

## From my Heart to Yours

I love to teach! Whether it be a weekly Bible Study, a retreat or a church service I love to share what the Word is saying. I find people in the Bible just like people of today. We can usually relate some way or another to some character in the Bible.

The purpose of these lessons is to help you think about what is truly happening in the lives of these people who are in this wonderful Book. As you go through each lesson put yourself in their shoes. How would you feel? How do you think they were feeling? Have you ever had a situation like they were living?

There are no right or wrong answers. The questions are designed to help you think “outside the box”. To “walk in their shoes” for just a short time. Doing this makes it easy to glean what the Lord wants to say to each individual person.

After the lesson there is a “Hidden Treasure”. This is a verse or verses that is a tidbit to focus on. If you like to memorize Scripture, this would be a place to start. If not, just meditate on the Scripture and concentrate on the meaning.

Next is “Consider This”. This is my time to draw your attention to areas that I find interesting or are keys to what I think the lesson brings out. In other words, it’s my time to teach.

And finally, there is “Application to my Life”. This is the time that I share experiences in my life that goes along with the Scripture passage we read. I try to be open and honest about who I am in Christ, warts and all.

I hope you enjoy your experience as you study God’s word. Remember to always start with prayer. God will bless you abundantly, I’m sure.

*Kay Slippy*



## Who Really Loves Me?

### Read Genesis 29:1-35

As we start this account, we see Jacob on a journey. His father, Isaac, sent him back to the family of Jacob's mother. The whole purpose was to find a wife. This was important because taking a wife from another nationality could cause a person to also take their customs, including worship of a god other than the one true God.

Our main focus of this Bible Study is Leah. She represents the true example of a woman desperate for the love of a husband who loves another. Leah's desire to have Jacob's unconditional love and attention causes her heartbreak. As women we understand this need to have the love and approval of others, especially with our husbands. We want to be their number one focus.

Leah was no exception to this rule. She really wanted to be loved. The first glimpse of her is in Genesis 29:16-17. Here we see Leah compared to her sister Rachel. Leah's description included her weakness. She was the older sister who had weak eyes. We don't know the exact meaning of this. It could have been poor eyesight or possibly a deformity. Whatever the meaning, she was different and not like her sister. The description of Rachel does not include anything negative. It might be read this way, "She was beautiful and easy to look at."

### **Reflection:**

*Have you ever been compared to someone else?*

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*How did that make you feel?*

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*How do you think Leah felt to be in Rachel's limelight?*

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The next verse, (18) is the beginning of a sad story for Leah. Jacob loved Rachel. Now that isn't a bad thing, for a man to love a woman, but as we go on, we'll see just how much pain that love caused Leah.

Because of Jacob's love for Rachel he struck a deal with Laban. He would work seven years and then Laban would allow him to marry Rachel. Seven years seems like a long time but to a man in love it went by quickly. Finally, the time came for his marriage.

Weddings and wedding nights were different than they are now. There would be no way to hide the bride today. Whether a veil hid Leah's face or the switch was made in the dark it was of little consequence. Jacob woke up the next morning and there was Leah, weak eyes and all. Think about his reaction and what that must have done to Leah. Here she is in bed, with memories of the night before when Jacob thought he was with the love of his life, and boom. You can be sure that Leah went from a woman tenderly loved to unloved and unwanted.

Unfortunately, Jacob sealed the marriage when he spent the night with Leah. When confronted by Jacob, Laban makes the excuse that Leah was the oldest and needed to marry first according to their custom. Laban agrees to allow Jacob to marry Rachel too, but he must work another seven years to pay for this right. One-week later Jacob marries Rachel. That was when Leah was laid aside, like nothing.

Let's look at the plan. We don't know how the plan was devised. We don't know if Leah protested or if she loved Jacob and thought he would eventually love her too. We do know one thing; women's rights didn't exist back then and if Laban made the decision, then Leah would be bound to do it.

**Reflection:**

*What do you think Leah might have been thinking as the plan unfolded?*

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*Do you think she thought the outcome would include Jacob's marriage to her sister?*

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*What do you think Jacob and Leah's relationship was like during the week before his marriage to Rachel?*

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*Have you ever made plans, (that seemed workable in the beginning), but turned out with bad consequences?*

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Now we have Jacob working for another seven years and married to two sisters. One is loved and one is not. (Verses 30 and 31) Our merciful God saw that Leah was unloved by her husband and allowed her to get pregnant. Rachel, however, couldn't have children at that time.

It's obvious that Leah longed to have her husband love her. She probably looked forward to the nights he spent with her. She loved him. "If only he would love me." she thought.

The first child she had she named Reuben, which means "Behold a son". (32) Why was she so excited about this son? Her next words show us her true heart. "Now my husband will love me." This child was a tool to acquire her husband's love. I'm sure that she loved Reuben, but she hoped that her husband would be more attracted to her.

It didn't work. The next child she bore was named Simeon and she said that God gave her that son because she was unloved. Who didn't love her? Her husband! The word unloved can also mean "hated" or "an enemy". It doesn't sound like their relationship was good at all. She felt like he hated her. So, this child will make the difference, she thinks. But it didn't.

(34) This time she doesn't even use the word love. Attachment is what she will settle for. Maybe this son will make him want to hang around. She has finally come to the place to realize that her husband probably is never going to love her like she loves him. You can almost hear the voice of depression here. "Maybe this son will make him want to be with me, even if it's just to be with the kids."

She finally seems to come to terms with what she really wants in life when she has Judah. Judah means "Praise" and that's what she was doing. Her focus has now come off her husband and is on her God.

All along God has loved her. He saw that she was unloved by her husband and He showed her love by allowing her to have children. Until the last child Leah saw her children as a means to an end. "My husband will love me if...." She didn't seem to realize that what she really wanted was to be loved unconditionally. What she really wanted was to be secure in that love. That security could only come from God's love for her. Human love can fail us, God's love never will.

Are there things in your life that you are doing to acquire someone's love? Maybe you, like Leah, have a husband that is not the ideal. Are you focusing on what you can do to gain his love instead of focusing on the One who loves you most? Are you trying to gain the love of a parent, sibling, or child? Stop looking to other humans or things to supply your needs. God is the only one who can give you what you long for. Like Leah you need to come to the place to say, "Now I will praise the Lord."

**Hidden Treasure:** (Let's make Zephaniah 3:17 personal.) The LORD *my* God is with *me*, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in *me*, he will quiet *me* with his love, he will rejoice over *me* with singing."

**Consider This:** I may not always be loved by others, as I would want to be. I can, however, be assured that God loves me unconditionally and with that knowledge comes my security. He should always be number one in my life.

**Application to my life:** I too, was a person who looked to fill the hole in my life with something other than God. If I could have named my children after my issues they would have been called, "More money", "More Romantic Husband", "Empty Nest", "Good Friend" and "Success". All these things were where I thought my happiness would come from. I failed to see that I needed God to be first in my life.

Have I arrived? No. I still catch myself thinking that "this thing" or "that thing" will bring fulfillment. That's when God steps in and reminds me to look to Him for my fulfillment.

