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The One Year[®]
WOMEN
of the Bible

Dianne Neal Matthews

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The One Year Women of the Bible

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*Dedicated to the memory of my grandmothers,
two women with different personalities but the same Savior*

NETTIE DENNISON PICKENS

"Godliness with contentment is great gain."

1 Timothy 6:6 (NKJV)

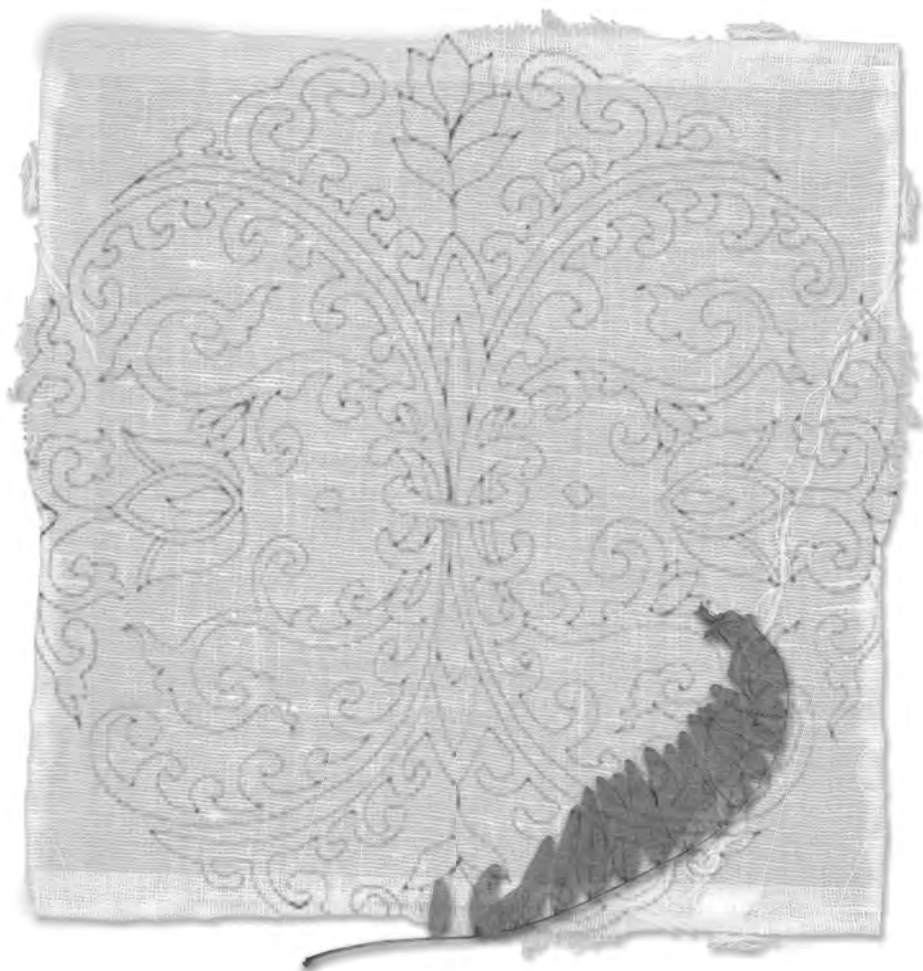
BETSY REVELY NEAL

"A merry heart does good, like medicine."

Proverbs 17:22 (NKJV)



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Introduction

Coming up with a year's worth of ideas based on women of the Bible was not easy. So many women get barely more than a mention, yet I would love to have *all* the details of their stories. It was also difficult trying to understand the women's motivations and feelings while trying not to interpret Scripture by my personal opinions or prejudices.

