

Get  
Wisdom  
BIBLE  
STUDIES

# *Finding Your Place in God's Story*



5 Weeks with the Women in *Jesus' Lineage*

Teresa Swanstrom Anderson

Teresa's Bible studies are some of the best on the market. Not only has she found a way to teach biblical truth with profound wisdom, but she does so in such a winsome and relatable way. This resource is a treasure!

KAT ARMSTRONG, author of *No More Holding Back* and *The In-Between Place*

Teresa, my pink-haired theologian, I want to hug you for writing these studies. You have shared practical, personal, and challenging ways to make the Bible come alive. When a smart woman chases after the heart of God, we all win.

TRICIA LOTT WILLIFORD, author of *You Can Do This* and *Just. You. Wait.*

In a noisy world filled with opinion, it can be difficult to cut through the clutter to find the voice of God and His vision for our lives. Plus, let's face it . . . the Bible is both intriguing and, at the same time, intimidating. Teresa does a beautiful job of taking us into God's heart by walking us through His Word. Her guided studies are for any woman who is wrestling with a sense of direction and believing in her worth. By taking us through the Scriptures in a practical, personal, and powerful way, she equips us to own our *now* and step boldly into our *next*.

MARSHAWN EVANS DANIELS, Godfidence Coach, TV personality, reinvention strategist for women, founder of SheProfits.com

With a relatable voice, Teresa makes studying the Bible approachable for women at any stage of faith. The Get Wisdom Bible Studies are a 360-degree look at God's Word with historical contexts, word studies, hands-on application, and commentary for each day's devotion. The studies are timely with varied messages of practicing contentment, trusting God in hard times, and leading the next generation. Teresa is serious about knowing God and how His character changes His people—the reader is not only encouraged to learn but to *live* the truths in these Bible studies.

BAILEY T. HURLEY, author, blogger, and speaker

Get ready for a Bible study that breaks the mold. Self-proclaimed "Bible nerd" Teresa Swanstrom Anderson has a passion for Scripture that is contagious. But don't you dare think this is a nerdy approach to study. Her warm and approachable style feels like a conversation with a wise and humble friend. Along the way, she will challenge you to *pick up your Bible* as she weaves linguistics, history lessons, and personal stories around a passage. I can't wait to recommend this series to women in our church.

GREG HOLDER, lead pastor at The Crossing; author of *The Genius of One* and *Never Settle*



GET WISDOM BIBLE STUDIES

# *Finding Your Place in God's Story*

Five Weeks with the Women in *Jesus' Lineage*

**Teresa Swanstrom Anderson**

NavPress 

A NavPress resource published in alliance  
with Tyndale House Publishers



NavPress is the publishing ministry of The Navigators, an international Christian organization and leader in personal spiritual development. NavPress is committed to helping people grow spiritually and enjoy lives of meaning and hope through personal and group resources that are biblically rooted, culturally relevant, and highly practical.

**For more information, visit [NavPress.com](http://NavPress.com).**

**Visit the author online at [HeyItsTeresa.com](http://HeyItsTeresa.com).**

*Finding Your Place in God's Story: Five Weeks with the Women in Jesus' Lineage*

Copyright © 2022 by Teresa Swanstrom Anderson. All rights reserved.

A NavPress resource published in alliance with Tyndale House Publishers.

*NavPress* and the NavPress logo are registered trademarks of NavPress, The Navigators, Colorado Springs, CO. *Tyndale* is a registered trademark of Tyndale House Ministries. Absence of ® in connection with marks of NavPress or other parties does not indicate an absence of registration of those marks.

The Team:

David Zimmerman, Publisher; Caitlyn Carlson, Acquisitions Editor; Elizabeth Schroll, Copy Editor; Olivia Eldredge, Operations Manager; Libby Dykstra, Designer

Cover illustration by Libby Dykstra. Copyright © Tyndale House Ministries. All rights reserved.

Photographs on page vii are the property of their respective copyright holders, and all rights are reserved.

Top © 2018 by Crystal Woodman-Miller; bottom left © 2020 by Christina Ceranna; bottom middle © 2021 by Christina Ceranna; bottom right © 2020 by Bryn Schult.

Interior illustration of headphones copyright © Rawpixel.com/Freepik. All rights reserved.

Author is represented by Jana Burson of The Christopher Ferebee Agency, [www.christopherferebee.com](http://www.christopherferebee.com).

Author photograph on back cover by Christina Ceranna, copyright © 2020. All rights reserved.

“The Seven Days of the New Creation” table from *Jesus and the Jewish Roots of Mary: Unveiling the Mother of the Messiah* by Brant Pitre, copyright © 2018 by Brant Pitre. Used by permission of Image Books, an imprint of Random House, a division of Penguin Random House LLC. All rights reserved.

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from The ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked AMP are taken from the Amplified® Bible, copyright © 2015 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. [www.Lockman.org](http://www.Lockman.org). Scripture quotations marked CSB are taken from the Christian Standard Bible®, copyright © 2017 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission. Christian Standard Bible® and CSB® are federally registered trademarks of Holman Bible Publishers. Scripture quotations marked MSG are taken from *The Message*, copyright © 1993, 2002, 2018 by Eugene H. Peterson. Used by permission of NavPress. All rights reserved. Represented by Tyndale House Publishers. Scripture quotations marked NIV are taken from the Holy Bible, *New International Version*,® *NIV*,® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide. Scripture quotations marked NLT are taken from the *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked NRSV are taken from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide. Scripture quotations marked VOICE are taken from *The Voice*,™ copyright © 2012 by Ecclesia Bible Society. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Some of the anecdotal illustrations in this book are true to life and are included with the permission of the persons involved. All other illustrations are composites of real situations, and any resemblance to people living or dead is purely coincidental.

