

Wanderers

lessons from women of stubborn hearts

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

Wanderers

lessons from women of stubborn hearts

HER NAME IS WOMAN BIBLE STUDY

Gien Karssen

NAVPRESS 

A NavPress resource published in alliance
with Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.



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 www.NavPress.com.

Wanderers: Lessons from Women of Stubborn Hearts

Copyright © 1975, 1977, 2015 by Stichting Manninne. All rights reserved.

A NavPress resource published in alliance with Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

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

The Team:

- Don Pape, Publisher
- Caitlyn Carlson, Acquisitions Editor

Cover design by Jacqueline L. Nuñez

Cover photograph of woman copyright © Linda O'Brien Photography/Getty Images. All rights reserved.

Cover illustration of wreath copyright © MarushaBelle/Shutterstock. All rights reserved.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, 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 ESV are taken from *The Holy Bible*, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked TLB are taken from *The Living Bible*, copyright © 1971 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Karssen, Gien.

Her name is woman : wanderers : lessons from women of stubborn hearts / Gien Karssen.

pages cm

ISBN 978-1-63146-412-6

1. Women in the Bible—Biography. 2. Bible. Old Testament—Biography. I. Title.

BS575.K36934 2015

220.9'2082—dc23

2015012168

Printed in the United States of America

21 20 19 18 17 16 15
7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Contents

Foreword *ix*

How to Use This Study *xi*

1. Hagar *1*
2. Lot's Wife *13*
3. Rachel *23*
4. Potiphar's Wife *37*
5. Delilah *45*
6. Peninnah *57*
7. Job's Wife *63*
8. Orpah *71*
9. Michal *79*
10. Jezebel *89*
11. Herodias *101*
12. Sapphira *115*

About the Author *123*

Foreword

When I began doing research for my Bad Girls of the Bible series, Gien Karssen's *Her Name Is Woman* quickly became a favorite resource. Her ability to delve into the hearts and minds of these biblical characters is remarkable, and her careful handling of Scripture reveals her deep respect for God and His Word.

Gien is also a gifted storyteller, allowing us to flee beside Hagar into the wilderness, to turn back with Lot's wife, to long for children along with Rachel, and to admire handsome Joseph, as Potiphar's wife did. We watch Delilah deceive Samson, and see Peninnah's jealousy in action. We listen to Job's wife rail against God, and our hearts sink in dismay when Orpah chooses the false gods of Moab, rather than the one true God of the Israelites.

The bitterness of Michal, the black heart of Jezebel, the cruelty of Herodias, the cunning of Sapphira—all are brought to vibrant life in these pages.

Gien doesn't shy away from describing the sins these

“wanderers” indulge in, yet she keeps our eyes fixed on the goodness and mercy of God. Descriptive details from other passages in Scripture and thoughtful questions throughout each chapter help us understand the lives of these women more fully.

In the end, it's Gien's ability to bridge the centuries and apply these ancient cautionary tales to our twenty-first century lives that make *Her Name Is Woman* a timeless treasure.

Liz Curtis Higgs, author of the Bad Girls of the Bible series

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 number increases, 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.

1

HAGAR

A Woman Who Rejected the God Who Saved Her

If she has given a maid to her husband and she has borne children, [and] afterwards that maid has made herself equal with her mistress, because she has borne children her mistress shall not sell her for money, she shall put a mark upon her and count her among the maidservant.

FROM THE LAWS OF KING HAMMURABI

READ

Genesis 16:1-16; Genesis 21:1-21

• • •

HAGAR PLODDED SLOWLY along the rough path. Her chafed feet and ankles hurt with each step, and the seams of her long robe were frayed and torn. Her heart beat quickly from the exertion of the long journey; her eyes burned from the scorching glare of the sun.

The wilderness in which she walked day after day offered no protection. During the day terrible heat rose off the sand in vapors, and the fierce wind blew dust into her mouth and nose. At night the temperature dropped, and the land became bitterly cold.

Despite the risks, Hagar pressed on toward Egypt, her home country. She wanted to return to the place where Sarah, the wife of Abraham (as they were later named), had bought her about twenty-five years before, then taking her to Canaan as a slave.