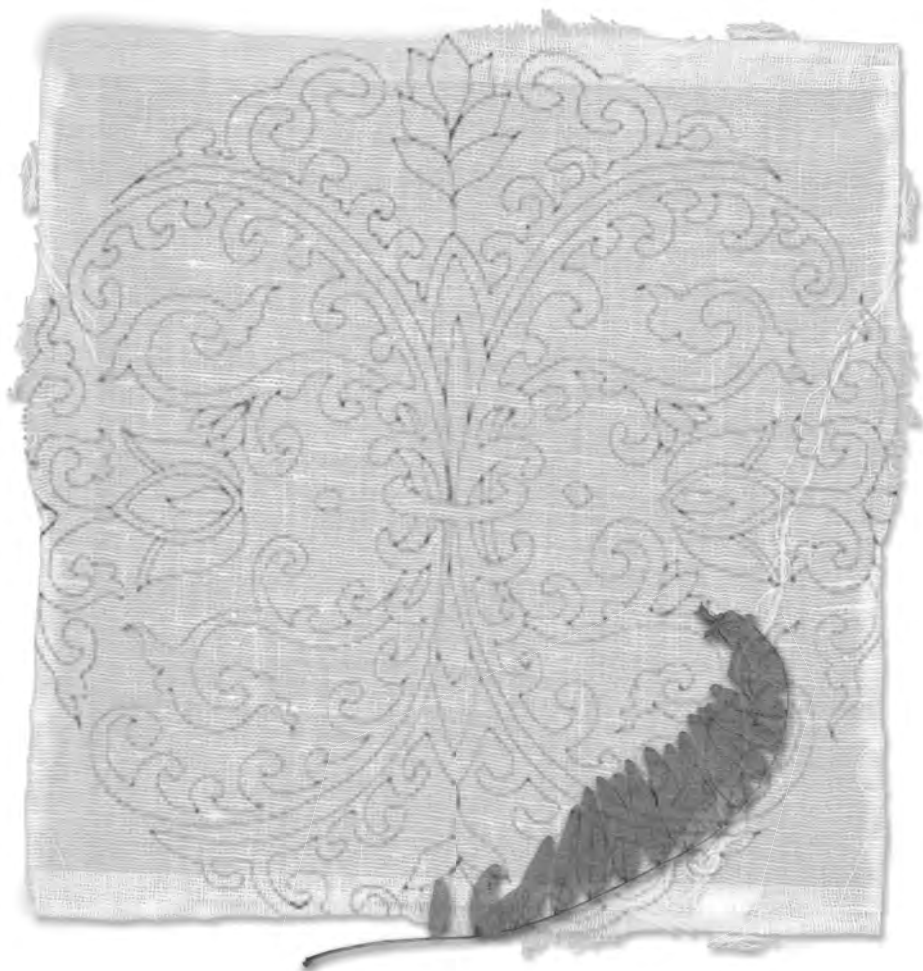
Once I made the effort to relate to these women from the perspective of my own experiences and emotions, they became more real to me than before. They also taught me some surprising things about myself. I never would have compared myself with Delilah, but her nagging showed me that sometimes I have a similar unspoken attitude toward God: *If you really loved me . . .* (April 23). Although I've never killed a man with a tent peg as Jael did, like Michal, I have been guilty of using killing words (September 24).

Most of the stories of contemporary women are based on real-life women that I have known, heard of, or read about. Unless I give first and last names or specifically refer to a woman as "my friend," the names have been changed and details have been fictionalized to guard identity. I also handled a few of my own experiences this way.

Growing up, I longed for a sister; as an adult, I've been blessed to find sisters in Christ to share my life journey. Now, in writing this book, I've discovered a new group of kindred spirits. Despite differences in lifestyle, biblical women faced the same basic struggles, problems, and needs that we do. I pray that as you read these devotions, you will see that the same heavenly Father who reached out to these women in the Bible still calls out to his daughters today.

All glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think. Glory to him in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations forever and ever! Amen

Ephesians 3:20-21



January 1

The Crowning Touch

EVE

Genesis 2:15-25

The week between Christmas and New Year's Day had passed too quickly. We had enjoyed a wonderful time of visiting our families, filled with gift giving, good food, movies, laughter, and games. Still, there was something missing. Everyone cheered as my nephew positioned the last piece of the new six-hundred-piece jigsaw puzzle we had worked on so hard all week. We all admired the beautiful picture of a spring garden, copied from a painting by Monet, until someone noticed the tiny empty space near the center.

