

Believers

lessons from women of powerful faith

HER NAME IS WOMAN BIBLE STUDY

Gien Karssen



Gien Karssen is a storyteller. Although there are many studies about the women in the Bible, I have never read one more practical than *Her Name Is Woman*. Gien makes these biblical women really come alive as you observe their actions and the effects of their lives. She helps you draw out applications that are relevant today. Gien is one of the best trainers I know for young Bible study leaders. She brings the Word of God to bear upon situations in day-to-day living. My prayer is that this book will work as a seed that brings forth much fruit.

CORRIE TEN BOOM

*Author of *The Hiding Place**

All my life I have read about the women of the Bible, learning much from them even though they were somewhat vague, historic characters. In this book, these same characters have suddenly come alive. Because of Gien's careful research, sanctified imagination, and skill as a writer, I found myself understanding these women and their situations in a new way. Knowing more about the customs of their day helps us understand better why they acted as they did. It is interesting to note that God's women, down through the centuries, have enjoyed a freedom the world finds difficult to understand—the freedom to be and to do that which God intended. You will find this book both interesting and enlightening.

RUTH BELL GRAHAM

*Author of *Footprints of a Pilgrim**

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Believers: Lessons from Women of Powerful Faith

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Foreword

What do you want to be known for? When you come to the end of your days, what is it that you most hope your lasting legacy will be? Think on it a moment. Is not the answer that you were first and foremost a lover of God, and that you brought His love to all those you encountered?

So it is with the women you will soon learn more about. Their stories are not merely encouraging reminders of what is possible for us; their lives also shed the light of understanding upon our lives—and on the faithfulness of our good God.

These women are like us, living in a fallen world. There were many times for them when God felt far away, uninterested, or at best distracted. Continuing to believe that God is good and putting their faith into practice by seeking Him, praying, and worshiping Him in the midst of what seemed like silence on His part was hard. It is hard for me. It is hard for you, too. God knows that. He knows that our faith is often tested. He also knows that we come to know Him more deeply, believe Him more thoroughly, and love Him more wholeheartedly through the difficult times.

Over two thousand years ago, Jesus spoke the words “Don’t be afraid; just believe” to the synagogue leader Jairus,

and He is speaking them to us today. No matter what is going on around you or inside of you, Jesus says, “Look to Me. Walk with Me and keep on moving forward. Don’t look at your fears or your failures; look at Me.” He says, “All things are possible for those who believe.”

Press on in your heart toward Him, dear sister. Be encouraged. God is faithful. His invitation is simply to *believe* Him and rest in His love. I know that is both the most difficult thing for us to do and the most vital. It may feel impossible to you some days, but nothing is impossible for God.

Just as these women knew.

Hebrews 11:6 says, “Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must *believe* that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him” (emphasis added). We are believers. We come to God because we believe He exists, we believe we need Him, and we believe that He is good. When we seek Him, the Bible promises, we will find Him—and finding Him is the most wonderful reward.

Jesus has done everything, paid everything, and won everything to win you. He believes you are priceless beyond measure. He invites us to believe Him, trust Him, and look to Him. For your everything. Even your legacy. He hasn’t changed. The God of these women you are about to study has not changed. He has loved you from before the beginning of time.

Don’t be afraid. Just believe.

Stasi Eldredge, author of Captivating and Becoming Myself

How to Use This Study

Do you long for a meaningful life? Do you want to become whole and fulfilled? These inborn, inner urges originate from the commission God gave woman at her creation. He expects woman, an equal partner with man, to be willing to step into her calling. The spiritual side of a woman is extremely important.

The women in this book are not fictional. They are real. They lived in history and, in their desires and problems, in their hopes and ambitions, are living among us today. Though the Bible doesn't share the full extent of their stories, I imaginatively explore what these women may have been doing and feeling in the time and place in which God placed them, in hopes that you will connect with their journeys even further.

As you learn about each of the women throughout the *Her Name Is Woman* series, the central question you must ask is, What place does God have in her life? The answer to this question decides the extent of every woman's happiness, usefulness, and motivation to keep moving forward. If God

is absent, or if He is not given His rightful place, then life is without true purpose—without perspective.

As you read this book, join with these women of the Bible to consider your attitude toward God. And I hope that as you get acquainted with these women, you will make a fresh or renewed start in getting to know the Word of God.

I trust that meeting these women will turn out to be an unexpected gift for you and that you will resonate deeply with their experiences—and I pray that they will show you the way to a richer and happier life with God and other people.

