

# Learners

*lessons from women of striving and grace*

HER NAME IS WOMAN BIBLE STUDY

Gien Karssen



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

**CORRIE TEN BOOM**

*Author of *The Hiding Place**

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

**RUTH BELL GRAHAM**

*Author of *Footprints of a Pilgrim**

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**NAVPRESS** 

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*Learners: Lessons from Women of Striving and Grace*

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# Foreword

RALPH WALDO EMERSON said, “I have never met a man who was not my superior in some particular.” In other words, each person we meet has the potential to teach us something new if we are willing to look for the lesson in every conversation and situation. There is no end to the opportunities to grow in our knowledge, wisdom, and understanding, and the Scriptures command it. We are instructed to learn the commandments, to learn to love the Lord, to learn to fear the Lord, to learn to do right and seek justice, to learn the secret of being content, and to learn to control our bodies. Hebrews even tells us that Jesus Himself “learned obedience” (Hebrews 5:8). That’s just a sampling of the many exhortations to be lifelong learners that we find in the Scriptures.

When we learn something new about God, it opens up a window of how much more we need to learn. We don’t engage in learning because we are unwise but because we are wise. It’s not about making ourselves better but about getting to know God better.

Like Emerson, we can learn much from the women in the

Story of God, even from those whose lives were the messiest and most broken. Eve learned identity and purpose, Sarah learned of God's providence and sovereignty, and Rebekah learned the tragic results of not waiting on the perfect timing of God. Reading Bathsheba's story, we are perplexed by the extravagant grace of God. When reading the story of the widow of Zarephath, we learn that faith is not primarily a mindset but a series of actions. The stories of Tamar and Naomi show us that redemption is always found—even if it is waiting far ahead of us in the future. These women teach us to hold on to faith when it seems as though faith has let go of us, and they teach us that we must develop the kind of faith that stands the test of life.

Jesus taught his disciples with stories, and Gien Karssen does the same. She tackles familiar stories but zooms in on the characters so we see them and understand them more clearly. She shines a spotlight on the tension, the choices, the revelations, the triumphs and failures, and the thrills and disappointments that each woman encounters. She gives us a window to see how they responded when God showed up the way they expected and how they reacted when He seemed to remain hidden and silent. We can take a front-row seat to learn from their successes and their mistakes. Although separated by thousands of years and thousands of miles, these women are not that different from us. And from them, we can learn valuable lessons.

*Heather Zempel, discipleship pastor and  
author of Amazed and Confused*

# 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 a 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

# EVE

*The Mother of All Living*

The woman was made of a rib out of the side of Adam; not made out of his head to rule over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved.

MATTHEW HENRY, *A COMMENTARY ON THE WHOLE BIBLE*

## READ

Genesis 1:27-28; Genesis 2:18, 20-25; Genesis 3:1-20

• • •

EVE WAS CAPTIVATED BY ALL SHE SAW—everything around her was perfect. The nature she saw was wondrous and refreshing. The air she breathed was pure and unspoiled. The water she drank was clear and sparkling. Every animal lived harmoniously with all others.

Her marriage was perfect—her fellowship with God and her husband were a daily joy. Eve had everything anyone could desire.

Then one day a voice in the garden asked her, “Did

God tell you that you should not eat the fruit of any tree in the garden?”

*Why, she wondered, haven't I ever noticed the special beauty of the tree that stands in the middle of the garden? And why does my entire happiness suddenly seem to depend on eating its fruit? Eating something so desirable can only be good . . .*

---

*Reflect on a time when you felt as though your happiness depended on something other than God alone. How did you respond to the temptations involved?*

---

She didn't notice that she was being deceived—that God's Word had been twisted—that God's love was being doubted.

Eve didn't know that the one speaking to her was Satan in disguise.<sup>1</sup> He was and had been a liar and a murderer from the beginning,<sup>2</sup> desiring to deceive people.<sup>3</sup> He didn't quote God precisely, but used his own words.<sup>4</sup>

His attack on God's Word should have warned her not to listen to him. She could still have escaped at this phase of her temptation.<sup>5</sup> For although she was on dangerous ground, she had been created with a will that was capable of withstanding the tempter. She didn't have to give Satan the opportunity to deceive her by listening to him.<sup>6</sup> She had a choice. But

<sup>1</sup> 2 Corinthians 11:14; Revelation 20:2

<sup>2</sup> John 8:44

<sup>3</sup> 1 Peter 5:8

<sup>4</sup> Genesis 2:16-17

<sup>5</sup> James 4:7

<sup>6</sup> Ephesians 4:27

unfortunately, she listened to him. Even worse, she answered him. This marked the beginning of her fall.