For information about special discounts for bulk purchases, please contact Tyndale House Publishers at [csresponse@tyndale.com](mailto:csresponse@tyndale.com), or call 1-855-277-9400.

ISBN 978-1-64158-469-2

Printed in the United States of America

28 27 26 25 24 23 22  
7 6 5 4 3 2 1

*To the woman who thinks she's not enough  
who lives in the margins  
who feels too much  
or too small  
who thinks her story is too hard  
and her life is too messy:*

*You are worthy.*

*You are needed.*

*You are loved.*

*Just as you are.*

*Rise up, dear friend.*

*Step into the story God is writing.*

*He's inviting you into great things.*

# *Let's Connect*



*Take a few moments to be replenished . . .  
so that you can pour into others.*



**HeyItsTeresa.com**



**@teresa.swanstrom.anderson**



**GetWisdomBibleStudies.com**

I can't wait to discover all God is doing in your life through this exploration of the women in Jesus' lineage. I'd love to see and read all about it! Post using the hashtag #findingyourplace on Instagram, Twitter, and/or Facebook so we can encourage one another as we go through this study.

# *Get to know Teresa*



***Teresa Swanstrom Anderson*** is a blogger, author, speaker, and Bible study teacher. Teresa grew up in Seattle, but spent her middle school years in Guatemala and has a deep love for people in developing countries. Now living in Denver, Colorado, with her husband and six children, she spends her days wiping off sticky counters, Instagramming, and blogging at [HeyItsTeresa.com](http://HeyItsTeresa.com). She is the author of *Beautifully Interrupted* and the *Get Wisdom Bible Studies*. Teresa is passionate about helping women study the Bible, say yes to God, lead wherever they are, and live for what really matters.





# Contents

INTRODUCTION 1

WEEK 1: **Tamar** 15  
*A Woman Who Pursues What Is Right*

WEEK 2: **Rahab** 47  
*A Woman Who Chooses Growth*

WEEK 3: **Ruth** 73  
*A Woman Who Loves Radically*

WEEK 4: **Bathsheba** 101  
*A Woman Who Claims Her Voice*

WEEK 5: **Mary** 129  
*A Woman Who Says Yes*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS 159

NOTES 161



# Introduction

*Never walk away from Wisdom—she guards your life;  
love her—she keeps her eye on you.*

*Above all and before all, do this: Get Wisdom!*

*Write this at the top of your list: Get Understanding!*

*Throw your arms around her—believe me, you won't regret it;  
never let her go—she'll make your life glorious.*

*She'll garland your life with grace,  
she'll festoon your days with beauty.*

PROVERBS 4:6-9, MSG

As a society, we not only like instant gratification—we expect it. We have on-demand movies, Netflix, and Hulu. When our favorite artist releases a new album, we download it onto our phones. If we want a new book, we can get it on our Kindle or listen to it on Audible with a single click. Even two-day shipping seems too slow for us sometimes, doesn't it?

But here's the thing: Growing in our relationship with Christ isn't necessarily quick. There is no instant download to encountering God. We can't pull up into the Starbucks drive-through and leave minutes later with a full grasp of the Bible and what it says about God and means for our lives.

So if you want a bullet-points-only, CliffsNotes experience of the Bible, this study may not be for you. But don't let that freak you out! I get that life is busy, and I promise—we can engage deeply with God through His Word in the midst of everything we're doing without being overwhelmed.

If you are a woman whose life isn't perfect, who struggles balancing all aspects of life and wearing all the hats—but you have a genuine desire to grow in your relationship with Jesus in intentional ways that don't require hours a day—then welcome! I'm hopping up onto my chair and throwing confetti around because, my dear friend, you're exactly where you're supposed to be. Together we're going to see the pages of the Bible come alive—and see the God of the Bible become more a part of our everyday experience as a result.

### **WHY WE STUDY THE BIBLE**

The last time Jesus showed Himself to His disciples after His resurrection, mere moments before His ascension, something happened that is crucial for us to remember as we approach the Bible together. Luke 24:44-45 says, “Then he said to them, ‘These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.’ Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures” (NRSV).

We should be encouraged: Jesus opened their minds to understand that everything written about Him in Scripture must be fulfilled—but I am certain this isn't the only time Jesus has given individuals unique understanding.

He may even give it to you.

But here's the thing: These men had heard Scripture all their lives. They were ordinary working-class men without higher education. Not one of them had gone to school to become a rabbi, and they did not own a scroll or Bible. Yet because Scripture was read every time these men went to worship and biblical stories were retold throughout their lives, this knowledge was deep within the recesses of their minds and hearts. From childhood, these disciples heard God's Word.

We can know something, however, without understanding it.

And that's where the disciples were operating from.

Jesus decided to use this moment before His ascension to turn

the spigot, and all their previous knowledge, the buildup of years of knowing God's Word, poured out. Except now, with Jesus' hand on that faucet, everything they had learned and heard through the years suddenly made sense to them.

With the help of Jesus, knowledge was finally tied together with comprehension, and the disciples had a major aha moment.

Just like the disciples, we won't have aha moments every time we open the Bible, worship, or pray. We will have days or even weeks when we don't "feel" any big revelations or hear whispered promptings from the Lord.

Do you feel like you're reading the Bible wrong or even wasting your time without having those heartfelt or aha moments? If you're like me, you want those heart moments all the time. That's when we feel especially close to Jesus. But here's the thing . . . it's not about us. Reading the Bible is not about having God give us a warm fuzzy feeling. It's not to show us how to act and react; neither is it about Him speaking to us. Spending time in the Word is about learning who God is. It's about growing in knowledge of the Creator of the universe and our Lord and Savior. Period.