AS YOU BEGIN

You may approach this book in one of two ways. First, just read it. The stories are intended to draw you deeply into the life of each woman in these pages. But be sure to include the Bible passages referenced at the beginning of each chapter in your reading. They are an important part of the book and are necessary for understanding the chapter. Second, you may wish to discuss the book in a small group. Considering the subjects and questions with some other people will add depth and greater insight to your study of these women.

Scripture references at the bottom of many pages will help you dig deeper into the Bible's wealth of truth and wisdom. You may answer the questions throughout each chapter personally or discuss them with your group. You may also conduct topical studies of these women or research accompanying themes. Whatever your direction might be, this study will

become richer as you discuss these women with others, especially after your own individual preparation. Whether you do this study on your own or with others, be sure to use a journal so you may record your thoughts on the questions and any other things God impresses on your heart through the course of this study.

SUGGESTIONS FOR BIBLE STUDY GROUPS

1. Start with a small group—usually with a minimum of six and a maximum of ten people. This way your group will be large enough for an interesting discussion but small enough for each member to participate. As your numbers increase, start a second group.
2. Before you start the group, decide how often you want to meet. Many people may hesitate to give themselves to something new for an indefinite period of time. There are twelve chapters in each book of the *Her Name Is Woman* series, so they may easily be used as twelve-week studies. However, these books can just as easily work as six-week studies (two chapters per week). Some chapters are longer and will take more time to work through, while others are short enough to be combined into a two-part lesson. Please note that the number of questions varies depending on the length of the lesson. Discuss what process will work best for your group.
3. Remember that a Bible study group should discuss the Bible. While many of the questions within this book

are designed to help women examine their individual faith journeys, Scripture informs every piece of the study and should be referenced as an integral part of the discussion. Each participant should prepare her study at home beforehand so each member may share her personal findings.

4. Stress the necessity of applying the lessons learned, and help one another in doing this. There is a far greater need for spiritual growth than for an increase of knowledge. “How can what I learned influence my life?” is a question each participant should ask herself.
5. Determine, before you start, to attend every meeting. Miss only when you absolutely cannot attend. If you can’t attend, do the study anyway and make up for it at the next meeting.
6. Consider yourself a member of the group. Feel free to make a contribution. Lack of experience should not keep you from taking part in the discussion. On the other hand, resist the temptation to dominate the group.

SUGGESTIONS FOR LEADERS OF BIBLE STUDY GROUPS

- Be sure that you have given sufficient time to your own Bible study and that you have completed it.
- Come prepared. Make notes of the points you want to stress.

- Begin and end on time. Set the tone by starting promptly at the first meeting.
- Few mountain climbers enjoy being carried to the top. Leave the joy of climbing to the group members. Don't do all the talking. Guide the discussion in such a way that each member of the group can participate.
- Don't allow any one person to dominate the conversation. Gently guide the group so each person may have an opportunity to speak. Sometimes it is necessary to talk privately with an overtalkative person, explaining the necessity of group participation. While some women may prefer to remain quiet, give them the opportunity to participate by asking them specific questions.
- Use the questions throughout each chapter as a jumping-off point, but feel the freedom to focus on issues that seem to particularly resonate with your group. However, don't allow the group to get too off topic. If a particular question becomes too time consuming or detracts from the overall study, redirect the conversation back to the main study. Getting back on track when the subject begins to wander can be done by saying, "Perhaps we could discuss this further after the study," or "Let's return to the main focus of the study."
- At the beginning of each session, open with prayer. Pray that Christ will speak to each person present by His Word. At the end of each session, pray for yourself and for each member of the group. Pray that the Holy Spirit will make you sensitive to the needs of others.

JOCHEBED

A Woman Who Traded Sorrow for Faith

When all kinds of trials and temptations crowd into your lives my brothers, don't resent them as intruders, but welcome them as friends! Realise that they come to test your faith.

JAMES 1:2-3, PH

READ

Exodus 1:8-22; Exodus 2:1-10



THE CRY OF A NEWBORN BABY cut through the reverent silence in the home.

Jochebed¹ sank into her pillows, tired. Briefly, a feeling of new motherly happiness flowed through her. She had once again brought a child into the world. Jehovah! His Name be praised! She had waited for this moment with great expectation, full of hope—and fear. “Is it a boy or a girl?” she asked anxiously.

Before the answer came, Jochebed was distracted by sounds

¹ Numbers 26:59

from outside. A whip cracked through the air and unmercifully cut the back of one of her fellow citizens. She heard a Hebrew screaming and the loud cursing of a furious Egyptian. Such sounds had become more familiar, as had the fear and tension that came with them. The situation of the Israelites in the Egyptian province of Goshen had been hard for a long time and was becoming increasingly worse.