When God created the first man and placed him in the Garden to live, there was something missing there, too. Even after God had spent six days fashioning a world full of beautiful plants and a dizzying array of animals, his creation was not complete until he made the first woman. Eve was the crowning touch to God's perfect creation. Designed and shaped by God's hand, her femininity perfectly complemented everything else he had made. Adam took one look at Eve and exclaimed, "At last!" God surveyed his finished work and could now say that it was "very good" (Genesis 1:31).

God designed women to bring a special kind of beauty to the world. We are created in God's image, and we testify to his glory in a unique way as we embrace feminine traits of nurturing, sensitivity, compassion, and creativity. We are also fashioned to have a close relationship with our Creator. Until we know him personally, we are missing the vital piece that completes us, no matter how full our lives may seem. Even if we look as beautiful as a Monet painting, without a relationship with our Creator we have an empty space near the center of our being, right where our heart is.

You will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God.

Ephesians 3:19

January 2

Putting a Spin on God's Word

EVE

Genesis 3:1-7

Marlene threw the newspaper down in disgust and started pacing back and forth. As a first-time candidate for mayor, she had jumped at the chance to share her views. The reporter, apparently, had his own agenda—changing a word here and there and leaving out some comments. Next time, Marlene would ask to see the article *before* publication, and she would go over it word for word.

When Satan wanted Eve to disobey God, his first step was to distort God's words. The serpent asked, "Did God really say you must not eat the fruit from any of the trees in the garden?" Eve corrected his misquote, and then added a phrase that was not in God's original command (see Genesis 2:16-17), saying that they must not "even touch" the tree in the middle of the Garden. Eve's careless misrepresentation of God's command encouraged Satan. He denied that disobedience would lead to death, and he questioned God's motives.

Today we have the awesome privilege of access to the entire Word of God in written form, yet it's easier than ever for Satan to make us question what God has said. Many people add to, water down, twist, or reinterpret the Bible to suit their personal opinions or desires. *Did God really say . . . that sex outside of the marriage relationship is wrong . . . that hell is an actual place . . . that Jesus is the only way to God?* Some people listen to speakers or read books about the Bible without ever studying it for themselves.

When Satan tried to get Jesus to distort God's Word, Jesus repelled his efforts by quoting appropriate Scripture back to him (see Matthew 4:1-11). If we want to live in a way that's pleasing to God, we need to have his Spirit living in us and we need to study his Word continually. When Satan comes to trick us, we can be ready to quote Scripture—preferably word for word.

*I have hidden your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.
Psalm 119:11*

January 3

Defining Moment

EVE

Genesis 2:16-17; 3:4

In Eve's innocence, she didn't know that her conversation with the serpent was a decisive turning point in her life. Either Adam or God had told Eve about the commandment against eating fruit from the tree in the middle of the Garden. She had no reason to question God's word or his intentions, having known only her Creator's kindness and concern for her well-being. However, the serpent sounded wise too. The fruit on the beautiful tree looked delicious; how could it be harmful? What could be wrong about gaining more wisdom? As Eve decided whose advice she would follow, the fate of the world hung in the balance.

Similar scenes play out in countless lives every day. A teenager taught to abstain from premarital sex hears from his health teacher that it's perfectly natural and safe, as long as he uses protection. A college student has to listen as her professor daily promotes "the enlightened path to spirituality" while ridiculing the "old-fashioned" beliefs of Christianity. A woman struggles to hold her marriage and family together as her coworkers pressure her to consider her own needs first.

We all have defining moments in our lives when we have choices to make. Will we base our actions on the unchanging Word of God, or will we listen to other sources that sound reasonable or wise? Our decisions will determine the direction of our lives to some degree, and sometimes of the lives of others. It may not be a life-or-death situation, but the outcome can affect our health, a relationship, or our character. Whenever we have to choose between listening to God or some other voice, something precious hangs in the balance.

Whose voice will you listen to today?

January 4

Contentment 101

EVE

Genesis 3:6-7

My younger brother's first job was as a caseworker for the Department of Human Services in a small town. One day, a coworker's client reported that she had lost her food stamps. Since the woman wouldn't receive any more stamps for two weeks, the employees pooled what little money they could spare and bought groceries for her. The next day, the woman's caseworker brought back her response—she complained because the groceries didn't include enough meat.