## Are You Leaving or Leaning?

### Read Daniel 3:1-7

Often in life we are put in positions where we really don't feel we have a choice. After this very large image was erected, it appeared as if the choice, of whether to worship it or not, was taken away. The cost of not falling down was heavy. Death in a fiery furnace.

People came from all over to this special event. Satraps (Princes of the various provinces), administrators, governors, counselors, treasurers, judges, magistrates, and other officials. All these very prominent people gathered to pay tribute to this very large gold image. The announcer says that when the music starts, everyone needed to fall down and worship the gold image.

There always seems to be a rebel or two in every crowd. People who don't want to follow the rules. People who have their own ideas. Here we see three rebels. Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego, Jews who had a place of authority in the kingdom.

Being a Jew in a kingdom, where all manner of idol worship was carried out, would be a dangerous place to live. These three men must have proved themselves worthy to be put in charge of the affairs in the province of Babylon. The word, integrity, comes to mind.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego have watched as this statue has been erected. They might have discussed what was going to happen. They probably have been praying for strength to do the right thing. Now the day has arrived and being in positions of authority, they find themselves in a situation that could mean death. What will they choose?

### **Reflection:**

What do you think these three men were thinking when they first gathered with the other people in front of the image?

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When the announcement was given?

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When the music started?

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**Read Daniel 3:8-12**

If there are rebels in every crowd, there also seem to be people who like to “stir the pot”. The conversation starts with flattery and then moves right into what they really want. It sounds something like this! “O king, live forever!” Remember when you said that when the music starts everyone is to bow down and worship the gold image? And remember you said that anyone who does not bow down will be thrown into a fiery furnace? There are three Jews, which you set over the affairs of the province of Babylon, who do not respect you enough to do what you say. In fact, they do not even serve your gods and did not fall down and worship.

**Reflection:**

Why do you think these men “stirred up” this trouble?

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**Read Daniel 3:13-18**

In a rage the king sends for the three “rebels” and asks them if what he is hearing is true. He doesn’t wait for their answer, he just states that when they hear the music, if they do not bow down, they will be thrown into the fiery furnace. Then, arrogantly he asks, “And who is the god who will deliver you from my hands?”

I’m sure he didn’t expect the answer he got. They said, “We really don’t need to answer your question because we serve a God that can deliver us. But if He chooses not to, we still won’t bow down to your gold image.”

**Reflection:**

What would it take for you to be as bold as these three men were?

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Why do you think they said, “But if not”?

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## Read Daniel 3:19-27

Nebuchadnezzar is so angry that he gives the order to heat the furnace seven times hotter than it was usually heated. He had Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego bound and thrown into the furnace. They were fully clothed including their turbans. The furnace was so hot that it killed the men that put them into the furnace, but it did not do anything to those three rebels. Actually, God himself was in the fiery furnace with them.

The king is amazed and asks, "Didn't we throw three bound men in the furnace? Now I see four loose men, walking around. The one looks like the Son of God."

Note in verse 26 that the king, himself, went to the mouth of the furnace. He asks the three men to come out. Notice also that he calls them, "servants of the Most High God".

As the three come out the officials surround them. Except for no longer being bound they are the same as when they went in the fire. No burns on their skin! Their clothes were not burned! No hair was singed! They didn't even smell like smoke!

### Reflection:

Imagine what the thoughts of the people might have been as they are looking at this miracle. Pick one character and write down what they might have been thinking. (The king, the accusers, the three men.)

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The end of the story is that Nebuchadnezzar decreed that no one could speak anything bad against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego. If they did, they would not only be killed but their property would be destroyed. He says, "Because there is no other God who can deliver like this."

These three men stood for something and were rewarded because of it. We don't always see our reward on this earth but faithfulness to God will always bring a reward.

**Hidden Treasure:** "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him." Job 13:15a (NKJV)

**Consider This:** We may never be called to put our lives on the line when we stand up for God. We can, however, see a lesson in this account of faithfulness to God.

I'm sure you know someone who has walked away from the Lord when trouble struck. Divorce, the death of a loved one, financial ruin, emotional hurt and many other things can cause us to think that God is not listening. That God has abandoned us. We may have begged God and gotten the wrong answer.

We need to remember that God is always doing the best for us. It may not seem that way when we are sitting beside the bed of our dying loved one, but God loves us. And just like the three "rebels", He is right there as we are walking through the fire.

When trouble strikes remember Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego. It's your turn to say, "Even if He won't save me (bring my husband back, save my child from destruction, heal the cancer that's raging through my body) I WILL STILL NOT BOW DOWN.

We have a choice right from the beginning. We can leave or lean. Choose to lean on Him and one reward will be a closer walk with Him.

**Application to my life:** Several times in my Christian life I have come up against the desire to "leave". One of the hardest issues for me is being hurt by other Christians. When someone, who is a brother or sister in Christ, steps on me, I generally must go through a period of "leaning" heavily because in my heart I want to "leave".

My prayers often sound something like this, "Lord, I cannot do this again. I will just be a Christian without hanging out with your other kids. Do I have a sign on my back that says, "Hurt Kay! She can take it!"? Why do you allow this? Can't you keep this from happening?"

After the whine I usually come to the place of saying, "Ok, Lord. Though You slay me, I will still trust in you." I need to learn to be ready with that answer before the fire is being stoked to seven times hotter. I need to be ready and say, "Even if He allows someone to walk all over me, I will still not leave His side."

Hard? You bet! But so worth the reward!

## Don't Stress! He's Got this!

### Read 2 Kings 4:1-7

A widow comes to Elisha and pours out her need to him. Her husband, who had been a prophet, had died. With his income gone they had been unable to pay their bills and the creditor was knocking at the door.

In those days, when you could not pay the person you owed, you could be given or give yourself to them to work off the debt. In Leviticus 25:39-41 it says that if the person you owed was an Israelite, they weren't allowed to call you a slave, but a hired hand. This helps us see the dire situation that this widow was in. Either they owed an Israelite who didn't follow this law or the creditor was not an Israelite and so her sons would be considered slaves.

She goes to the man that she feels could find a solution to this problem. A problem that seems overwhelming. He responds with, "How can I help you?"

### **Reflection:**

*Have you ever been in a situation where you thought there was no solution? Describe:*

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*How do you think the widow felt when Elijah said, "How can I help you?"*

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In verses 2-4 Elisha tells her what to do. First, he asks her what she has in her house. She replies, "Nothing...except." We often do this in our lives. In times of stress we see the "nothing" easily. She had nothing except a jar of oil. Oil was an important commodity. Oil was used for anointing the body, for burning lamps, for medicinal purposes and for anointing the dead. For this widow to "only" have a jar of oil was the beginning of a miracle.

Elisha tells her to have her sons go and borrow jars. Not a few but as many as they can get. Then they are to go into their home and fill the jars with oil.

**Reflection:**

*What would your reaction have been if you had been the widow? Would you have been so quick to send your sons for the jars?*

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In verses 5-7 we see the solution to their situation. Note that the oil keeps flowing until they ran out of jars. She goes to the man of God and he tells her to sell the oil and pay her debts. But also note he says, "You and your sons can live on what is left."

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**Reflection:**

Put yourself in the widow's place. What would you be thinking as you filled the first jar? After the last jar?

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Think back to your situation (where you thought there was no solution). How did it turn out?