When I realized a few years ago that the Word of God is not about me but about Him, I was rocked. I realized every verse within every page is written with the intent of us learning more about God's character and love.

*Every story, every illustration, and every law  
loops back around to teach us who He is.*

The Bible obviously shares how we should live and who we should be as lovers of the Lord, but it does so in relation to who God is and how He views us. That's why, whether you've loved Christ for five minutes or five decades, I'm just thrilled to be walking through this study of God's Word with you. Together we get to learn more about who He is! As we continue spending time with Him both in the

Word and in prayer, we'll be more prepared to experience Him when He opens our minds like He did for the disciples.

## BEFORE WE BEGIN

### *The Bible*

When I was young, I loved collecting. Specifically, I collected bottle caps and napkins. It's okay, you can laugh—it's totally weird. I had boxes of party napkins. I just loved that they were all different, like little pieces of art. Looking back, it kind of makes sense—I love entertaining and setting a pretty table. I still collect those fun napkins so I'm always ready when someone comes over, but I've also begun to collect something else: Bibles.

Why Bibles? Well, the two-hundred-year-old ones passed down from my grandfather are admittedly pieces of art, but I also have shelves of current versions. Still scratching your head as to why I'd have more than one? Well, let me tell you: because different versions say things in different ways.

A great way of understanding Scripture is consulting various translations. Though these Bibles may be worded differently, they don't ultimately differ in meaning and intent, because they all come from the Greek and Hebrew languages the Bible was originally written in. Some translations are more literal in interpretation than others, however. For example, both *The Message* (MSG) and *The Voice* translation (VOICE) capture the tone and essence of the text, while the *New Revised Standard Version* (NRSV), *English Standard Version* (ESV), and *Amplified Bible* (AMP) translations are known to be more literal, emphasizing word-for-word accuracy, literary excellence, and depth of meaning. In other words, versions like *The Message* should be looked at as a reading Bible (almost like a commentary that illuminates the text), rather than as a literal Bible, which is better for deep study.

Don't feel like you need to be a crazy Bible-lady like me, with

shelves full of varying translations. The great thing about the internet is you can simply find different versions online. I encourage you to download the Bible Gateway or YouVersion app on your phone or head to their sites on your laptop. Try out a few different versions, and see which ones resonate with you best. If you have a favorite Bible already, google what the Bible you're using is translated for. Is it written for tone and intended meaning? Or is it translated for literal, word-for-word interpretation? Is it a reading Bible or a studying Bible?

In many weeks of this study, we'll explore a reading version of the passage, such as *The Message*, *The Voice*, or *The Passion Translation*, which will help us grasp the thematic picture in more accessible language. As we break apart each passage and dive in deeper, we will use the literal translations, so make sure you have one at the ready. I'll include the text from the *English Standard Version*, but in most cases, you will need to reference your own Bible or the Bible app on your phone for the rest. Make sense? Great!

### *Commentaries and Resources*

If we want to be bold women who love God deeply, we must be women of Scripture. We must love the Bible in a way that surpasses others' opinion and research. To become spiritually literate, we must become a student of the Word. Commentaries and books about the Bible are incredibly helpful, but we need to make sure we're not spending more time in books *about* the Bible than in the *actual* Bible.

To be clear, I'm not saying we shouldn't refer to sermons and use commentaries. It would be foolish not to take advantage of the wisdom of others whom we have deep respect for. God has most certainly given the gift of discernment in regard to unraveling the Scripture to unique individuals.

I often study with a commentary or two nearby (in fact, I currently have three opened here on my desk), but through the years, I've learned how important it is to make my own interpretation and

have my own thoughts about a Scripture passage (even if it's mostly questions) before considering someone else's thoughts and interpretation. I need to make sure my first Guide is God, rather than humans.

The first thing I'd like us to do is turn to a resource that can help us wrestle with what we're actually reading in the Bible. As we sort through God's Word, we need to be curious about the meanings beyond simply our initial understanding. That's why, in addition to adding the Bible Gateway or YouVersion app onto your phone, I'd also like you to download the Blue Letter Bible (BLB). This is really important because we're going to reference it. All. The. Time.

All of these apps I'm recommending are free, but if you want to download only one, choose the BLB because it has Bible translation options in addition to lots of extra resources. We'll be using this app every day in this study because it allows us to easily dig into the languages of the Bible (the Hebrew and Aramaic, the languages in which the Old Testament was written, and Greek, the New Testament's language).

If your eyes are glazing over and you're beginning to rethink wanting to do our study because "Whaaat? Dissecting Greek and Hebrew sounds hard / boring / not for me"—I get it. But this is something you can do! And digging into the Bible on this level is how we learn to study for ourselves and not have a faith that is spoon-fed to us. We want to make sure we are learning God's truth, right? Not just someone else's thoughts!

The BLB will rock your world if you haven't used it before. It totally changed the way I study. I'll show you really quickly how it can do the same for you. First, let's open the app and click on the search icon at the top. Let's look up something random like Psalm 23. (By the way, depending on whether you're in the app or on the website, you may want to choose a different Bible translation that better aligns with the wording we're discussing in the study—the BLB has a few different options.) Read verse 1 and see what questions

come to mind. *Hmmm . . . what does it mean, I shall not want? Like, I'll literally never want for anything if the Lord is my Shepherd?*

Now this is the fun part. We can figure out what these words mean in the original language so we can better comprehend what God wants us to understand! To get there, tap the number by verse 1. On the screen that pops up, tap on *Interlinear*\* (we'll be using this function a lot!). On the next screen, scroll down to the phrase or word that you're wanting to dig into—in this case, I shall not want.