This woman had a problem attitude that was first exhibited by Eve in the Garden of Eden. God had provided the perfect environment for meeting all of Eve's physical, emotional, and spiritual needs. She was surrounded by beauty and bounty, but when Satan drew her attention to the forbidden tree, Eve experienced discontent for the first time. Her focus shifted from all that she enjoyed to the one thing that God had withheld from her. Her happiness and well-being suddenly seemed to depend on eating fruit from the tree in the middle of the Garden. Nothing else would satisfy her.

We have all inherited the tendency to want more than what we have. When our eyes are drawn toward something that we don't have, suddenly our houses, furniture, marriages, or families don't seem to be quite enough. It's hard to stay focused on our blessings when something else is tempting us. This attitude insults God and inevitably leads us into sin. We can cultivate contentment by asking God to remove our desires for something more and then by trusting him to provide what is best for us. With his help, we will learn to be satisfied—even when we don't have as much meat or fruit in our diet as we might like.

I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am.

Philippians 4:11 (NASB)

January 5

The First Designer Dress

EVE

Genesis 3:7-11, 21

“What am I going to wear today?” That’s one of the first questions we ask each morning—unless it’s “What can I still fit into?” Clothing is a big part of a woman’s life. We want to wear something that’s comfortable, stylish, and flattering. Several times a year, clothing manufacturers introduce their new lines, and the stores’ new merchandise can make us dissatisfied with our wardrobes. Many women rack up credit-card debt from spending more on clothing than their budgets allow. The billions spent on advertising make us forget that the purpose of clothing is basically to cover our naked bodies.

When Adam and Eve disobeyed God and felt shame for the first time, they made the first clothing—not Tommy Hilfiger, but fig leaves. God had something better in mind. Although their sin forced them to leave their perfect home and suffer painful consequences, God did not abandon them. He fashioned clothing for Adam and Eve from animal skins—garments that were more durable, protective, and less scratchy than leaves.

God’s sacrifice of animals to cover Adam’s and Eve’s nakedness foreshadowed the day when Jesus would sacrifice his life to permanently cover our sin. We may try to make ourselves spiritually presentable by following rules or rituals or by being a good person, but that will leave us spiritually underdressed.

Only the robe of forgiveness provided by Jesus’ sinless life, death, and resurrection is adequate to cover the shame of our sinful condition. Once we accept this incredible gift, our sin no longer separates us from the holy God who created us. We can draw near to him without thinking, *I don’t have a thing to wear.*

Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Romans 13:14 (NIV)

January 6

Hide and Seek

EVE

Genesis 3:8-10

Eve's attempt to hide from God shows that she didn't get the results that Satan had promised her when she ate the forbidden fruit. She wanted to gain knowledge and wisdom but then was foolish enough to think that she could hide from an all-seeing God. Instead of joyfully running to meet him when he came to walk with them, Adam and Eve tried to avoid him. Their guilty consciences isolated them from the One who had created them, provided for their needs, and loved them.

We can't fully appreciate the loss that Adam and Eve experienced. We have never lived in a perfect environment or had God physically walk and talk with us in a garden, but we all suffer from the effects of their fall into sin. And people have been trying to hide from God ever since. Some hide behind philosophy, a false religion, or a destructive lifestyle. Christians play a more subtle game of hide-and-seek. We sometimes use church activities or spiritual busyness to avoid total openness and honesty with the Lord we are supposedly serving.

God knows us much more intimately than we know ourselves. He is fully aware of our actions, thoughts, feelings, and motives. No matter what we've done or how badly we've messed up, he seeks us and desires fellowship with us. His call of "Where are you?" is not a demand but an invitation to come clean and experience the joy of being unconditionally loved and fully accepted by our Creator.

God sent a Savior to take the penalty for our sin so that we could stand before him unashamed and free of fear. Once our guilty consciences are cleansed by Christ's blood, we never need to hide from God. We can come out from our hiding places and run to meet him.

Search me, O God, and know my heart.