Like Satan, Eve also twisted the words of God. She added, “And you must not touch it . . .” to what God said, although God had not said anything about touching. Then she weakened His stress on death by omitting the word *certainly*.

---

*Have you ever been guilty of  
softening or changing God's words  
to align with your personal desires?  
What does such an action indicate about  
a person's heart and motivations?*

---

Satan's first blow was successful. Eve was willing to listen to him, to linger with him. This increased his boldness. He blatantly called God a liar. He portrayed God as Someone who wanted to subdue humans and curtail their happiness, since He had the power to do so.

“Die?” he railed. “You won't die at all. You will be happier than you ever dreamed. You will be like God.” He continued to tempt her, drawing her toward independence. His call to disobedience was fatal to Eve. Her resistance had been broken when she took time to argue with Satan. She stretched forward and took the fruit that her heart desired.

By then, the evil could not be stopped. She had become so entangled in the nets of the deceiver that she could not

escape. She ate the fruit. But that was not the end of the matter. The woman who was deceived in turn became a deceiver. Eve entangled her husband in her sin. Without protest he accepted the fruit from her and ate it.

---

*Reflect on a time when a sin choice  
in your life impacted someone else.  
What did you learn from that experience?*

---

At that moment her entire life changed.

In the beginning, the creation God had made was ideal. It was so perfect that He was satisfied with it Himself<sup>7</sup> and stressed this fact after every deed of creation.

Yet something was missing. “It is not good for a man to be alone. I will make him a helper,” said the Lord God. After both man and woman were created, God’s work was complete and “very good.”<sup>8</sup>

Eve was a creature carved by the hand of God. She was created equal to her husband. Their only difference was sex. She was unique.

As a human being, she, like Adam, was gifted with reason and understanding. Therefore, she was his partner in conversation. And like him she had a personal relationship with and was expected to be obedient to her Creator. God made Eve, along with Adam, accountable for executing the same tasks.

<sup>7</sup> Genesis 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25

<sup>8</sup> Genesis 1:31

In her own specific way, she was to help fill and subdue the earth. She had a unique relationship with her husband. She shared her life with him. She completed him. Her physical structure made her fit him, so that together they could execute God's command to multiply.

Although completed after Adam, Eve was certainly not an "afterthought." She was as much a part of God's original plan as Adam was. She couldn't function without him, and he could not do without her.<sup>9</sup>

As husband and wife, Adam and Eve formed a new nucleus: a couple. This couple was characterized by its own personality. It was not the sum of two individuals; it was its own new entity. It is God's plan that the marriage partners should live together in complete harmony—that they feel at ease with each other, one in a bond maintained by mutual love and respect.<sup>10</sup>

In the wake of her conversation with Satan, Eve realized how bitterly she had been deceived. She first noticed this in her relationship to Adam. They had always been at ease with each other, as God had created them to be. But now they were suddenly shy and defenseless. The protection of their innocence was gone. They discovered they could not have a free and easy relationship. They began to hide things from each other. They discovered that they not only stood naked to each other—they were naked before God! Their purity was gone. Their sinless nature had been destroyed.

<sup>9</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:11-12

<sup>10</sup> Ephesians 5:21

Their intimate relationship with God was broken. Instead of becoming like Him as Satan had promised, they became afraid of Him and fled from Him.

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*What specific recurring issues do you see in your relationships that are an effect of the fall? How is Christ's sacrifice for your sin redeeming those issues?*

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Then God entered this devastating situation. He took the initiative to look for them. How lovingly He greeted them. He started with a question, not an accusation. He gave them a chance to acknowledge their sin, but they failed to see their opportunity. He first held Adam responsible for his role.<sup>11</sup> Though Adam had been present, he did not stop Eve from committing the sin. In fact, he joined her. And then he blamed her. “The woman You gave me did it.” Adam almost sounded as if he blamed God for giving Eve to him.

Eve passed the guilt on to someone else too. She blamed the serpent, although if she had been honest with herself, she would have had to admit that she had voluntarily accepted his offer. It was true, he had misled her, but she had sinned of her own free will. She had failed the test offered to her as a human being to obey God voluntarily out of love.

<sup>11</sup> Romans 5:12, 14

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*In what part of your life are you not taking responsibility for your own sin? Have you ever blamed others for choices that are ultimately yours? How can you change your perspective and response to these areas?*

---

The judgment of God that followed revealed to her the catastrophic impact of her deed. Not only the beautiful Garden of Eden, but the entire world, was cursed. The soil, once without weeds, would now produce thorns and thistles. The animals were cursed. The tranquility of the animal kingdom over which Adam and Eve had ruled together was marred. The wolf and lamb would no longer eat peacefully together. The stronger would rule the weaker. The beautiful paradise in which they could have lived happily forever had, with one quick blow, become a lost paradise. They were ordered to leave quickly, so they wouldn't eat from the tree of life and thus be forced to live forever as sinful people.<sup>12</sup>

Eve, who had completed God's creation and who was the last link in the chain of happiness on earth, had thrown this happiness away by her disobedience.