You'll see that in the Hebrew the word is דָּכַר or *chacer*. What does that word mean? Go ahead and click on it to find out.

On the page that pops up, you'll find all sorts of information about this word: how to say it, what part of speech it is, what its synonyms are. My favorite sections on this page are *Strong's Definitions* and the *Gesenius' Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon*.

Now, let's say that learning more about the word and its meaning didn't clear up our question. We've started to dig in ourselves and not simply accept someone else's explanation of a biblical passage—but since things are still a little unclear, let's head to the commentaries.

Navigate back to Psalm 23 and click on verse 1 again. This time click on the *Text Commentaries* option. Some of my favorites in the app are by Matthew Henry and C. H. Spurgeon, but look through all of them to find which ones are most helpful to you. For the purposes of our exploration, let's tap on Spurgeon's Psalm 23 commentary. Here's my takeaway from what he wrote: "I shall not want" means I may not possess all that I wish for, but I am given a spirit of contentment. After all, does God not feed the ravens and cause the lilies to grow? I know that His grace will be sufficient for me.

Other places where you can find cross-references, commentaries, and lexicons online are Bible Hub ([biblehub.com](http://biblehub.com)) and Bible Study Tools ([biblestudytools.com](http://biblestudytools.com)). So many discoveries and insights are just a click away! When you start researching word, context, and

\* On iPhones, this is called *Interlinear/Concordance*; to get to this function on the website, click on *Tools* next to the verse first.

commentaries in your study of the Bible, that is often the beginning of more questions and jumping down bunny trails of more questions and research. But you know what? The point of spending time in the Bible isn't to check off a task and move on with our day. Second Peter 3:18 says, "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity."

Spending time in the Word and with the Lord is about gaining wisdom and knowledge. So if you decide to bounce around even more than I do within these pages and go down bunny trails that I have yet to discover, do it! You can spend fifteen minutes on a passage of Scripture or fifteen days, months, or years. This is all for you and your relationship with Him!

## HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

### *Who + How*

There are several ways you can engage in this study. Here are some tips for each context:

1. *Individually*: If you're doing this on your own, that's great! Write in the margins, highlight sections where God seems to want to get your attention, star things, put big question marks in areas you'd like to dig into further. Get this book messy! This study is a conversation between you and the Lord, so freewrite throughout as you really dig into all the beautiful things He wants to chat with you about!
2. *One-on-One*: We grow most in community, so find a friend who would like to do the study with you! Perhaps you'll meet together every week over coffee or lunch. Or maybe you'll meet over the phone or virtually.
3. *In-Person Group*: If you are doing this study in a group setting,

such as a church Bible study or home group, still strive to be 100 percent honest and authentic in your answers. Often, when we're with other women, we're afraid that they might judge our struggles, anger, pain, or even questions we have for or about God. But when we hide our true selves, we won't see the spiritual, emotional, and relational growth that can come out of time with other people who love Jesus. Of course, if the conversation dives into particular sections or questions that you don't feel ready to share publicly, give yourself permission to not answer. But if the group feels safe and supportive, I encourage you to bring all of yourself—including your messiness. And remember—even when you're in a group, make sure to invest in your daily, personal study! Coming to the group time after careful engagement with the Scripture will help everyone flourish.

For more specific directions on how to use this study as a group, head to [GetWisdomBibleStudies.com](http://GetWisdomBibleStudies.com) to download the PDF guide. This guide will map out how to use this resource in a five-week study and how to focus on questions and themes most beneficial for group discussion, as well as how to create and facilitate a healthy group.

4. *Virtual Group*: If you're not plugged into a group in your local context, why not start your own virtual group via Zoom, FaceTime, Skype, or another video-conference website and app? Or perhaps your friends are super busy and spread across the state or country (or world!), so finding an actual day and time to meet proves difficult. If this is the case, you can start your own Facebook group, decide who will facilitate, and start chatting about what you're learning each day or each week. You and your friends can simply post whenever works best for everyone's individual schedules! Sounds fun, right?

Each day of this study can take you only twenty to thirty minutes, but if you'd like to dig deeper, you'll be learning the skills to explore more deeply in the passage of Scripture and the context of the stories of these five extraordinary women in Jesus' family. At the end of each day, you'll be prompted into a time of journaling prayer, so you can talk to and hear from God as He helps you understand your place in His big story of redemption.

### *When + Where*

Before starting this study, consider when in your day would best provide some uninterrupted time to dig in. I know finding time can be so difficult in our busy lives, thanks to jobs, kids, and other responsibilities. And fitting in Bible study five days a week can feel like a lot, particularly during busy seasons of life (for example, this study would be especially rich during Advent, and we know how crazy things can get then!). Because of that, this study has been intentionally crafted with only three days of study per week, to best fit your pace of life. You may want to do a Monday/Wednesday/Friday rhythm, or you may find that it's easier to do three days in a row. Whatever you decide to do, I promise that you'll still encounter depth and a transformative time in God's Word. We make time for the things that matter—and I promise, time meeting God through His Word is so worth it.

Personally, though I'm certainly not a morning person (hello, coffee), my brain is most attentive in the morning . . . plus, I really love having time with the Lord to center myself before the chaos of the day begins. Through the years, my family notices when I haven't done this for a few days—my joy, patience, and kindness just isn't what it usually is when I'm in the Word at the start of the day!