As you begin this study, consider why the mother of Moses is listed in the ranks of the heroes of faith (Hebrews 11:23). What is faith, according to Hebrews 11:1?

Centuries before, the Egyptians had favored the Hebrews, largely due to the influence of Joseph, the son of Jacob. Through Joseph's insight and wise leadership, Egypt had withstood an immense famine, and the country became a haven for the entire Near East.² Years after Joseph died, the Egyptians continued to appreciate the Israelites.

Four centuries passed. God continued to bless His people in the foreign land—Israel's numbers increased, and her property holdings became larger and larger. But as God's blessing rested on Israel, the Egyptians began to feel threatened. They tightened their control over the Hebrews and tried to limit the Israelites' growth by suppression and forced

² Genesis 41:55-57, author's paraphrase

hard labor. Even those attempts failed. The Israelites began to multiply even faster.³

Finally Pharaoh tried to approach the problem at its roots and called for the two Hebrew midwives who helped the Israelite mothers with their deliveries. “Watch carefully whether a boy or a girl is born,” he ordered, anger rising in his voice. “If it is a boy you must kill him, but let the girls live.”⁴

That cruel order also failed to produce results, for the midwives showed more fear of God than of their king. They waved aside his orders with an excuse. “The Hebrew women have their babies so quickly that we cannot get there in time!” they said. “They are not slow like the Egyptian women.”⁵

The situation had not changed three years later when this son of Amram and Jochebed was born.⁶ Since the midwives refused to cooperate, the king now gave a new order, this time to the entire nation. “From now on,” he decreed, “throw all Hebrew boys who are born into the Nile River.”⁷

The order appalled the already pressured Israelites. For the Hebrew women, the joy of new motherhood turned into a dreadful tension. Their baby boys’ first cries of life turned into death screams as their warm, little bodies were drowned in the chilly waters of the Nile. In horror the parents had to watch, over and over again, as crocodiles ate their newborn children.

“Crocodile food.” Jochebed shuddered. “That is what Pharaoh makes of our flesh and blood.” Then with a shock

³ Exodus 1:7-14

⁴ Exodus 1:16, author’s paraphrase

⁵ Exodus 1:19, author’s paraphrase

⁶ Referring to Aaron’s birth three years earlier. See Exodus 7:7.

⁷ Exodus 1:22, author’s paraphrase

she came back to the reality of her own situation. Only a few seconds had passed since Jochebed had asked if the baby was a boy or girl. The midwife seemed hesitant to answer. When the woman finally looked at her, Jochebed saw fear in her eyes. “It is a boy,” the midwife said with a sigh, compassion ringing through her voice.

“Give me the child,” was all Jochebed could utter. A moment later she pressed the soft, pink little body to her heart. “What a beautiful child you are,” she whispered. Then, as she looked her baby over from head to toe, a strange awareness came over her. This was not simply a beautiful baby; this child was in a special way related to God’s plans. He was beautiful for God.⁸

God had plans for her little son. Jochebed could not define precisely what those plans would be, but she knew it for sure. From that moment on, she decided to fight for his life. The overtone within her heart would not be sorrow. She would trust in God.

*When you are faced with sorrow and darkness,
what is your response? The future can feel
undefined and even hopeless at times.
List three things we can learn from Jochebed
about trust in the midst of these times.*

Jochebed and her husband were Levites and thus belonged to the tribe that would later be assigned to serve God in His

⁸ Acts 7:20

temple. Although both of them were born into slavery, they had kept their faith in God. Jochebed continually directed the antenna of her faith toward Him. Because of this faithfulness, she received His messages and gained inner convictions about things that would be revealed later.

What is faith? It is the confident assurance that something we hope for will happen. It is the certainty that what we hope for is waiting for us even though the possibility seems slim (Hebrews 11:1). All Christians have been justified by faith through Christ (Galatians 2:16), but in order to receive answers to their prayers, they must pray with faith (Matthew 21:22). If they doubt and do not pray with faith, however, their prayers will go unanswered, because whatever is done apart from faith is sin (Romans 14:23).

How have you seen the correlation between faith and conviction in your life? Give a specific example of a time when faith led to confidence in God's future work.

God was about to do something great for the world, for the suppressed Hebrews, and for this tested family. And, as He usually does in history, He drew a human being into His plan. Much would depend on Jochebed's faith and how much she was attuned to His leading.

In what ways can you be more attuned to God's leading? What things distract you from watching for His leading?