Her joy of motherhood would be tempered by pain and trouble. The sting of lordship would now affect her relationship with her husband. He would now rule over her because of sin.

<sup>12</sup> Genesis 3:22-23

And though Adam and Eve did not die instantly after their sin in the Garden, the institution of death was a result. In a second they had become mortal human beings, subject to death.

But far worse than natural death was spiritual death, the vacuum of separation from God.<sup>13</sup> This, most of all, Eve painfully experienced in her innermost self.

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*If you are a follower of Christ, you are no longer separated from God. However, often in our sin we still hide from God, though He longs to be close to us. Have you experienced relational distance because of sin? What did you learn from that experience?*

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Eve was lonely and had a difficult time during childbirth. Being the first woman on earth she had no mother, no sister, no friend who could share her feelings. There was no one to go to for advice, no other woman who could help her with the delivery. And what a strange experience, to become a mother when you have never been a child yourself. What do you do with a child? In these trying circumstances it is no wonder that Eve fell back on God. “With the help of the LORD I have brought forth a man,”<sup>14</sup> she said as she smiled at her baby, Cain.

She and Adam were not the only ones to be punished for

<sup>13</sup> Genesis 2:17; Ephesians 2:1

<sup>14</sup> Genesis 4:1

sinning against God. Satan's punishment was far greater. He was told of his destruction, by Someone named Immanuel, who would be born of Eve's offspring.<sup>15</sup> Was she hoping, was she expecting, that the child in her arms was the promised Messiah?

Eve was a living demonstration of faith—faith that one could never sink so deeply so as not to be able to turn back to God. And hope—hope that God would give new possibilities, no matter how great the sin.

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*Read Romans 5:3-4, and reflect on how God spurs us toward hope. Does God's response toward your sin cause you to hope? Has your hope grown over the course of your walk with Him?*

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Eve was crushed when Cain killed her second son. She realized that she had brought a sinful man into the world. He was a murderer. The terrible extent of her deed in the garden became even more starkly clear to her. She had passed on death—spiritually and physically—to Adam, and he to every person born.<sup>16</sup> No human would ever again live in innocence, as she once had. Each person born would sin not only by choice, but also because of an inner urging. Everyone would face an unending battle between good and evil. Everyone would be separated from God by sin. There would be no exceptions.

<sup>15</sup> Isaiah 7:14

<sup>16</sup> Romans 3:10-12, 23; 6:23

Again and again Satan appeals to the desires of man, trying to entice him. Sin and death will enter the scene each time we give in to our own desires.<sup>17</sup> In every generation there will be people like Eve who are moved by the desire to have what the eyes see and to satisfy the desires of pride.<sup>18</sup> Satan tries to move every person against God just as he did to Eve. He stirs up rebellion and ingratitude in order to cause men to fall like he fell—from pride.<sup>19</sup>

Even many, many years after Eden, when Jesus Christ has offered us redemption<sup>20</sup> and everyone who personally believes in Him again has access to God,<sup>21</sup> the best of us will realize that while we want to do good, we are drawn toward evil.<sup>22</sup> Only Jesus Christ—the Announced One—has proven that a man can conquer temptation if he clings to and lives by the Word of God.<sup>23</sup>

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*Knowledge of God's Word and His desires for us help protect us from temptation. What is one specific practice you can begin this week to expand your knowledge of Scripture?*

---

As a result of Adam and Eve's sin, the tears, mourning, and pain we experience now will continue until a new kingdom.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>17</sup> James 1:14-15

<sup>18</sup> 1 John 2:16

<sup>19</sup> Isaiah 14:12-15

<sup>20</sup> 1 John 2:2

<sup>21</sup> John 1:12-13

<sup>22</sup> Romans 7:15-19

<sup>23</sup> Matthew 4:1-11

<sup>24</sup> Revelation 21:1, 4

And until that time, every human will be plagued with sin. Until then, every person is urgently warned not to follow Eve's example.<sup>25</sup> For Eve, the mother of all living, provides a frightening example. She is the woman who admitted sin into the world when she allowed Satan to make her doubt God's Word and His love. But may we also learn from her faith that God can redeem the darkest of stories.

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<sup>25</sup> 2 Corinthians 11:3