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When you were wondering how things were going to turn out, did you ever think of the solution?

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As we run into overwhelming situations that seem to have no solution, we need to remember that God is a God of miracles. If he can part the Red Sea, have the walls of Jericho fall down and help a little boy kill a giant, He can find a solution to your problem. The best part is that He doesn't leave you alone but walks the road with you.

**Hidden Treasure:** Ephesians 3:20-21 (NKJV) "Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen."

**Consider This:** There is no problem too large that the Lord cannot fix. There are no small resources. "Nothing" equals "something" when you have God on your side.

### **Application to my life:**

I don't always learn a lesson the first time. (And that's probably an understatement.) When we were first married, we were very financially strapped. We had gone a year with very limited income. The holidays were fast approaching, and we had no gifts for our children and no food for our table. I was stressed!!! As a new Christian I was trying hard to rely on God, but I was still trying to "work something out". My Christian friends kept telling me that God would provide but I knew that "this big problem" was unfixable. I prayed, I whined, and I whined some more.

A week before Christmas the solution started arriving. Box after box of food came. All included a turkey and all the holiday trimmings we could want. In all, seven boxes loaded to the brim were left on our front porch. We were so blessed that we were able to share with others who were struggling.

You would think that since I saw this miracle for the food that I would be able to leave the gifts for my children in God's hands. Not so...whine, cry, pray, whine, whine...

Christmas Eve a friend of ours, who owned an electronics store, brought over all the toys that had been used for display. These were not inexpensive toys. These were high end, something I could never have bought my children, toys. He even included batteries.

What a blessed Christmas that was. As a baby Christian I got to see God work in a magnificent way.

Fast forward three years. My husband and I are now running a crisis center for people who needed help "getting on their feet". It was Thanksgiving. I was not sure how I was going to feed sixteen plus people. Donations were down and I was stressed. I was whining to my 10-year-old daughter about our situation. She quietly said, "But mom, what about the seven boxes with turkeys?"

Okay, so sometimes I must be hit with a brick. I wonder if the widow's sons ever had to remind her about "all those jars of oil".



## Through the Valley

Death! That word leaves the heart cold with fear. We cannot imagine life without our loved one. We cannot grasp that they will not be there to talk to, laugh with and touch. As a Christian, we may know that heaven is waiting for them and yet we still look death in the face with fear because although our loved one will be home, we will be suffering.

This passage of Scripture was a comfort to me after my Dad died. I could relate so well to Elisha. I pray that you too can find comfort in it.

### **Read 2 Kings 2:1-14**

Elisha has been in training to take over Elijah's job. In 1 Kings 19:21 it says, "...Then he (Elisha) arose and followed Elijah and served him." We don't really know what that service consisted of, but we do know that service meant they spent a great deal of time together. I am sure that from Elisha's reaction we see that he had grown to love Elijah. Only when you love someone can you have the reaction that we see in verses 2 and 3.

### **Reflection:**

Why do you think that Elisha did not want to leave Elijah's side?

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In verse 2 when the prophets tell Elisha that Elijah is going to be "taken" why do you think he wants them to "keep silent"?

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Have you ever had news that you did not want to talk about? Explain:

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In verses 2, 4 and 6 we see that Elijah asks Elisha to “please” stay while Elijah goes to another place. Three times we see Elisha’s response. “I am going!”

Why do you think Elijah wanted Elisha not to follow him?

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There is no clear reason in Scripture to explain why Elijah wanted Elisha to stay but one thing is clear, Elisha was having no part of it!

**Reflection:**

Has there been a time in your life when you wanted to be with someone because you knew they did not have long to live? Explain:

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What was your reason for you wanting to be with them?

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In verse 9 Elijah says, “Ask! What may I do for you, before I am taken away from you?” This statement must have made Elisha’s heart skip a beat. Here is the man (that Elisha loves) boldly stating that he was being taken away. Although Elisha asks for a double portion of Elijah’s spirit, I am sure that his mind was screaming, “No, no, no! Don’t go!”

In verse 11 we see what Elisha was dreading. The verse begins with, “Then it happened”. Elijah and Elisha were walking along and suddenly a chariot of fire appeared and separated the two of them and Elijah went up to heaven. Death is the ultimate separation. Death leaves only memories. No amount of preparation will get us ready to face the feelings we have the moment those we love are gone.

We see the anguish in verse 12. Elisha cries out for him, “My father, my father...” and tears his clothes. Tearing of clothing was an expression of deep sorrow.

And then he moves on. He picks up Elijah’s cloak and starts on his own journey alone. Alone? Was he alone? That’s how he is feeling. Note verse 14. “Where is the Lord God of Elijah?” And God shows Himself by parting the waters just as he did for Elijah.



When we are in anguish, we often think we are alone. Where is God when we are hurting so deeply? Why did He allow this horrible thing to happen? What is the meaning of all this heartache? During these times of doubt, we need to watch, because our God that loves us will show Himself. He knows exactly how we are feeling. He has been there. He watched His Son die.

**Hidden Treasure:** Psalms 23:4 (NKJV) “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You *are* with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.”

**Consider This:** We may feel as if God has abandoned us when we are going through grief. Whether that grief is when we first hear the news or when the one we love has slipped from this earth we can be assured that God is walking us through the “valley of death.” Feelings are not fact. Rest in the promises of His word not on how you are feeling at the moment.

### **Application to my life:**

I stopped by to visit my dad at the beginning of our two-week vacation. He was having a difficult time walking. He said that he had fallen while working in the garden and so we figured it had something to do with the fall.

When I got back, I called my dad to see how he was. When I got no answer I said to Vernon, “I bet he’s out working in his garden.” I didn’t know that he was in Boise having an x-ray because he was now wheelchair bound.

After finally reaching him by phone and learning of the news that he had below the waist paralysis I traveled to his home to care for him. The first night with him assured me that something was drastically wrong and that the doctor’s attitude of “wait and see” was the wrong approach.

The following day, after seeing his primary doctor and finding nothing on the x-rays of his lower back, he was admitted to the hospital. After another series of tests, the specialist called my sister and I out into the hall. He explained that dad had a large tumor on his spine near his neck that had metastasized from lung cancer. He had 72 hours to live unless he had immediate surgery. The tumor was fast growing and would shut down his respiratory system if left alone.

I immediately went to call my husband to ask him to come to be with me. At that moment I needed someone to lean on. As I was walking down the hall, I could see Jesus standing there with His arms stretched out for me. I cannot explain it, but I rested my head on his chest and said, “Please, don’t take my dad.”

Things moved fast after that. Dad was taken to yet another hospital for immediate surgery. After surgery and a short recovery, he was admitted to a rehabilitation center where he could learn to live with paralysis. A long life was not expected. In fact, just a few months. Vernon and I decided to bring dad to live with us until he died.

My older sister drove 170 miles on weekends to relieve me since we had to turn dad over every two hours’ day and night. The second weekend dad took a turn for the worse. After the hospice nurse checked him, she told us he had pneumonia and probably wouldn’t live a week. Again, I saw Jesus with arms outstretched and resting in His arms I said, “Please, don’t take my dad.”