The Bible shows that God honored Jochebed and her husband. Their faith gave them the courage to ignore the king's command.⁹ They obeyed a higher leadership: God. Against Pharaoh's expressed order, they hid their child day after day after day. Their motivation was obedience to God, as well as love for the child.

What did they expect? A miracle? That solution no doubt lay within the possibilities. God, who out of nothing created man and animals and the entire creation, had the power to do anything. His power was not shortened. Every possibility was available to Him.

Think of a recent (or current) trial you have gone through. As you considered how to get through it, what possible solutions came to mind? Was a miracle one of those solutions, or was it something you dismissed outright? How can we rest in the goodness of God regardless of outcomes?

⁹ Hebrews 11:23

Gradually Jochebed began to understand that God was going to work a miracle through her. Yet for the time being, everything remained the same. The atmosphere in the country continued to be oppressive and hostile against the Hebrews. The king had not relented. Every day it became more difficult to hide the baby from the outside world. His tiny voice became stronger, and his crying increasingly became a matter of concern.

Jochebed could not possibly imagine how fascinating God's orders were for this child uniquely called by Him. "Every child comes into the world with 'sealed orders.' Every human being has a unique destiny to fulfill."¹⁰ That she daily bathed, clothed, and fed a child who would become one of the world's greatest national leaders was beyond her understanding. God had chosen her son to become one of the greatest personalities of the Old Testament. As a man, Moses would pass on God's laws to the Hebrew people, laws that centuries later would still be considered the foundation of society. He foreshadowed God's Son—the Messiah to come—and the stewardship of this future had been placed in the hands of his mother.

*What miracles might God be working
through you? What special stewardships
has He placed in your hands?*

¹⁰ Larry Christenson, *The Christian Family* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany, 1970), 64.

The problems of God's people at this time in history seemed insurmountable, but God had no problems—only plans. And His plans would be announced through this child.

During the days that came and went, insecurity and faith fought for precedence in Jochebed's life. She dealt with human insecurities concerning the child, but she also had the assurance of faith. This testing period made Jochebed's faith grow and gave her courage.

Think of a specific time when insecurity and faith fought for precedence in your life. How did you respond? What did your relationship with God look like as you emerged from that time?

Her growing faith made her inventive. She became skilled in hiding the child and in developing ideas to spare his life. She learned how to educate little Aaron so that he wouldn't betray his baby brother. She modeled wisdom and faith for Miriam, her only daughter, despite all the details of taking care of the baby. God also had sealed orders for these two children, whose futures were closely connected with that of the baby. Jochebed was responsible for their development as well as for that of her baby son.

The plan that Jochebed developed was simple and close at hand. Though it was based on facts that she had carefully put together, this plan was above all inspired by faith. God Himself prompted the ideas in her mind.

First she transformed a simple box made of reeds—maybe her shopping basket—into a little boat. The woven papyrus reeds would protect the baby against crocodiles, who seemed to have little interest in eating reeds. Then she carefully coated the inside of the box with waterproof bitumen and tar.¹¹ The water that was threatening the tiny boy with death would instead save his life.

Calmly and carefully, Jochebed went to work. Every possibility was thought through. Gradually, as she developed her own good solutions, she fell in step with the plans God had formed in heaven for His servant on earth. Her part in His plan was vitally important, but she could only move in the directions He pointed out to her.

Do you view your actions as a vital part of God's plan for you? In what directions might He be pointing you right now that require you to step forward in faith?

Because of Jochebed's faith, problems didn't have a chance to develop. They didn't paralyze or isolate her. On the contrary, her trials paved the way to greater possibilities. Her difficulties became her friends instead of her enemies.

Jochebed made the salvation of her youngest child a family affair. Through her approach, the problems and concerns

¹¹ Exodus 2:3

became a blessing to the entire family. Her husband was one with her in her faith. Yet it was she, the mother, who especially put her seal on the members of the family during this difficult time and welded them together as instruments for God.

She had the courage to involve her young daughter in her plans. That also was a step of faith. When she placed the little boat in the waters of the Nile River, Jochebed took her hands off her son and placed him into the care of God. The future of her little boy now lay solely in His hands and those of little Miriam.

Miriam unobtrusively kept watch over the floating cradle, demonstrating how carefully she had been trained for this task.¹² The poise and trust of the mother characterized the daughter.

Faith replicates itself. Who in your life might be watching you closely, learning how to rest in the promises of God through your example? Does this inspire you to grow in faith?