Simply can't get up any earlier than you currently do? Maybe you work shifts or have little ones not yet sleeping all the way through the night. I get it, and I've been there. I still encourage you to give God the firstfruits of your time, though. Throughout the Bible, we

are encouraged to give the first and best to the Lord. And though we may not have a first crop of corn or a perfect lamb to present to Him, we certainly can give Him the first of our time—not the leftovers. Even if rising earlier in the morning feels impossible in this season, you can still offer Him your firstfruits. Pack a bag with your Bible and this study and do it at the beginning of your lunch hour at work, first break between classes, or the first moments of your child's naptime. The laundry, dishes, and showering can wait. Put Him first.

### *What You'll Need*

This study is meant both to guide you through the lives of the women in Jesus' lineage and to equip you to forge your own path through God's Word so He can make it alive in your everyday life. As you begin your study, here are a few things to keep on hand:

- A Bible in your favorite translation
- Your phone with the Blue Letter Bible app and BibleGateway or YouVersion downloaded
- A pen (you'll find space to write as we explore the women of Jesus' lineage together, but also feel free to scribble in the margins as you need to!)
- A smartphone with internet access so you can watch the short videos that introduce each week (you can find those at [GetWisdomBibleStudies.com](http://GetWisdomBibleStudies.com)).
- A place without distraction where you can truly dig in!

### *One Last Thing*

A final note to remember as we go through this study: The Bible was written for us, but it's not written *to* us. The Bible is full of stories, poetry, laws, parables, and such, which were written for people who lived in a different culture thousands of years before any of us were born. So each week in this study, we're going to explore some of the

behind-the-scenes aspects of Scripture. We're going to figure out the historical and cultural background. We'll try to learn the *why* of it all. We need to become not just readers of the Word . . . but *studiers* of it. Only then can we understand what God has *for* us in His Word.

## **FINDING YOUR PLACE IN GOD'S STORY**

Waiting is never something we love. But anticipation? Anticipation is exciting. I mean, if my anniversary was approaching and I knew my husband and I were celebrating with a trip to Italy, I'd love the wait. I'd anxiously and excitedly count the moments (this has never happened, but hey, Ben, I'm putting it out there). That's a good wait. A fun wait. A wait with a light at the end of the tunnel—a timeline until something amazing happens.

The Bible is a bit like this. All throughout Scripture we read little hints, details, and prophecies about when the Messiah would arrive. No one knew the whens or hows about it, but God gave prophets insight that no one else had. From grandparent to parent to child, the words of the coming Messiah were passed down for thousands of years, and these recorded prophecies provided a road map of sorts. As God whispered signs and circumstances to the prophets, He foretold things humankind should anticipate while they waited. The writings of the Old Testament were completed in 450 BC (Jesus was born around 4 BC) and contains over three hundred prophecies. And Christ fulfilled every one of them. Mind-blowing, right?

<sup>19</sup>He paid for you with the precious lifeblood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God. <sup>20</sup>God chose him as your ransom long before the world began, but now in these final days, he has been revealed for your sake.

But amid all these prophecies were *people*. The pathway to Jesus was filled with human beings making choices, moving toward God and following Him in the middle of their everyday lives—as well as in the middle of tragic and traumatic circumstances. God’s story for the salvation of the world would unfold through the lives of men and women who had no idea of the role they were playing at the time.

Only a handful of these people are named in the genealogy of Jesus . . . and only five of them are women. And this is a big deal. The culture of Jesus’ day was patriarchal—that is, men were considered the most important and significant in someone’s family line, and women were often regarded as property, not people.

And interestingly, even if women were named, wouldn’t you expect them to be the women who did everything “right”? Who held places of honor and significance in the Hebrew Scriptures, like Sarah, Rebekah, or Leah?<sup>1</sup> Instead . . .

<sup>1</sup>This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham:

<sup>2</sup>Abraham was the father of Isaac,

Isaac the father of Jacob,

Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers,

<sup>3</sup>Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, *whose mother was*

*Tamar,*

Perez the father of Hezron,

Hezron the father of Ram,

<sup>4</sup>Ram the father of Amminadab,

Amminadab the father of Nahshon,

Nahshon the father of Salmon,

<sup>5</sup>Salmon the father of Boaz, *whose mother was Rahab,*

Boaz the father of Obed, *whose mother was Ruth,*

Obed the father of Jesse,

<sup>6</sup>and Jesse the father of King David.

David was the father of Solomon, *whose mother had been Uriah's wife . . .*

<sup>16</sup>and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, *and Mary was the mother of Jesus who is called the Messiah.*

MATTHEW 1:1-6, 16, NIV, EMPHASIS MINE

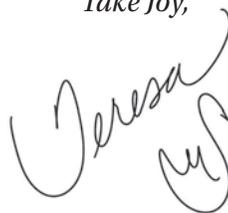
The five women named and honored in the genealogy of Jesus are not the expected matriarchs but the ones with hard, complicated stories. Perhaps they're the ones who best exemplify this prophecy from Isaiah:

On this humbled ground, a tiny shoot, hopeful and promising,  
will sprout from Jesse's stump;  
a branch will emerge from his roots to bear fruit.

ISAIAH 11:1, VOICE

Some of these women form the roots and rings in the stump, and one is the embodiment of this "tiny shoot, hopeful and promising." But every one of these women is just like us: resoundingly ordinary, tainted by sin, and yet unexpectedly used to change the world when they found their place in God's story.