From that day, dad never got out of bed. He would do well for a short time and then take a turn for the worse. The nurse would say he wouldn't live through the night, and the next morning he was eating bacon and eggs for breakfast.

This wreaked havoc with my emotions. I didn't want to leave him, even to go to the store. When I had to go, I would run through the store, grabbing things, hoping that he wouldn't die while I was gone.

At home I would sit for hours just waiting for him to die yet dreading when that time would come. I wanted to spend every minute with him but was so exhausted that I couldn't. I had difficulty talking to God. All I could say was, "Please! Please! Please!" I didn't really know what I wanted. I just wanted the pain to go away and I couldn't picture that it would without my dad living. And yet, through all this, God's presence was very near to me

After two and a half months I was nearing my breaking point. Physically I was exhausted and emotionally I was ready for him to go home. He died one evening, with me by his side.

When I read the account of Elisha, and how he didn't want to accept Elijah's going home, I could relate. When Elisha couldn't stand to be away from Elijah, I could relate. And, when Elisha picked up the mantel and went to work, I could relate to that too.

God has a way of turning unimaginable devastating news into a time of rest and peace. Don't be afraid of someone you love dying. He will walk that path with you and when you come out on the other side of the valley of death you will be forever changed for the better.

## Take the Dirty Dip

### Read 2 Kings 5:1-16

Naaman was a commander in the Syrian army. Syria had been an enemy of Israel but at this time there must have been peace. During one of the raids on Israel, Syria had taken captive a young girl who was now a personal slave to Naaman's wife.

Naaman was highly regarded by his master, the king of Syria. He did have a problem. He had leprosy. If he had been an Israelite, he would not have been living around other healthy people.

Leprosy is a disease that damages skin and the nervous system. It starts as a skin lesion, often just a white patch on the skin. It then progresses to an open wound. In later stages of the disease fingers, toes and sometimes the nose will be eaten away. It also causes eye damage and so blindness occurs.

People with leprosy, in Biblical times, lived outside of the camp or walled cities. When walking amongst healthy people they were to call out, "Unclean, unclean." Since contact with secretions is the way leprosy is spread, the "unclean" were not allowed to be greeted, since greetings in Eastern countries require being touched or hugged.

The people of Syria must not have had these restrictions because Naaman not only lived at home but was the commander of an army and spent time with the Syrian king.

In verse 3 we see the unnamed servant girl tell her mistress that if Naaman would go to the prophet in Israel he would be healed.

### **Reflection:**

*If you had been taken from your home and held captive in a strange country, would you give advice that would heal your captors?*

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*What does this say about the young girl?*

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*About Naaman and his wife?*

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In verses 4-6 we see that Naaman takes the advice of his wife's servant girl and goes to the Syrian king. He asks permission to go to Israel. The king gives him permission along with a letter addressed to the king of Israel requesting that Naaman be cured of his leprosy. Note also that Naaman didn't go empty handed. He was willing to pay for whatever the prophet of Israel could do for him.

When the king of Israel gets the letter, he is immediately suspicious.

**Reflection:**

*What did the king of Israel think was happening and what was his reaction?*

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Just the fact that the Syrians had an Israelite girl as a servant shows that relations between the two countries were not the best. The Israeli king's reaction of fear also shows us that he was intimidated by the Syrians.

In verse 8 we see Elisha's response when he hears that the king had torn his robe. It's the opposite reaction of the king. Instead of fear, the prophet Elisha boldly says, "Send him to me and I'll show him that there is a prophet in Israel."

**Reflection:**

*Have you ever had a time in your life when you were so afraid of "what might happen" that you reacted like the king of Israel?*

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*In the end, were your fears realistic?*

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Naaman goes to the prophet's house and there he is greeted by a messenger (Verses 9-10). The messenger tells Naaman what he is to do to get rid of the leprosy. Naaman's response is immediate anger. (Verses 11-12) He has his own ideas about how this "healing" thing is supposed to happen.

**Reflection:**

*Describe what Naaman thought Elisha would do*

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*What did Elisha tell him to do?*

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Fortunately for Naaman he had some smart servants. They reasoned with him and he eventually did what Elisha had instructed him to do. The outcome was exactly what he wanted. To be healed.

God often asks us to do things that we feel are impossible. A person that has a diagnosis of cancer may find healing only after going through chemo and radiation therapy. A person with an unfaithful spouse may only find a wonderful marriage after going through the pain of separation. A parent may only find help for their child by removing themselves from the child's life. A person with relationship issues may only find a healthy relationship when forgiveness is involved.

Sometimes, when we ask God for a miracle, we have a pre-conceived notion how that "miracle" is going to come about. Like Naaman, we don't want to walk out into that "dirty" river. We want God to wave His hands over us, say a few words, and "presto", we have a miracle!!!

God loves us and wants us to be healthy and whole spiritually. Sometimes, the miracle that we are looking for has nothing to do with our physical health, marital happiness, or our family and relationship issues. Sometimes it's all about our spiritual growth.

Naaman learned a valuable lesson when he followed Elisha's instructions.

**Reflection:**

*What do you think Naaman learned from his dip in the "dirty" river?*

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*(Just think what might have happened if Naaman had not been swayed to follow Elisha's instructions.)*

**Hidden Treasure:** Isaiah 55:8-9 NKJV "For My thoughts *are* not your thoughts, Nor *are* your ways My ways," says the LORD. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts."

**Consider This:** We can always know that God has our best interest at heart. No matter what the situation God's way is the only way to have the results that we want!

### **Application to my life:**

My husband and I ran a Crisis Center that was completely faith based. The donations came in from the kind hearts of people, many who were elderly, and many were \$10 gifts. We were also supported by churches. The miracle I wanted, for our financial situation, was for God to wave His mighty hand and each month I would have the right amount to pay the bills and buy the necessities for running the center. After all, we had up to sixteen people living in the home continuously. Didn't they need to see that God provided for them? (And it would be much less stress for me!)

Unlike Naaman, many of my advisors told me that if God wanted me in the Crisis Center work that He would "wave His hands and I would have money each month". As a younger Christian I was swayed back and forth. I knew the Lord wanted me there but when others told me this, I would go to Him and ask, "Lord, do you truly want me here?" Each time He would assure me that, "Yes!" He did.

Usually this reassurance would come in the form of a miracle. Let me name just a few:

- We ran out of all paper products including toilet paper, paper towels, napkins and tissues. Not having a dime in the account, and doubting whether God wanted me where I was, He sent a sorority who had just had a retreat and wanted to donate the leftovers. Guess what we got! Toilet paper, paper towels, napkins and tissues.
- We were three months behind in our house payment. We needed to come up with \$1800. Each month I had begged God to provide and each month we were in arrears. We were handed a 72-hour notice to vacate and guess what we got! An \$1800 donation.
- I was supposed to speak at a church in a town 150 miles away. It was the dead of winter and not only were the tires on our car bald, but the car had just broken down. "How am I supposed to get there?" I cried out to God. A little old man called and asked if I would like a Chrysler New Yorker. He just bought a new car and thought maybe we could use it. That car had great tires and because of how heavy it was, carried us the 150 miles on packed snow, without a problem.