Psalm 139:23

January 7

The Blame Game

EVE

Genesis 3:11-13

Adrienne eased out of bed and gently closed the door behind her. *I thought he'd never go to sleep tonight.* She frowned as she turned on the computer. Her heart raced as she saw *his* screen name. These late-night sessions were getting longer, but it was so nice to talk with someone who really understood her. Adrienne blushed as she wondered where the relationship would lead. *It's not my fault,* she sniffed. *If Jim weren't so wrapped up in other things, I wouldn't be looking for a soul mate.*

The blame game started in the Garden of Eden when God confronted Adam and Eve with their sin. Filled with fear over what they had done, each of them tried to pass the buck.

“It was the woman you gave me,” responded Adam.

“The serpent tricked me,” insisted Eve.

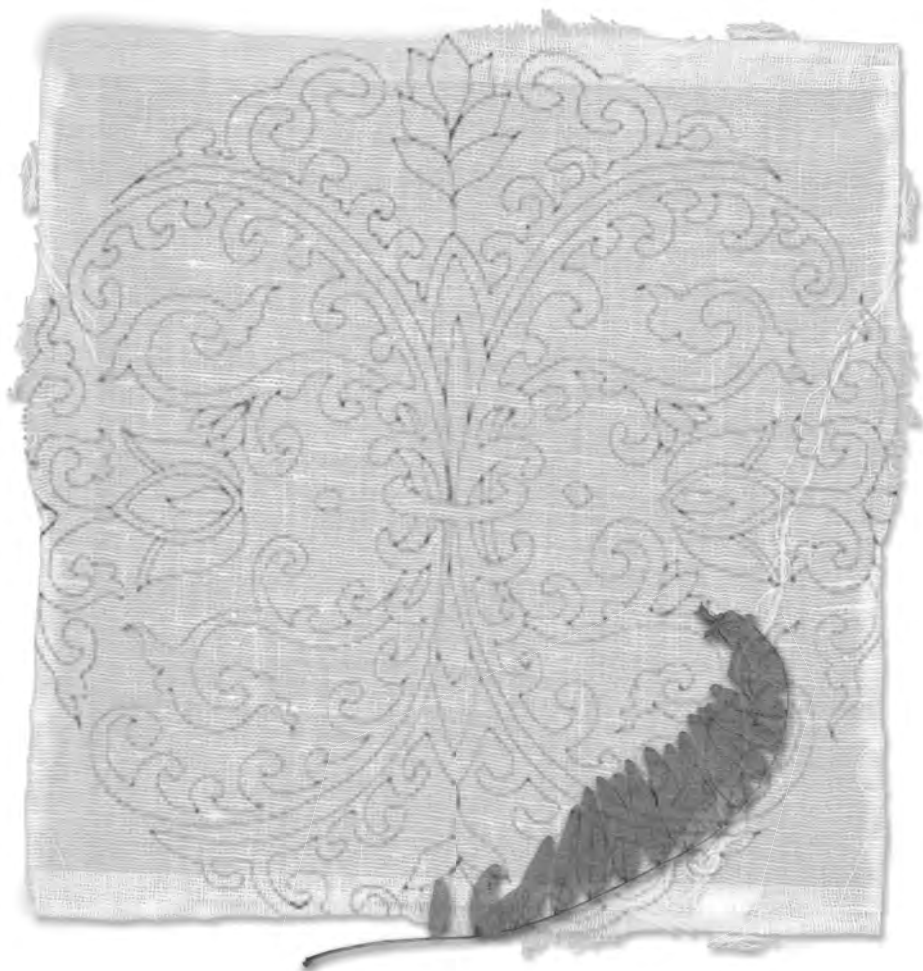
Did they really believe that God would fall for their excuses and not hold them accountable for their disobedience?

It's human nature to rationalize our behavior. As our own criminal defense attorneys, we look for ways to excuse our sinful choices rather than admit our fault. Society may encourage us to blame the environment or genetics, but that doesn't work with God. He accepts no plea bargains, and claims of temporary insanity get us nowhere.

Although we are influenced by many forces, the simple truth is that each of us answers to God for our attitudes, actions, and lifestyles. When we disobey God's laws, we have no one to blame but ourselves. We can't find forgiveness and release from guilt until we admit that we have done wrong. We can't be in a close relationship with God unless we are open and honest with him. That's when we will find our true Soul Mate.

I confessed all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide my guilt.

Psalm 32:5



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