*Take Joy,*





WEEK 1

# *Tamar*

*A Woman Who  
Pursues What  
Is Right*

## WEEK 1 • Day 1



## LISTEN

*Place your phone over the QR code for this week's sacred song. Listen to it before you begin, or whenever you'd like, to prepare your heart.*



## READ GENESIS 38

It's snowing outside—the big, fluffy flakes that make you feel like you're living in a snow globe. We're in the early hours, those quiet moments that don't quite feel like night but aren't yet the bright day. My coffee and I sit in front of our picture windows, watching and waiting for the first streaks of brilliant light to climb atop the mountain. I'm anticipating the miracle of the morning sun, how those fluffy snowflakes will soon sparkle like glitter.

This is my favorite perch in our cabin: The desk in the loft with a panoramic view of the ski slopes where so many of our family memories have been made. We've affectionately named our cabin—a run-down condo at Copper Mountain that we're fixing up—our “Happy Place.”

We waited nearly a decade to find this little place. We spend our winter weekends skiing, going to the little church in a grove of trees just off the lift at the top of a Blue run. As we gather to listen to the pastor's message, some of us stay clipped into our bindings, while others step off their snowboards or skis and leave them in the snow a few feet away. We all fumble with the bulletin through thick gloves or mittens, clumsily turning to the right page and belting out the same choruses and hymns I've sung since childhood, proclaiming God's glory and workmanship on this mountainside.

And now, after a wait of nearly ten years trekking up to the mountains for ridiculously long and exhausting day trips, we've finally found our small Happy Place.

Waiting is an inevitable part of life—and rarely easy. Ben and I

have waited weeks for medical-test results, months for our runaway teen to return, years to step out of financial struggle. I'm guessing you've struggled through your own seasons of waiting too.

But waiting doesn't have to be something that just happens *to* us. If we find ourselves looking into the unknown, moving from one season of hard things into another, we're not helpless and we're not hopeless. The details of wait and struggle do not define who we are in the middle of it all. You see, there's a secret to waiting well. A pause or delay can turn into a moment to grow.

What does this all have to do with Tamar, you might ask? Well, we might be tempted to define her by her wait. Honestly, for years I misunderstood her story. Whether I had literally been taught or simply had been given the impression that Tamar was a conniving you-know-what who got impatient and couldn't just be content with where she was, I got it all wrong. I got *her* all wrong. (Tamar, I'm sorry. I can't wait to ask you a million questions in heaven.)

I'm not the only one who was mistaken. A lot of the commentaries I've researched got her wrong too. *She didn't trust God enough to wait for His full plan to be revealed!* they exclaim. *She took things into her own hands instead!* Through the ages, many have found it strange that the Lord would place a woman "like her" in Christ's genealogy; some even claimed it was proof that God can use even evil sinners for His purpose.

And yes, I agree that God can use anyone and all things will work together for His good (Romans 8:28). But I don't think that's what is going on with Tamar. After months of digging into her story, I've realized we're missing some big details. We're misunderstanding, misreading, and misinterpreting things with our twenty-first-century, Western perception of the world.

In the middle of her wait, Tamar saw right through the injustice around her. And she didn't just sit down and give up. She chose to do a brave, terrifying thing: to pursue justice and chase what is right no matter what. And she helps us see how to do the same—even

when it means being unconventional and unorthodox. Sometimes the right thing doesn't look "right" to those around us . . . but God knows our hearts.

Don't just take my word for it—over the next three sessions, we're going to get to know this woman for ourselves . . . and realize how her example helps us understand our own place in God's story a little better.

1. After reading Genesis 38 in your favorite translation, pen down the essence of the story in a few short sentences:
- 
- 

2. What are your immediate thoughts about this story?
- 
- 

You may be like me, giving Tamar some serious side-eye for sleeping with her father-in-law, Judah. It seems a bit, well . . . yuck. And weird. And over-the-top. It sort of feels like she was acting in doubt and self-preservation.

But remember—being women who take God's Word seriously means we can't just take things at surface value. We need to look at the bigger picture.

3. Flip back to Genesis 15 and read verses 1-5. What did God promise Abraham?
- 
-

#### 4. What happened at the beginning of Genesis 16?

---

Sarah was tired of waiting for God. He had told her what He was going to do, but she was getting impatient. Maybe she thought she missed it or understood Him wrong. Maybe she even wondered if YHWH needed her to fulfill His plan. So, without consulting Him about it, she went about trying to “help” His promise of a child come to pass.

Want to know how many times I’ve tried to “help” God along when I’m unhappy with His timing? About a million. Waiting is hard, particularly when we don’t know if the wait will ever end. But it’s during this time that God strengthens our character and our trust in Him.<sup>1</sup> Either we’re going to trust God enough to go with Him, or we’re not. We need to stop telling Him to hurry up and instead recognize that He’s inviting us into His own story—and what He does in us in the waiting is part of that.

Sarah’s son, Isaac, was a long time coming—twenty-five years, in fact, after God first spoke to her husband, Abraham (Genesis 12:4, 21:5). Twenty-five years to develop Sarah’s trust in God, to allow her to test that trust, to show her the richness of dependence and the pain of choosing her own way. Twenty-five years to do something miraculous, to show Sarah that only God could give her this miracle. Maybe, just maybe, God took all that time to shape her into the woman and mother and God follower He wanted to raise Isaac. Who we are, who God shapes us to be, affects all the generations that follow.

But first Sarah had to experience the consequences of impatience and doubting God.

Was this what Tamar was doing? Trying to “help” God because she was tired of waiting?

5. Do you think Tamar and Sarah were similar in their motivations? Why or why not?

---



---

6. What did Judah say of Tamar in Genesis 38:26? Does this surprise you?

---



---

*Righteous.* Wow. That's a pretty big statement, especially from someone who was just about to burn his daughter-in-law to death for "prostitution" (38:24, NIV).