These are just a few of the "miracles" we saw while living at the Crisis Center. God never failed to provide but it didn't always come in at the time limit I wanted. Although I wanted it RIGHT NOW, God knew that what I really needed was to grow up spiritually. It didn't hurt me and was actually beneficial for me when I took that "dirty dip"!

## The Blue Water Incident

### Read Joshua 1: 1-9

Over forty years before this event Joshua and eleven other men went into this same land as spies. Out of twelve men only Joshua and Caleb brought back a good report and said, "This is good land. Let's go!" The other ten men stirred up fear in the people by focusing on giants that lived in the land. They even were so mad at Joshua and Caleb for their opinion that they tried to stone them to death. Unfortunately, the consensus was rebellion and so God punished the people by having them roam forty years in the desert. When all the people that rebelled were dead, this new generation, along with Joshua and Caleb, were brought back to enter the Promised Land under the leadership of Joshua.

God speaks to Joshua and lets him know that now is the time for him to go into this land but that he won't be going alone. In verses 5 and 9 God says, "I will be with you."

### Reflection:

*God brought Joshua back to a place that did not have fond memories. What might Joshua have been thinking as he was put into this leadership role?*

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*Has there been a time in your life that you realized that you were right back where you started, and the last time things didn't go well?*

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*How do you think Joshua felt when God told him, "I will be with you."?*

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God told Joshua that He would not leave him or forsake him. (verse 5) Another way to say this is, "I will not fail you or abandon you." Joshua could have let the things that he had gone through prevent him from believing that God was with him.

**Reflection:**

*Has there been a time in your life when you felt like God was far away? Why did you feel that way?*

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*What brought you back to the place that you realized that God had not abandoned you after all?*

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In verses 6 & 7 God tells Joshua to be "strong and courageous". Then in verse 9 He says, "Haven't I commanded you to be strong and courageous?" Joshua had seen what could happen, even though he was following God's direction. The last time he stood in this place, he had a great deal of faith and was willing to go in and conquer the land. Now he was in a leadership role, standing at the same place that he had before. God had reassured him that He would be with him. Now God was saying, "You need to be strong and full of courage and together we will do this."

*Why was it important for Joshua to be "strong and courageous"?*

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**Read Joshua 1:10-18**



Joshua now takes charge and directs the people to get ready to cross over the Jordan. He reminds them what Moses had told them, that this land was theirs. God had given it to them, but their ancestors had failed to have faith and move forward. Now was their time to show faith.

The people's response was that they would follow all of Joshua's commands. They also let him know that they realized that God was with him.

Note the last part of verse 18. They too remind Joshua to "be strong and of good courage".

**Reflection:**

*How do you think Joshua felt when the people supported him?*

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*Has there been a time in your life that God used someone else to confirm what He had been telling you?*

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**Hidden Treasure:** Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God *is* with you wherever you go." Joshua 1:9 (NKJV)

**Consider This:** Once there was a fish named George. He loved life. He loved to swim and play in the water. One day he was having an especially fun time. He was playing in some beautiful blue water. There were pretty dark green sprigs sticking up near some white rock. The water had a wonderful worm smell. All of a sudden, a bigger fish came by and lopped off his tail. He survived! But after that, whenever he passed through blue water with dark green sprigs sticking out of white rock and the water smelled slightly of worm, his heart beat just a bit faster.

Joshua found himself in this situation. The last time he stood on the banks of the Jordan, people wanted to kill him. His heart must have beat just a little faster thinking about what might happen. Then the Lord comes along and says, "I'll be with you." And then He commands Joshua to do something that doesn't come naturally. He says, "Be strong and courageous."

In order for George to go back to the happy life that he had prior to his encounter with the “Big Fish” he would have to be strong and courageous. Going back into that blue water would be scary but avoiding it would leave him in bondage to the past. Each time he courageously went into the blue water, the “Big Fish” went further and further to the back of his mind.

## **Application to my life**

I had a close friend during the early years of ministry. As a Pastor’s wife, that is a rare commodity. We did everything together but most of it was in a ministry capacity. We talked several times daily by phone and prayed together often. It was a joy to have her as a friend.

One day, because I didn’t agree with a decision that she made, she got angry. I called her the next day and when she answered she said, “What do you want?” We had gone from a closeness I treasured to enemies overnight and for no apparent reason. We had disagreed before. What was this all about?

At this point I was in George’s position. I noted my surroundings and I used my senses to remember this exact spot. “THIS WILL NEVER HAPPEN TO ME AGAIN” was my new motto.

I grieved over this for a year. Many in my church knew the heartache that I felt. They too lost her because she started attending another church. Everything we had done together became a chore for me. It was a reminder that she wasn’t there, and I was alone.

During this time, people started trying to help out in those areas. Although I let them help, I didn’t let them “in”. My heart was broken, and I was not going to go through this again. When I would find my heart starting to love my new helpers I backed away. My senses on overload would remind me that I couldn’t chance it. I couldn’t trust them; I couldn’t be sure that they wouldn’t stomp on my heart.

One day I was so overwhelmed that I just poured out my heart to the Lord. I cried and cried. And when I got up, I was renewed. I realized that I needed close friendships because that was how God made me.

There wasn’t an overnight change. I had to work on it. I had to open my heart even when, like George, the water looked right, the foliage looked right, and the smell was just right. As I allowed myself to swim through the water, with the Lord at my side, I started to relax and enjoy my new relationships.

Have I been hurt by them? YES! Would I do it again? YES! We don’t have any guarantees that someone won’t hurt us, but the benefits outweigh the pain.

I have had many other experiences like this in my life. I often tell the Lord, (*Whiny voice.*) “I don’t want to do this again.” And He always responds with, “I know. But you need to do this so you can have a full life.”

Once I begin, it gets easier each time. Like George, eventually the hurt of the past leaves and I again can enjoy the carefree life I had before.

## Scarlet that Saved the Harlot

### Read Joshua 2:1-22

Two spies are sent to check out the enemy. They go into the house of a prostitute named Rahab. There were many benefits of going there. First, it was a place where they could go without many questions asked. It was a place where strangers would come for a nights lodging. Since it was a hub of activity, information would be plentiful. Also, the home was situated on the wall which would be an easy exit.

As the spies glean information, men come and demand that Rahab bring the men out. She quickly takes them to the roof of her home, which was a flat area used for drying flax, and hides them.

After misleading the king's men, she goes to the two spies and talks to them about her concerns. First, she tells them that she knows that God has given the land to Israel and she explains that her people are frightened of them. The reason they are frightened is God's reputation for delivering His people out of Egypt and the miracles He performed. She then proclaims (Verse 11) that God is the "God in heaven above and earth beneath".

Because she believes her own statement about God, she asks that her family be spared. (Note that she saved the men before she asked for anything.)

The men agree that her family would be spared. The condition was that she would not tell anyone and that her entire family would be in her house when they conquered her people. If she strayed from the plan in any way, her family would be lost.

### **Reflection:**

*Why do you think that someone with Rahab's reputation would wonder about God?*

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*Why is it important to note that Rahab hid the men without anything in return?*

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*How would the Israelites know to save her house and the people in it?*

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**Read Joshua 6:22-25**

Several things happened within Israel’s camp before they came back to conquer the city and save Rahab and her family. Since this was not an immediate action, it took great faith on Rahab’s part to wait patiently for her family’s salvation.