While she walked, she reflected on the years that had passed. They had been good years. Even though a slave girl, she had enjoyed a good life. *After all*, she thought, *I have been privileged to live with Abraham and Sarah, with whom God has even made a special covenant.* Through their example, she had come in contact with the living God.

Despite the good memories of her past, no thoughts of gratitude stirred Hagar's mind now. Far from that! Feeling that she had been wronged and even insulted, she was bitter.

In a strange way, Hagar was suffering the consequences of a bad situation in Abraham's household. When he had moved from the land between the Euphrates and the Tigris Rivers to Canaan, God had promised him a son. Through that son, Abraham was told that he would become the father of a multitude of nations.¹

But years passed and the son didn't come. Worried, Sarah got the idea that the promised child should be born to a concubine, a second wife, instead of to her. According to the laws of that time, such a practice was allowed. In fact, a baby born of this arrangement was legally considered to be the child of the true wife and as such a rightful heir. In order to carry out such a plan, Sarah considered Hagar, who

¹ Genesis 12:1-5

occupied a favorable position within the family circle. After Hagar became Abraham's second wife, it was not long before she told him the happy news: "I am pregnant!"

Before Hagar's pregnancy, Abraham, since he had no son,² had thought that the male head of his household, Eliezer, would be his legal heir. But now, through Hagar, the child God had promised him might once again be coming into sight. Though Abraham had reason to expect that his heir would be a son of Sarah, up to that point God had never mentioned to him who the mother would be. He waited thirteen years for God to give him the answer.³

Before long, it was evident that Sarah's solution had been a purely human one. God's blessing toward Hagar had never been asked for and was not given. Impatient and doubting God's ability to work her situation out, Sarah had chosen her own way, and Abraham had given in to her plans too readily. No wonder the peace of God had left the house.

Reflect on a time when you made a decision out of impatience that impacted not only you but others in your life. What was the result?

At this time in history, a childless woman was despised by all. Unfortunately, Hagar didn't miss an opportunity to communicate such feelings toward Sarah. Then, as now, few

² Genesis 15:2-5

³ Genesis 17:15-16

things in the world were so subtle and yet transmitted so clearly as the feelings of one woman toward another.

Is there a woman in your life whom you have negative feelings toward? In what ways do you treat her that might communicate a lack of love?

Sarah in turn reacted to Hagar's nonverbal communication. She, too, knew her weapons and how to use them. As the mistress, she had the oldest and first rights, a fact confirmed by the laws of her time. Even now Hagar remained Sarah's personal possession, to do with as she pleased.

What "weapons" do you use against people? Why?

Unable to approach Hagar without Sarah's permission, Abraham likewise could not prevent Sarah from using her power to humiliate Hagar.

Although all three of them had trespassed God's laws and were equally guilty in His sight, it is understandable that Hagar's attitude hurt Sarah deeply. This hurt partially explains Sarah's terrible treatment of Hagar. Yet knowledge of Sarah's inner turmoil does not make Hagar's humiliation any easier for us to accept.

Hagar, tiring of Sarah's treatment, finally lost her patience. Without asking permission, she fled to the wilderness. In this way she was true to her name. *Hagar* literally meant "flight."

Knowing full well that she and her yet-unborn child might be heading toward death, she disappeared into the wilderness. Alone and without food, she knew that she might never reach her homeland. Her child might never see life. But she had to try.

Often in the midst of difficult situations, we feel the urge to flee. Have you ever felt this way? What did you learn by staying?

Instinctively she began walking south on the long road toward Egypt. The farther she walked, the more her danger dawned on her. She had given up a sheltered community for the endless, inhospitable wilderness. Neither person nor beast could be seen for miles; there was no one to help her.

Somewhere in the northeastern section of the Sinai Peninsula, Hagar reached a desert spring along the road to Shur. The oasis offered refreshment and rest, but it did not still her inner needs.

Separated from security and friendship, she cried out from her innermost being to the God of Abraham, the only One who could save her. And He had not abandoned her. The slowly moving dot in the rough desert terrain of the

Sinai had not escaped His attention. He had kept His eye on Hagar just as He continues to do for all mankind.

