. 25:5-10 who is a kinsman-redeemer and what are his responsibilities? Deut. 25:5-6?

How did God use the family line that came from Boaz and Ruth? Skim Ruth 4:18-22, Matthew 1:6-16 for the key names you recognize.

**Finding My Lessons**

How did Ruth’s choices influence her life and future? What comparison and/or lesson is there for you?

What did Ruth risk in her choices? Why were they not the risk they appeared?

How do you handle risk?

How did God write Ruth’s love story without overriding Ruth’s choices? What lesson is there for you?

How have you witnessed God using circumstances you had no control in, to bring blessing and hope into your life?

How do you calculate risk when you follow the lead our God of unfailing love?

Paul: A Heart Transformed

**What is the result of a heart transformed by God?**

As a teenager, I entered a scripture memorization contest in the talent competition for our church’s district youth organization. I had to memorize Paul’s conversion story as he presented it to King Agrippa. I researched meaning, practiced word-for-word memorization, and pictured Paul standing up for God in the royal court where he had no allies. I went home with a first place ribbon that day. While I can’t deliver Acts 26 by memory today, I have never forgotten Paul’s testimony. It was pointed, personal, and so compelling that even King Agrippa quipped that Paul “almost” persuaded him to be a Christian.

Most of the New Testament scripture I remember the best, Paul wrote. He was a master in communicating the truths of transformation. He left no wiggle room. While his conversion was dramatic, it was the change that occurred in his heart, mind, and perspective that gave him a new voice. To be fighting against the Christians one day and to take their side the next? It’s the story of a mass murderer turned world evangelist!

Paul writes where I live and struggle. Read closely and you understand that his personal relationship with the resurrected Christ was not a personality change; it was a heart transformation. What Jesus did in his heart, opened his eyes to a power that did not come from a try-harder mentality or fighting insecurity with perfectionism or power control. While he was not a gentle man, he was transparent and humbled in ways that strengthened his ability to communicate with the rich and the poor, the powerful and the powerless.

Here are two lessons I keep close to my heart in my desire to let Jesus continue to transform my heart.

**1. Pray from your heart Jesus transformed.**

Read Paul’s prayers. They were not head prayers or pretty word prayers. They were heart prayers. They weren’t about changing his circumstances; they were about the heart transformation. He wanted the people who received his letters to find the same heart transformation. Anytime I pray one of Paul’s prayers, I have heart work to do in order to pray them. He continues to mentor me in prayer.

**2. Protect your heart and mind from contamination.**

It’s the little things that fester and contaminate. The small bitterness that grows. The subtle jealousies that I call unfair. The anger that blind me from my own insufficiencies. Paul didn’t live in a protected bubble. He wrote and spoke about how Jesus changed his heart in these areas. I can listen to someone who struggled like me, and found Jesus’ help real, practical, and effective. Paul continues to mentor me in growth.

Paul, lion of God, prolific writer, prisoner for Christ, unchained while in chains. I don’t want Paul’s life, but I do want the life of Christ in me like it so powerfully lived in Paul. Don’t you?

Learning from Paul . . .

We first meet Paul as Saul. Use the following scripture to rebuild his life before Jesus confronted him on the Damascus Road.

Philippians 3:4-6

Acts 21:39,16:37

Acts 22:3

Acts 7:54-8:1

Acts 8:3

According to the following scripture, how did Saul’s encounter with Jesus change his life?

Acts 9:3-6

Acts 9:17-19

Acts 13:1-3

Acts 13:9

How many of the New Testament books did Paul write as letters? Hint: check the first verse of a book and look for Paul as the writer.

**Paul’s Transformed Heart**

Use the following verses and list what Paul learned about God’s work in the heart:

Rom 6:17-18

Rom 10:8

I Cor 4:5

Ephesians 6:6

Col 3:23

2 Timothy 2:22

**Finding my Lessons**

What did Paul believe about heart transformation from the verses you looked at above?

Where/when is your heart most vulnerable?

Where do your prayers need to be informed by God’s will more than yours?

How is heart transformation the life-long pursuit of a disciple of Jesus?