When the time came for Israel to conquer the city, Rahab and her family were saved first; And because of her great help in saving the spies, she became a part of Israel.

**Reflection:**

*Why do you think that God used a harlot to help the children of Israel?*

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*How would you have felt as you waited, and your rescue didn’t come immediately?*

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**Hidden Treasure:** “By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace.” Hebrews 11:31

**Consider This:**

The story of Rahab is an important one. Rahab, the harlot, was not all cleaned up in life when God chose to use her. She was still going about the business of sin but within her was a stirring of something fresh and wonderful. She believed in the God of Israel.

We probably have a “list” somewhere of the qualifications for serving God. I’m sure the word “harlot” isn’t on that list anywhere. And yet, we see God using people that we wouldn’t even consider “good enough” to serve. He used a loose woman to bring salvation to a town. (The woman at the well.) He used a Princess to save a child who would save Israel. (Pharaoh’s daughter) He used a murderer to bring the Gentiles to salvation. (Paul)

God is in the business of changing lives and using people where they are. Do you feel as if you have sin that is too great for God to use you? Don’t let Satan use that lie against you. God just wants us to be available and He will use our tiny mustard seed of faith to change the world.

Did I mention that Rahab is in the lineage of Jesus? Look at Matthew 1:5. She is King David's great grandmother. And note that there is no sign of the word "harlot" in that passage. Yes, God is in the business of changing lives. Even mine.

### **Application to my life:**

As a pastor's wife I have many opportunities to teach those I minister to. I had a lady come to me one day and tell me about her neighbor. This was her description: "She is a single parent and she yells at her kids constantly. She goes out and parties almost every evening and leaves her kids with a babysitter and then she usually brings home a man for the night. I think she's doing drugs too, at least marijuana." She went on to explain that the woman was unreachable.

And here was the teachable moment. (smile) My response, "You just described your pastor's wife before I met Jesus."

Yes, folks. God took a divorced, drinking, drug using, promiscuous woman and changed her. Not overnight! He healed my brokenness a little bit at a time. (And I'm still a work in progress.)

I know people who have had a background like mine who don't feel worthy to serve the Lord. I have never felt that way. Unfortunately, I have had times in my life when Christians, who knew my background, felt I was disqualified for service. It saddens me that people would think that they aren't worthy to work for the Lord. It saddens me more that Christians would feel that the blood of Jesus is not sufficient to cover all sin.

What saved Rahab? Faith and the scarlet cord! What saved sin sick Kay? Faith and the scarlet blood of Jesus!



## Deal with the Heaps!

Moses and Aaron were busily trying to get Pharaoh to let God's people go. The Israelites had been in bondage to the Egyptians for hundreds of years. God told Moses it was time to go and free them. With his brother Aaron's help, Moses had been showing Pharaoh that the Israelites served a mighty God.

Pharaoh had already watched as God turned the waters of Egypt into blood. Pharaoh was stubborn and he still would not let God's people go.

### **Read Exodus 8:1-7**

Through Pharaoh's stubbornness the people of Egypt suffered. Frogs were everywhere. In their bedrooms! In their kneading bowls! In their ovens! Everywhere!

#### **Reflection:**

How do you think the Egyptians felt while fending off frogs in their households?

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Do you think the Egyptians would have been angry with God or their leadership?

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### **Read Exodus 8:8-11**

So, Pharaoh calls Moses and Aaron and asks them to call on the Lord to take away the frogs. This was not a repentant kind of attitude. Pharaoh just wanted the frogs "gone" but he still was not willing to let God's people go.

Moses tells Pharaoh to pick a time to have the frogs gone. This way, Pharaoh could not say that it was just a coincidence. He chooses the next day. WHAT? The next day?

**Reflection:**

Why do you think Pharaoh called on Moses and Aaron and not his magicians?

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If you had frogs making themselves at home in your house and yard, would you say, "Remove them tomorrow."?

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**Read Exodus 8:12-15**

Moses and Aaron asked God to remove this plague and he did. The frogs died and they were gathered into heaps. And the heaps stunk.

**Reflection:**

How do you think the people felt to have the frogs gone?

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What do you think they thought about the stinky aftermath?

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**Hidden Treasure:** "Have mercy upon me, O God, According to Your lovingkindness; According to the multitude of Your tender mercies, Blot out my transgressions. <sup>2</sup> Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, And cleanse me from my sin. <sup>3</sup> For I acknowledge my transgressions, And my sin is always before me. Psalms 51:1-3 (NKJV)



**Consider This:** As we look at the account of Moses and Pharaoh there is something that struck me. Although Pharaoh did not give in to what God asked him to do, even if he had he still would have had to deal with the heaps.

God does not always take away our consequences of sin. At times He will, but more often He allows our consequences to help us remember what the cost is for our sin.

In Scripture we see this many times. David's baby died because he had an affair with Bathsheba; The Israelites walked around in the desert for 40 years because of their lack of faith; Moses was not allowed to see the promised land because he took credit that should have been God's.

The good thing is that we have a great God and He will help us deal with the heaps!

**Application to my life:** There are many consequences for divorce. A divided family can bring about all kinds of issues especially when both parents are thrown together for graduations, weddings and significant events in the children's lives.

One such event happened when my husband's oldest son got married. During rehearsal, while everyone was trying to figure out the dynamics of who sits where, the pastor took Vernon aside and asked how he was handling the situation. My husband said, "I'm praising God for consequences. He said if we did things His way things will go much better. I did not do what He said and now I suffer the consequences. Praise God He is faithful!"

As a parent I have had to allow consequences and they hurt me far more than they did my child. One such time sticks out in my mind.

During the Christmas holidays the movie theater gave out free tickets to see family movies. This was a luxury in our family since we didn't have much money to spare for fun stuff. My daughter was a paper girl and she loved to visit with the people along the way which always made her late. The day of the movie I told her that she needed to get her route done on time or she wouldn't be able to join us for the movie.

When she didn't come home at the designated time, I went to look for her. She was talking to a lady at the beginning of her route. I told her that we were leaving for the theater and she would need to finish her route. She cried and begged but I knew that the consequence for this had to be that she missed the movie.

I'm sure everyone at the theater that day wondered why that lady was crying through the entire movie. I was so sad that she didn't get to go that I could not quit crying.

When I got home, she came and told me how wrong she had been and that she missed out on the movie because she had disobeyed. And so, I cried some more!

I wonder how our wonderful Heavenly Father feels when He must allow consequences for our sin.



## God's Restoration Project

Peter was a disciple with warts. He seemed to always put his foot in his mouth, jump to conclusions, and get himself in trouble. One such time was when Jesus said that all the disciples would stumble, and Peter (foot in mouth) said, "Not me!"

### **Read Matthew 26:31-35**

Peter can hardly contain his enthusiasm. "Even if everyone else stumbles I will not be one of them." Jesus calmly replies, "Tonight before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times." And Peter's reply? "Even if I have to die with you, I will not deny you."

### **Reflection:**

Why do you think that Peter was so sure that he would not deny Jesus?

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What do you think Jesus was thinking as He told Peter what would happen?