When Pharaoh's daughter noticed the box and had it picked up out of the Nile, Miriam conducted herself in an exceptionally mature manner. As soon as she saw that her brother was safe with the princess, she stepped forward. No word or motion betrayed how personally she was related to this child. The sound of her voice was controlled. Her

¹² Exodus 2:4

behavior created no suspicion. “Shall I go and get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you?”¹³ she asked.

“Yes, go,”¹⁴ the princess answered, not knowing that with those words she gave the child back to his mother. So during a time of terrible persecution, Jochebed was able to care for her son openly without feeling threatened. She was even being paid to do so by the daughter of the man who had tried to kill her child. That was divine humor.

After the child had grown older and the princess had adopted him as her own son, she named him Moses. “That will be his name,” she said, “because I have drawn him out of the water.”¹⁵

Think through Jochebed’s situation carefully and list all the “enemies” (whether people or difficult circumstances) she faced. Which of these “enemies” turned into “friends”? Do you have certain difficult circumstances in your life that God’s power and grace could change into “friends”? If so, what are they?

Moses had been rescued; his future was completely secure. After the early years under his mother’s care, he received the best opportunities in Pharaoh’s court that any young man of his time could have wished for. He, the son of a Hebrew slave

¹³ Exodus 2:7

¹⁴ Exodus 2:8

¹⁵ Exodus 2:10, author’s paraphrase

family, received the education of a prince. All the possibilities of the mighty and learned Egyptians were at his disposal. And while Hebrew babies were still dying premature deaths, Moses was being prepared for the task for which God had chosen him. His sealed order was to become the redeemer of his people.

Jochebed continued to have a part in that preparation. The few years that Moses had been under her wings helped to determine his future. Her faith in God had become familiar to him. His people's complete commitment to God made an indelible impression on his receptive soul; the attractions of the heathen palace had little to offer him.

When Moses became a grown man, he preferred the sufferings of his people above the riches of Egypt. He developed into a man of faith¹⁶ who walked daily with the unseen God as if he could see Him. He became a friend of God.¹⁷ This was an exceptional compliment to be given to a human being.

Like Moses, we are called God's friends (John 15:15). And more than that, we are His children (Galatians 3:26). How has this knowledge impacted your life?

Jochebed had received the meaning of her name: "Jehovah is her glory." Had that name been given to her by believing

¹⁶ Hebrews 11:24-29

¹⁷ Exodus 33:11

parents in the hope that she would work for God's glory in her life? Did she choose the name herself as a public witness of her deepest thoughts, or was it a name of honor granted to her by God?

The Bible mentions her name only twice,¹⁸ but it is forever engraved in history as the name of one of the most important mothers who ever lived. Probably never in history have three children of one mother, Jochebed, ever had such an influence at the same time.

Her children demonstrated to the world the place that God had in their mother's heart. His honor had been her highest purpose. They also illustrated that principle with their own lives. When Moses was the leader of the Israelite nation,¹⁹ Aaron was its high priest who symbolized God's holiness and grace toward His people.²⁰ As the high priest, he represented God to the people and the people to God. And as the intercessor for his people, he foreshadowed Christ.²¹

Miriam also played a part in the leadership of God's people, which for a woman was a rare exception in Israel's history. She was the nation's first prophetess and used her gifts in music and song to lead the Hebrew women into bringing honor to God.²²

So Jochebed's three children used their lives in the service of God. Their mother had the laws of God in her heart long before she imprinted them in the hearts of her children as the

¹⁸ Exodus 6:20; Numbers 26:59

¹⁹ Micah 6:4; Psalm 106:23

²⁰ Exodus 28:1

²¹ Hebrews 2:17; 5:1-5

²² Exodus 15:20-21

Bible commands.²³ She accomplished her feats and ministries by believing the promises of God.

*Consider Jochebed's life in light of
Genesis 50:20 and Romans 8:28. Explain how
these verses were true in Jochebed's life.*

Jochebed lived far too early to be familiar with these words of James: “Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.”²⁴ But she did experience the truth of his words, just like the other men and women—heroes of faith—in whose ranks she is listed. These people achieved unusual and great things because they believed in the almighty God.²⁵

Despite often hostile environments, the people Scripture proclaims as heroes of faith thought vertically instead of horizontally, spiritually instead of according to their own human natures. Convinced that their God was greater than the greatest difficulty, they courageously faced immense problems. They experienced how much God desired to surprise them, and what a small thing it was for Him to change their sorrow into faith.

²³ Deuteronomy 6:6-7

²⁴ James 1:2-3

²⁵ Hebrews 11:1-40