“Hagar,” He called loudly, addressing her by her first name.⁴ He knew precisely who she was.

“Servant of Sarai,” He added, placing her into the framework through which He saw her. In His eyes, she was still Sarah’s maid. He did not begin the conversation with a rebuke, though under the circumstances He could have.

“Where have you come from, and where are you going?” He then asked. It was a disarming approach that gave Hagar room to speak her mind freely. Jesus Christ, who during His years on earth would use the same approach, was speaking to her.⁵ Jesus Christ Himself was visiting her in the person of the Angel of the Lord. It was one of the preincarnate appearances of the Lord Jesus in the Old Testament.

“Where have you come from, and where are you going?” This question speaks to the larger picture of our lives. Consider your past and the path you are following toward your future. How does your relationship with God speak into both of those areas?

Later, He would reveal Himself in the same manner to Abraham, the father of all believers,⁶ and to Moses,⁷ both of

⁴ Genesis 16:7-9, ESV

⁵ John 4:4-42; 8:3-11

⁶ Genesis 17:4-5

⁷ Exodus 3:2-6

whom the Bible calls friends of God.⁸ Both Jacob and Gideon would also be deeply impressed when they met Christ under similar circumstances.⁹

But Jesus Christ's first documented meeting with a person was with Hagar, long before He came to earth to redeem mankind. A young heathen woman who did not belong to the people of God, she—the mother of an unborn child—had come before God in extreme need. God in turn showed her the way to deliverance. In humility and repentance, she obeyed Him and turned back toward Abraham's camp. Her sin, like that of Eve, was pride. Renouncing her proud spirit of rebellion and willful independence, Hagar returned to Sarah, her mistress.

Instead of asserting herself or speaking out for her own rights, Hagar had to humble herself. The Lord Himself had given her an example of humility when He had stooped down to speak with her. Later, He would humble Himself much more in order to provide sinful people with an alternative to death.¹⁰ He would give new life to everyone who personally trusted in Him.

*In what circumstance or area of your life
is God calling you to humble yourself?*

God, who gives special blessings to those who have the courage to humble themselves,¹¹ honored Hagar's obedience.

⁸ James 2:23; Exodus 33:11

⁹ Genesis 28:12-17; Judges 6:11-23

¹⁰ Philippians 2:5-11

¹¹ 1 Peter 5:6

“You will give birth to a son,” He said. “You shall name him Ishmael [‘God hears’]. . . . I will increase your descendants so much that they will be too numerous to count.”¹²

The son she expected would not be an easy man with whom to get along. He would have a wild and untamed character. Yet how she must have rejoiced in her heart at these words of God. There was hope again. Instead of expecting death, she now had the perspective of life. The future was blossoming for her and her unborn child. Jesus had a plan for their lives and had come down to share it with her personally.

“You are the God who sees me!” she exclaimed in adoration and worship.¹³ Yet she was also afraid and overawed. *I have seen God and am still alive*, she thought after God left her. *I am able to tell others.*

The Bible tells of other appearances of the angel of the Lord (Genesis 32:24-30; Joshua 5:13-15; Judges 6:11-24). What were the reactions of these people, and in what ways are they similar to Hagar’s?

Later, the spring oasis where she encountered God was named Beer Lahai Roi,¹⁴ which translated means, “the well of the Living One who sees me.” Hagar had experienced the true God who saw and answered her during her time of need.

¹² Genesis 16:11, 10

¹³ Genesis 16:13

¹⁴ Genesis 16:14

As long as Hagar lived, she no doubt remembered this experience with God. Every time she pronounced Ishmael's name, she reminded herself of this fact: The living God had heard and had acted.

Approximately seventeen years passed. Ishmael had now become a strong young man. Isaac, the son of promise, had now been born and at three years of age was finally ready to be weaned.

The weaning of a child during this time was cause for much celebration, for it was considered to be a milestone in the youngster's life. Abraham's entire household and many of his friends from neighboring cities came to celebrate and to see for themselves the miracle God had performed for Abraham and Sarah. One hundred-year-old Abraham and ninety-year-old Sarah had been blessed with a son in their old age, the son of promise from whose offspring the Messiah would later come.