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### **Read Matthew 26:69-75**

Peter had run away before (see Matthew 26:56) and now he was in a sticky situation. The first time he's confronted he's outside the courtyard. He's hanging back so no one will know he knows Jesus. A girl recognizes Peter as one of Jesus' followers, but he denies it.

Then he sees another girl and she recognizes him as a follower of Jesus. He again denies it with an oath.

Then a group comes to him and tells him he must be a follower of Jesus because he talks like a Galilean. Peter then curses and swears saying, "I DO NOT KNOW THE MAN!"

And the rooster crows and Peter is left weeping bitterly.

**Reflection:**

Put yourself in Peter’s shoes. How do you think he felt as each denial came about?

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As Peter was weeping, what might have been his thoughts?

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Has there ever been a time in your life that you felt hopeless because your actions put a relationship at risk?

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Jesus is crucified. Peter must have been devastated. Although Jesus had told the disciples that this would happen the reality of it was overwhelming. Grief was replaced by awe when the tomb was empty. When Jesus appeared to the disciples, as they were hiding in fear, (John 20:19-20) they rejoiced in His presence.

One day while fishing Jesus revealed Himself to some of the disciples. He invited them to breakfast and as they were gathered around the fire, Jesus asks Peter some questions.

**Read John 21:15-19**

The questions Jesus asked Peter helped to stamp “forgiven” on all the denials that Peter had proclaimed in the past. With this exchange Peter renewed his commitment to follow the Lord at any cost.

**Hidden Treasure:** “For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.” Psalms 103:11-12 (NKJV)

**Consider This:** God always knows where we stand. He recognizes those times when the sin of the past has continued to haunt us. Peter must have had some residual issues with his denials. To carry such a burden would take away from the ministry that God had prepared for him to do. What a beautiful way to restore him to his fullest!

**Application to my life:** I had been the guest speaker at a women's retreat at a retreat center. We were closing the retreat with a worship service at the church building. As I was heading to the church I remarked to my niece, who had been at the retreat, that I recognized the boarded-up building that we passed. I said, "That building used to be a bar that I spent a lot of time in. I thank God that He rescued me from that life, or I would be boarded up too."

When we walked into the church building, I felt like I had been there before. It had an odd arrangement, with three tiers all facing a stage. I said to my niece, "I think this was a bar. I spent some time here too. The last time they had a belly dancer."

All through the retreat the Lord's presence had been palpable. The worship service was no different. As the Pastor announced that there would be a special, I heard the familiar chords of one of my favorite songs, "Alabaster Box." As the music played, a dancer came from the back and danced, with abandon, sharing the story of the sinful woman pouring her heart out to the Lord.

Although I had not felt the guilt, because he threw my sins away, I felt such a love from my Father. He had, through a young girl's talent, reminded me that He has made me completely new. From the sexual dance of a belly dancer to the worshipful dance of a child of the King using my favorite song, He showed me the depth of His love for me!

Here are some of the words to that song that sums up my feeling that evening.

"I can't forget the way life used to be.  
I was a prisoner to the sin that kept me bound.  
I spent my days poured my life without measure  
into a little treasure box, I thought I found.  
Until the day when Jesus came to me  
and healed my soul with the wonder of His touch.  
So now I'm giving back to Him all the praise He's worthy of.  
I've been forgiven and that's why I love Him so much."

JANICE SJOSTRAN



## Forgiven Much, Loves Much

We are going to look at two people who both knew Jesus. One, a prominent man, the other, a woman with a past. One, a man who doesn't recognize his sin nor does he regard Jesus for who He is; the other, a woman who knows her sins are horrible and shows her love for Jesus in a wonderful way.

### **Read Luke 7:36-50**

Let's look into the life of this man who invited Jesus to his home. Simon was a Pharisee which says that he would be a strict law keeper. His entire life would be built around his ability to keep the law. He was probably also self-righteous and spent much of his time telling others how sinful they were. In Matthew 23:27 Jesus called Pharisees, hypocrites.

#### **Reflection:**

What are some characteristics of a hypocrite?

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We don't know why Simon invited Jesus to his home, but we do know what his heart was like. He did not give Jesus the normal greeting of a guest, a kiss on both cheeks, nor did he provide water to wash His feet. Finally, he didn't anoint Jesus' head with oil which was usually done following the foot washing.

#### **Reflection:**

Other than their love for God, what are some reasons that people attend church today?

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Now let's look at the woman. We know some things about her. First, she was uninvited. We know this because a Pharisee would never invite a sinner to eat with them. Not only is she described as a sinner in verse 37 but Simon's thoughts in verse 39 shows us exactly who people thought she was. "If Jesus really is a prophet, He wouldn't allow this sinful woman to touch Him." We don't know what kind of sin this woman was involved in. Whatever kind it was; it was not hidden from public view. EVERYONE KNEW!

**Reflection:**

As humans we have a tendency to categorize sin. What sins might be looked on with contempt today?

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Are there people that you avoid because of their sin?

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This woman must have played and replayed the events that were going to take place. We know that her motive was to anoint Jesus. How do we know? She brought an alabaster flask with her. This wasn't a spontaneous moment. This was a planned time to worship Jesus. How brave she was to go into a crowded room with people who hated her

**Reflection:**

What things might have been rushing through this woman's thoughts as she made her way to Simon's house?

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Can you see this picture in your mind? Jesus is reclining and talking with the Pharisee and in comes a woman, crying, and she begins to wipe His feet with her hair. She takes out a beautiful alabaster flask and pours perfumed oil on His feet. The aroma fills the room as she continues in worship. Now, take note of verse 39. Simon says something to himself that includes a statement of unbelief. "if He were a prophet."

A teachable moment has been presented. Jesus tells a story about two debtors. One owes ten times more than the other but both debts are forgiven. Who would love the creditor more? Of course, Simon responds with, "the one whom he forgave more."

Note Jesus' comparison of the sinful woman and the Pharisee in verses 43-47. "You didn't give me a kiss; she hasn't ceased to kiss my feet since she came in. You didn't wash my feet; she washes them with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You didn't anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with fragrant oil."



I wonder if Simon actually saw what Jesus was really saying. "Get the picture Simon! She loves me because she is forgiven much. You don't really know you have sin that needs forgiveness, so you don't love me." Although Simon was trying to keep the law and looked like he was religious his heart was not right. God sees our heart and knows all our sins.

When we categorize sin, we are taking away from the real lesson here. The issue was not that the woman's sin was terrible, and Simon's was not as bad so the woman would love Jesus more. The issue was that the woman knew how horrible she looked before a Holy God. Simon's arrogance wouldn't allow him to see himself as God saw him. He needed a Savior too.

Let me give you an example. We have two people. One was a hellion. She tried everything once to see if it was for her. She was married several times, was involved in alcohol and drugs, had numerous sexual relationships outside of marriage and was hateful and hard to get along with. When she became a Christian her entire life changed. She loved the Lord with all her heart and totally sold out to Him. Why? Because she realized what she had been saved from.

Now let's look at the other person. This man was raised in a Christian home, with Christian values instilled in him. He accepted Jesus as His Savior at a young age and lived his life as is expected from a Christian. Not that he was perfect but the choices he made in life were good ones. He married as a virgin, reared his children in a godly home, attended church regularly and would be looked at as a righteous man. He also loves the Lord with all his heart and is totally sold out to Him. Why is he different than Simon? Because he realizes that his sin was just as ugly as hers.