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Description automatically generated**Joshua: Where Courage Conquered Fear

**What are you afraid of?**

Is courage just an over-positive accounting of your skills and belief in yourself? Or is it a reckless nod to adventure and risk? What is courage made of? Hope? Optimism? Grit? An altered sense of reality? A refusal to let fear be a task-master?

Courage comes from the French word for *heart.* Something happens in the heart that brings whatever is needed to face the giants of any obstacle. And just what is that transformation?

I learned some important lessons about courage from Joshua. He was the man Moses mentored to replace himself. He was God’s choice to get the Israelites off the sidelines and into the Promise.

I can just imagine Joshua grieving the death of his leader, Moses, realizing he must fill some big sandals. In that moment he faced his most promising opportunity and the one that exposed every weakness and insecurity he had. Could he do this? Could he be Moses for these people?

That’s where God met Joshua. That’s where God delivered truth that Joshua couldn’t see through the eyes of fear. God told Joshua to be strong and courageous. This wasn’t just a pep talk. This was heart-talk.

I read Joshua’s words from God when I faced my first career job as a college professor 500 miles from home, family, and familiarity. I would teach Speech Communication, but the degree that said I was equipped for this responsibility was a poor substitute for the confidence I needed. *Had I just made the mistake of a lifetime? Could I really do this? Was I ready?*

Before I stood in front of my first class, I went back to Joshua. I read how God told Joshua two times to be strong and courageous because God had called him and would bring success to match his obedience. That’s when I saw the connection to a life principle I have not forgotten.

I had a choice to make: live in my insecurity and keep questioning my ability or live in the confidence of the call and empowerment of God. I understood that empowerment came from obedience. I had to obey God to find courage, not the other way around.

God speaks the truth that our heart is afraid to claim. God’s truth becomes our courage. It isn’t just a supernatural overpowering or a wave of emotion that blinds us to realities. God’s truth about courage is that it is His resources backing our obedience. That’s where true courage comes from.

So Joshua became my life-long mentor. I have gone back to God’s transforming words to Joshua more than once. Here are my two ongoing life principles I learned from Joshua.

**1. God calls but not from an unprepared place.**

Every time I have sensed God directing me in a new direction, I look back first. When I do, I see the unmistakable signs of preparation. I see the opportunities, encounters, lessons, even tests of obedience and how they prepared me for some new responsibility or season. God never speaks into a vacuum. His direction is like a string of pearls, each one connected to take us to a new place of confidence based on His call and resources.

**2. God empowers with resources that require our obedience.**

This is not some generic obedience where I pat myself on the back because I don’t do the really bad stuff. This is about obedience of the heart, the place where no one will ever know whether we obey or not. No one but God, that is. I learned that the courage God gave Joshua was not in weaponry or military skill. The courage God gave Joshua happened when Joshua let his heart be trained, informed, and shaped by God. Courage came with obedience.

It is the same with us. This shaping God delivers requires that we keep our heart sensitive so that we are conscious of small nudges and quiet whispers. It means that what God wants to address in our heart becomes the raw material for the courage and empowerment He has to give.

Joshua led the people into the promised land of God. But really, Joshua let God do the leading in His heart first. When Joshua’s heart was at one with God’s heart, Joshua found the courage and boldness, the wisdom and strategies that helped him complete the job God gave him.

Nothing has changed the formula today. Not in parenting. Not in ministry. Not in the skill related work of a career.

Everything God wants to give us starts in the heart.

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Description automatically generatedI hope you have made some new discoveries through this Bible Study. I would love to hear from you. Just drop me a note about what you learned and how you’ve grown. My email is [debmgoodwin@gmail.com](mailto:debmgoodwin@gmail.com)

If you haven’t signed up for my weekly blog, I would like to invite you to join the 600 plus who receive my weekly blog, *Quiet Circle.* Go to [www.debbiegoodwin.net](http://www.debbiegoodwin.net) and scroll down until you see the **Let’s Connect** box**.** Insert your information l and click. You can also send me an email request and I’ll add you. I have a gift for you as a first-time subscriber. You’ll receive an email with a link to my popular “Ten Prayers that Changed My Life.”

I am committed to using my blog and Bible Study guides to encourage spiritual growth. I love to help people grow a more intimate relationship with our God of unfailing love!

May you always find new ways to let God grow you!

Debbie