But the party atmosphere was not entirely pleasant. Ishmael, the oldest son, could not tolerate all the attention his younger brother was receiving and began to mock him. There was, of course, more going on behind the scenes than just an innocent rivalry between two brothers. Ishmael, the son of natural birth who was procreated in unbelief and impatience, felt inferior to Isaac, the son of promise. Unwilling to accept second-place billing, Ishmael refused to acknowledge Isaac's privileged position. Unaware of God's promises to his mother in the wilderness many years before, Ishmael could not accept his subservient position.

Abraham loved both boys equally, as only a father could. Only Sarah understood what was at stake. “Get rid of that slave woman and her son,” she demanded of Abraham. “That woman’s son will never share in the inheritance with my son Isaac.”¹⁵

In response to his wife’s strong statement, Abraham became upset and confused. As he prayed, God showed him that the separation of his sons was necessary. The patriarchal line of the tribe God had chosen for His future people, Israel, would run through Isaac. He alone was the son of God’s promise¹⁶ and would become the forefather of a family of twelve tribes. From that point on, Abraham came to understand the difference between both sons had to be clear. Sarah was right. But through this confusion, God’s promise to Hagar that her posterity would become great remained valid. Like Isaac, Ishmael would become the father of a family of twelve tribes because he was a son of Abraham.¹⁷

Thus Abraham had to send Hagar and her son away into the wilderness. After living in Abraham’s household for nearly thirty years, she was now forced to leave. As Abraham filled up a water skin for Hagar, all three of them realized that the food and water for Hagar and Ishmael would not last long. Nevertheless, the difficult journey began.

The inevitable came all too quickly. The water supply ran out, and despite their frenzied searches, Hagar and Ishmael could not find a spring. Ishmael, weakened from walking and dehydration, was the first to fall to the ground, exhausted.

¹⁵ Genesis 21:10

¹⁶ Galatians 4:22-23

¹⁷ Genesis 25:12-16

When it became clear that her son would soon die, Hagar used the last of her strength to drag him beneath a small but sheltering bush. It was the final service she could render to her child.

Having done all she could do for her beloved son, Hagar could not bear to sit and watch him suffer any longer. Numb with fatigue and pain, she sat down some distance away and cried as if her heart would break.

Suddenly from heaven she heard the same familiar voice she had heard in the wilderness so many years before. Once again, the angel of the Lord asked her a question: “What is the matter, Hagar? Do not be afraid; God has heard the boy crying as he lies there. Lift the boy up and take him by the hand, for I will make him into a great nation.”¹⁸

Startled, she looked up and saw a well of fresh water only a few feet away. Struggling to her feet, she hurried over and refilled the water skin. With the water God had provided, her son drank in new life.

For the second time, Jesus Christ had visited Hagar in her misery to save her life and the life of her son. Again, there had been the promise of a hopeful future for Ishmael.

As Ishmael grew older, his mother traveled to Egypt and brought him back a wife. By this act, she proved that she was still not a God-follower. Her extended time around Abraham and Sarah had not completely changed that. Even the visitation by Jesus Christ had not really changed her heart. The Lord on whom she had called in her need, who had helped

¹⁸ Genesis 21:17-18

her, had not become the Lord of her life. He was not allowed to possess her heart.

Have you allowed the Lord to possess your heart, or do you simply call on Him when you're in need? What does it look like to allow God to be Lord of your life?

Because the Lord knew that Hagar would choose the idols of her past, He permitted her forced departure from Abraham's family. Instead of enjoying a sheltered and secure existence near Abraham, she chose to live a nomadic life in the desert. Because of Hagar and Ishmael's dreadful choice to assert themselves instead of living by faith in Abraham's God, the entire history of the world has been affected. Ishmael became the founder of the Arab nations, while the Israelites are the descendants of Isaac. The enmity of these two races still continues today.

Yet, despite everything, Hagar stands in history as a proof that Jesus Christ loves people. Every man, woman, and unborn child is loved by Him. His demonstration to Hagar proves that every person in need who calls out to Him will be answered. Jesus Christ, who was willing to reveal Himself to a woman who had reached the end of her possibilities, even now is available to everyone who seeks Him.