**Hidden Treasure:** "I waited patiently for the LORD; And He inclined to me, And heard my cry. He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, Out of the miry clay, And set my feet upon a rock, *And* established my steps. He has put a new song in my mouth-- Praise to our God; Many will see *it* and fear, And will trust in the LORD." Psalms 40:1-3 (NKJV)

**Consider this:** Do you realize what you were saved from? Are there people in your life that you avoid because their sin is so ugly? Start today to see sin in the eyes of God and only then will you learn to love much because you were forgiven much.

**Application to my life:** I have an ugly background. When I was first saved, I was so excited to share the change that God made in my life that I was often surprised at the reaction I would get. When I was about a four-year-old Christian an opportunity came about for me to teach at a women's retreat. I was really excited because the Lord had been priming me to speak on, "How to love the unlovely."

After a committee meeting of the camp coordinators I was approached with a request. They would still like me to speak but I could not share my past. I prayerfully declined their request because I felt the Lord wanted me to share just as He had given the lesson to me.

I was approached by my pastor who, after hearing why I declined, claimed I was spiritually prideful and that I needed to do as they asked. I again felt the Holy Spirit prompting me to say no and so I again declined with the words, "I cannot speak without sharing what God wants me to share."

Because I was on the program I was allowed to speak "my way". I spoke on how Jesus loved, touched and hung around the unlovely of the world. I encouraged those in the audience to love people even when they are unlovely.

My final remarks after sharing my lesson, including my testimony, went something like this. "I was asked to give the lesson you just heard without sharing my past. Why? Because I'm unlovely." You could have heard a pin drop.

## Am I Really Free?

Freedom! This word seems to echo off the rafters of our country. Although, in this country we have freedoms that few enjoy, we also have great bondage. This bondage can be summed up in a word. SIN! When lives are controlled by sin then captivity is the result and liberation is necessary.

Christians can also be in bondage. Although there are many forms of bondage, we will only look at one. First, let's look at a woman who didn't know the word freedom, until she met her Liberator.

### **Luke 8:1-3**

Here we meet Mary Magdalene and we learn a little about this woman. First, we know where she lived. She was from Magdala, a city in Galilee. Another thing we learn is that she is supporting Jesus' ministry. This may mean that she was wealthy, but she could have had a trade that allowed her to travel and sell her wares. Whatever resources she used for the support; we do know that she was a person with a giving spirit.

Contrast that with the description of her in verse 2, "out of whom had come seven demons". Although that is all that is said, from other Scriptures we can learn what life was like when someone was demon possessed.

**Reflection:** Read the following Scriptures and note the descriptions of those that were demon possessed.

Mark 5:1-20 & Luke 8:27

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Matthew 9:32-33

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Matthew 12:22

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*(These verses do not indicate that anyone with a seizure disorder, or blind, or unable to speak is possessed by a demon. This just means that demon possession can resemble diseases of today.)*

Viewing these scriptures, we can see what Mary Magdalene's life might have been like. Her description was probably most like Mark 5 and Luke 8 because she had seven demons, not just one. In both scriptures the same man was described as having multiple demons. Notice in Mark 5:5 that "night and day he was crying out and cutting himself with stones". That is a picture of the misery that he was in. He was angry, violent and powerful; Homeless and naked. He had nothing to offer anyone.

**Reflection:**

Has there been a time in your life when you were, like this man, so weighed down that you had nothing to offer? Describe the feelings you had at that time.

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We don't know the story of the old Mary meeting Jesus. That Mary probably had made a name for herself in the area. She may have been homeless, naked and angry. We can picture her meeting her Liberator for the first time. Can you see her falling down at His feet? Even the demons recognized who Jesus was. They knew He had come to provide deliverance to all who wanted it. Did the old Mary see a ray of light at the end of the tunnel? Did she know that her life was about to change?

Look at Mark 5:15. Instantly the man went from a naked, insane, homeless man to a sane, dressed man sitting at the feet of Jesus. I wonder how long it had been since this man had been able to sit still. Can you picture Mary? Silence and peace surround her as she sits at the feet of Jesus.

No wonder she gave her all to Jesus' ministry. No wonder she was so brave that she watched the crucifixion (John 19:25) and went to the burial site and watched as the stone was rolled in front of the tomb. (Matthew 27:57-61).

Now look at John 20:11-18 and Mark 16:9. Mary Magdalene was the first person that Jesus appeared to after He had risen! How blessed she must have been. Do you wonder if the disciples thought she had lost her mind when she told them she had seen Jesus?

Let's go back and look at freedom. Many people in the world are not saved and sin has them bound. Freedom can be found only as Mary Magdalene found it, through Jesus.

Now let's look at a bondage that Christians are tied to. It's called self-image. I'm not necessarily talking about an outward image. I'm talking about where people see themselves before the Lord. Let's take Mary Magdalene as an example. What if she had always thought of herself as a demon possessed woman even though she was delivered from that bondage. She would not have lived the abundant life that God had planned for her. She probably wouldn't have been there to be the first to see Jesus.

Christians can be so bound that they are immobile. We know that Mary was not stationary. She walked away from her old life, grasp the new one, and became a tool of God.

When Christians are bogged down with their past, they cannot be all that they should be for the Lord.

Is your past dictating your future? Do you see yourself as a low-class Christian and so unable to be of use for the Lord? Remember, when you said, "yes" to the free gift of salvation you became a "new creation". (2 Corinthians 5:17) As a new creation the old is gone and the new is come. Each Christian had the same experience so each one started in the same spot. A baby.

Now are you going to crawl around all your life or are you going to turn your back on the person you were, like Mary did, and give all to God? The choice is up to you.

**Hidden Treasure:** Titus 3:4-7 But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

**Consider This:** When I said, "Yes" to God He made me into a new creation. My old life is completely gone and now I am His child. I will no longer be bound by the lie that God can't use me because of my past.

**Application to my life:** We had a few minutes for testimony after a ladies Bible study. As a new Christian, I was on-fire to share what the Lord had done in my life. Honesty was always at the forefront. This is who I was, and this is who I am.

I shared about my past including my three marriages. As usual, when I was finished there was dead quiet.

After the final prayer I had a lady ask if she could speak to me alone. She began by telling me how brave I was to share the details of my past. She then shared that she also had been divorced twice and she was now married to the Godly man that I knew. Because there were no children from her previous marriage, she chose to keep her past a secret because she knew the outcome.

At this point I didn't know the outcome. I was just an ignorant new Christian. Later I saw what she was talking about and I began to withdraw from sharing my testimony. I saw my past as something to hide because it was so ugly. I lost the joy of my salvation and became a robotic Christian just going through the motions.

One day during my private Bible Study I read Psalm 51:12 "Restore to me the joy of Your salvation and uphold me *by Your* generous Spirit." I immediately prayed, "Lord, what happened to my joy?" His response was to remind me that I had allowed opinions to stop what He was doing through my testimony.

From that day on I have not stopped sharing the good, the bad, and the ugly of my past and to praise the One who changed me. The joy of my salvation has returned!