Time to do some digging into the original language so we can figure out what's actually going on here. Let's open up the Blue Letter Bible (BLB) app on our phones and dig into this a bit.

7. Head to Genesis 38:26 in the Blue Letter Bible (BLB) app (now is a great time to download it if you haven't yet!).

Click on the verse, then tap on *Interlinear* and scroll down to the word *righteous* (or whatever the comparable word is in the version you're looking at). Once you've tapped on the link for *ṣādaq* (𐤑𐤕𐤁, pronounced *tsa-dak*), scroll down to the *Outline of Biblical Usage* and see exactly how the word *righteous* is translated. Write down several of the descriptions below:

---



---



---

Judah wasn't simply saying Tamar wasn't sinful and disgraceful . . . he was placing blame upon himself, saying *he* was the guilty party, not her. He's exclaiming that he is in the wrong and is the one who is punishable, not her. By saying she is righteous, he declares Tamar upright in morality, affirming that she did what was honorable and just.

### **History Lesson**

Judah's father, Jacob, is Abraham's grandson; patriarch of the Jewish faith; and father of the twelve sons whose families would become the twelve tribes of Israel.

Judah gave Tamar (who was in the guise of a temple prostitute) his signet ring, cord, and staff as a guarantee of future payment—and in reality, as a sign of his sin. When she returned it, this tangible sign of his unrighteousness caused Judah to repent.

The next time we see a reference to Judah's staff in Genesis, something interesting is happening. In Genesis 49, Jacob is making prophecies on his deathbed. As his sons gather around to hear his last words, Jacob has a message for each of them . . . and verse 10 gives us a particularly pertinent statement about Judah:

The scepter shall not depart from Judah,  
 nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,  
 until tribute comes to him;  
 and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.

8. What do you think this prophecy means? How does it point to Jesus?

As pastor and author Tony Evans shares in his commentary,

Joseph was Jacob's favorite, and I think he would have been Jacob's personal choice to continue the messianic line. But God had chosen Judah—in spite of his failings—to father the line of kings leading to Christ, as the scepter will not depart from Judah or the staff from between his feet until he whose right it is comes (49:10). He would be the new leader of his brothers, full of power and majesty like a lion (49:8-9). From Judah would come the kingly line of David and Solomon and all of their descendants. More importantly, Jesus would be called “The Lion from the tribe of Judah” (Rev 5:5).<sup>2</sup>

Both the scepter and staff are symbols of power and authority. Most of Judah's life was full of regret and running from God—and, perhaps, abdicating that authority through his own unrighteousness in giving his staff to Tamar.

It wasn't until he received the staff back from her that Judah became a man of honor. It wasn't until he laid down the physical sign of his tarnished authority and accepted it back in repentance that God bestowed true authority on him. That authority would not depart from him and his family again.

For her part, Tamar took hold of the staff with its inherent symbolism that God gave her (through a sinful Judah), and as she used it to demonstrate her righteousness, we see the authority and power extend to her as well. God bestowed an overlooked, mistreated woman with honor and authority that would never diminish. Many nations would be born from Judah, but just as many would be born from Tamar. One could say she held the scepter and was grafted into the family through it.

As Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *The Color Purple* Alice Walker so famously said, “The most common way people give up their power

is by thinking they don't have any." (Woo! Say it again for the ladies in the back, Ms. Walker!) Satan often makes us believe we have no power, doesn't he? But God sees. God knows. And He offers the powerless His power and authority. He gave Tamar far more influence and place in His bigger story than she ever could have dreamed.

We've just scratched the surface of Tamar's story, and we're going to learn more about her in the days to come. But as we wrap up today, let's remember that this first woman named in Jesus' family line was called righteous for standing up to unrighteousness. That her patience and faithfulness in the face of injustice, and her participation in God's work to turn Judah toward righteousness, pointed toward the One who would come to right injustice and bring His people to repentance.

My friend Vivian Mabuni says in her book *Open Hands, Willing Heart*:

We may not have the opportunity to see the direct outcome of our choices or live the life we always dreamed of, but God maps out for us a way to walk in freedom from our expectations of how we think life should unfold, even when our circumstances don't make sense to us.<sup>3</sup>

No more sitting back and shutting down, thinking we have no power. In God's power, we can fight injustice, we can right wrongs, and we can continue stepping forward into the story He is writing us into.

Justice is what love looks like in public.<sup>4</sup>

CORNEL WEST



Take a moment to lay before God what you're feeling stuck in or wronged by, and ask Him to show you how these are an invitation to step into His power and story.

*Amen.*

## WEEK 1 • Day 2



### LISTEN

*Place your phone over the QR code for this week's sacred song.*



### READ GENESIS 37:1–38:2

Amy Purdy was only nineteen when she found herself fighting an inexplicable and aggressive form of bacterial meningitis. As the blood disease spread quickly, doctors gave her a 2 percent chance of survival and immediately placed her on life support. Over the next two and a half months, she would lose both her legs, her kidneys, her spleen, and the hearing in her left ear. But she fought—hard. And slowly, miraculously, Amy grew stronger.

But after all that fighting, when she was finally well enough to try prosthetic legs . . . that's when reality set in. Life was different. *She* was different. And she had a choice: Would she give in to the exhaustion—or would she continue to face the hard things in front of her?

Amy asked herself,

If my life were a book, and I was the author of that book, how would I want this story to go? I saw myself walking gracefully. And I saw myself somehow helping other people through my journey, and I saw myself snowboarding again. . . . I could feel the wind against my face and the beat of my racing heart as if it was happening at that very moment. And that passion, and that fire I felt inside, that is when a new chapter of my life began.<sup>5</sup>

Four months after she lost her legs, she was back up on a snowboard. She worked with her legmaker to create new legs that would help her fly down mountains. And Amy Purdy went on to be the first female to win a bronze medal in Paralympic snowboarding.

“I learned it’s that change and it’s that challenge that forces us to figure out what we’re really made of,” she said. “It makes us dig deep. It makes us find our fire.”<sup>6</sup>

When we’re faced with the unexpected, the hard, the overwhelming—that’s when we find what we’re really made of. The choices we make when it’s easier to just give up show who we really are. When there’s nothing left to hide behind, the real you steps forward.

That’s our girl Tamar. Everything had been stripped away—and who she was emerged from the darkness. But we won’t understand the depths of her story and the reality of the choices she made unless we take a close look at the contrast Scripture provides us: the person who made a different set of choices. That’s why we’re going to talk about Judah quite a bit today. After all, one story isn’t complete without details from another. As we’ll learn, Judah was a guy who wasn’t interested in putting in the hard work to become a man of honor and good character. For many years, he forgot who he was and Whose he was—and he experienced the fallout of that choice.

I've been there. Maybe you have too. When we take our eyes off the One we're following and who He's calling us to be, life may feel easier in the short term . . . but it gets a lot harder in the end.

1. After reading Genesis 37 and the first several verses of chapter 38, what words would you use to describe Judah?

---

---

 **History Lesson**

Abraham → Isaac → Jacob → Judah

As we mentioned in day 1, Judah's father, Jacob, is the grandson of Abraham. Like Judah, Jacob was cunning and deceitful—and he devastated his brother's life. Tricking his ailing and blind father (Isaac), Jacob stole the blessing and birthright intended for Esau (Genesis 27). Because Esau planned to kill Jacob in revenge, Isaac summoned Jacob and instructed that he travel to his mother's family to find a wife and start a family. (Side note: Isaac specifically commanded in Genesis 28:1 that Jacob not marry a Canaanite. More on that later.)

Upon traveling to Haran and finding his mother's brother Laban, Jacob saw Laban's daughter Rachel, who was a shepherdess. It was love at first sight. Jacob agreed to work for Laban for seven years in order to receive Rachel's hand in marriage. (Remember, during this time, women were commodities, used as pawns in business deals.) Like the soap opera that much of the Old Testament is, Laban tricked Jacob at the

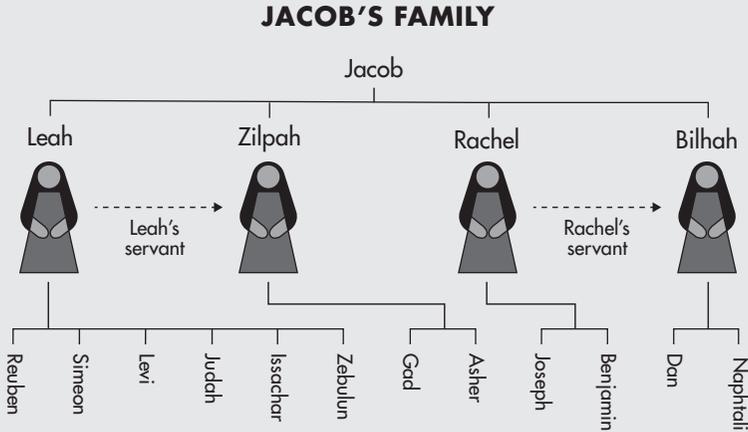
wedding, and without realizing it, Jacob married Rachel's older sister Leah instead. Can you imagine how his stomach must have dropped when he eventually lifted her veil? But because it was Rachel that he loved, Jacob worked seven additional years to also marry Rachel. (Sister-wives. Yikes.)

Genesis 29:31-35 tells us that the Lord saw how Leah was neglected, and He opened her womb to conceive four sons (and, we read in Genesis 30:21, one daughter, Dinah). The first three sons (Reuben, Simeon, and Levi) were named from Leah's pain (for example, Reuben means, "The LORD has seen my affliction; surely my husband will love me now," (Genesis 29:32, CSB). But by the time Judah was born, Leah's heart was positioned differently. In verse 35, she says, "This time I will praise the LORD"—and so she named him Judah.

In ancient Israelite culture, not having children wasn't an option. Women's sole purpose in life was to bear children, specifically male offspring. Not being able to do so was devastating, just as it is today. But along with the heartbreak of loss came painful cultural stigma as well. No children meant shame. It meant there was no one to care for them as they grew old. Women without children would become destitute. They would have nothing and would likely starve to death in their poverty. And without a male descendant, an entire family's heritage would be erased from history.

Because Rachel was terrified that her sister was conceiving and she was not, she used her servant as a pawn, a placeholder to bear children for her. Eventually, the Lord opened Rachel's womb as well, but meanwhile, Leah also brought her servant into the equation. This woman bore more children for "Leah's side" as the sisters competed for their husband's love through their children.

Joseph, who was around seventeen when his brothers sold him to Ishmaelite traders, was his father's favorite because he was the first son from Jacob's beloved Rachel, who died giving birth to her second son, Benjamin.



2. On the fateful day when Joseph was sold and trafficked into slavery, what did Judah say to his brothers (see Genesis 37:26)?

Judah may not have encouraged killing Joseph like several of his other brothers prompted, but he certainly didn't stand up for justice, either. This is a stark contrast to the woman who would eventually become his daughter-in-law—a woman who stood for justice even when it nearly destroyed her reputation and her life.

Why are we looking at Judah's response to Joseph? Because Tamar's story seems awkwardly plopped down right in the middle of Joseph's. We read about how he was sold to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, then *boom* . . . we're taken out of the story abruptly.