

# God Calls **Ordinary People** To Do Extraordinary Things for Him

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*"But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise;  
God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong."  
(1 Corinthians 1:27)*

Throughout history, God has shown a remarkable pattern. He hasn't looked for perfect resumes or polished credentials when giving someone an assignment. Instead, He calls ordinary people who might be flawed, overlooked, or sometimes even fearful to carry out extraordinary assignments for His glory. While the world often seeks charisma, credentials, and clout, God looks for something far simpler and far more powerful: a willing heart.

Over the years, I have seen how God raises up ordinary people to accomplish extraordinary purposes. You don't need a platform, a title, or an impressive résumé. Some of the most influential leaders in God's story began with nothing more than a simple, quiet "yes." Their willingness, not their qualifications, was the foundation for a life of lasting impact.

In this course, we'll begin with the journey of Gerald Easterly, a man I knew personally who was called to a unique ministry of intercessory prayer. His quiet but strategic approach to prayer not only impacted entire communities, but also deeply influenced my own perspective on God's call to ministry, especially in the years following my time as a restaurant owner.

To become God's servant, it isn't necessary to be famous or wealthy. You aren't required to be fearless. You just need to be faithful. Because when God calls, it's never really about what we can bring to the table. It's about what He can do through a willing heart.

You may never feel fully "qualified" and that's okay. **God doesn't call the equipped; He equips the called.** Your willingness to listen, learn, and follow His direction will be the beginning of a journey that could shape another individual or their entire family, communities, and even nations.

Get ready to step into God's calling - not by chasing fame or fortune, but by answering His call.

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# CHAPTER 1

## The Jericho Marcher

*"And the Lord said to Joshua: "See! I have given Jericho into your hand, its king, and the mighty men of valor. You shall march around the city, all you men of war; you shall go all around the city once. This you shall do six days..."*  
(Joshua 6:3-4)

Back in the day, my husband and I owned a restaurant called the Wooden Nickel, and Gerald Easterly was a beloved regular at our restaurant. It wasn't just because we enjoyed visiting with him, but because of the unique and heartfelt way he supported us. Before he ever stepped foot inside to order a meal, he would begin his visit with what we called his "Jericho march." Slowly and deliberately, he would walk the full perimeter of the restaurant property, circling it in prayer, much like the Israelites marched around the walls of Jericho. With each step, he prayed aloud for God's protection, blessing, and provision over our business, our staff, and even our customers.

But he didn't stop there.

Once his prayer walk was complete, he'd enter the restaurant quietly through the back door (never the front) and make his way through the kitchen. With gentle reverence, he would lay his hands on every major piece of equipment: the ovens, the walk-in cooler, the dishwasher, even the ice machine. As he touched each one, he prayed that it would keep working reliably, knowing full well that in a restaurant, a broken appliance can disrupt the entire day.

It wasn't a show. It wasn't a ritual. It was intercession—simple, sincere, and deeply moving. Mr. Easterly didn't just pray *for* us; he prayed with the kind of faith that made you feel like heaven was leaning in to listen. And his presence brought with it a quiet assurance: someone was faithfully lifting us up, one circuit and one kitchen appliance at a time. Only after he'd finished his rounds would he sit down to enjoy his meal.

Gerald Easterly had a personal mission in life, one that burned in his heart with unwavering conviction. His dream was simple in concept but profound in impact: to make sure that every single person was being prayed for, every single day, by someone else. He believed that if people were consistently lifted up in prayer, communities would change, hearts would soften, and God's presence would saturate entire regions.

But Gerald wasn't content with lofty ideas; he was a man of strategy and structure. He began by appointing a prayer leader for each block in our town. That block leader received the list of names of every person in every household on their street and committed to pray for them daily. Then, Gerald took it a step further. He assigned another group of intercessors to cover the block leaders, praying specifically for their strength, protection, and discernment.

From there, he organized prayer warriors to cover the neighborhood-level leaders. Layer by layer, the network expanded, like a living chain of prayer, each link holding up the next. His vision was

scalable: from block to neighborhood, from neighborhood to city, then to state, and eventually to the entire nation.

Although Gerald never saw his dream fully realized in the United States, he didn't stop dreaming or working. His passion took him beyond American borders. In one small country overseas, he successfully implemented his prayer network strategy across the entire nation. And on a tiny island in the Caribbean, he replicated the same model, organizing believers to stand in daily intercession for one another, from the coastal roads to the inner villages.

It wasn't about recognition or results; it was about obedience. Gerald believed that prayer could shift the atmosphere of a home, a city, even a country. And even though he never saw the full harvest of his labor in his own homeland, he sowed seeds of prayer and faith that are still bearing fruit in places most of us will never see.

I wrote the song "*Ordinary People*" for him, inspired by his quiet faithfulness and the way he lived out his mission with such purpose. Every time Gerald came to our restaurant for a meal, he would ask me without fail to stop whatever I was doing and play that song for him. It didn't matter how busy the kitchen was or how many people were in the restaurant, he wanted (needed?) to hear *his* song. And honestly, I was always happy to sit down at our old upright piano and sing for him. It felt like a small way to honor someone who was doing something truly extraordinary through prayer.

Sometimes I wonder... could we follow Gerald's example and build a community where every person is consistently, intentionally prayed for? It's a big vision but Gerald showed us that big visions can start with ordinary people.

1. Describe Gerald Easterly's "Jericho march" ritual at the Wooden Nickel restaurant. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. For what purpose did Gerald lay his hands on every piece of kitchen equipment? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. How did Gerald Easterly typically enter the restaurant and how is this significant? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. What was Gerald Easterly's personal mission in life? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. Describe the initial structure of Gerald Easterly's prayer network in his hometown.

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6. What did Gerald's actions (the Jericho march, laying hands on restaurant equipment, and organizing prayer networks) reflect concerning his belief in the power of prayer? \_\_\_\_\_

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7. Was Gerald ever able to successfully implement his prayer network throughout a region? \_\_\_\_\_

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8. Why might Gerald have been so insistent on hearing the song "*Ordinary People*" every time he visited? \_\_\_\_\_

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9. What message does the author wish to convey about "ordinary people" through Gerald Easterly's example? \_\_\_\_\_

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10. I wonder, could we follow Gerald's example and build a community where every person is consistently, intentionally prayed for? Discuss the challenges and potential benefits of attempting to replicate Gerald's vision in contemporary society and/or in your own country.

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## CHAPTER 2

### Outnumbered but Not Overcome

*"But He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.'  
Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses,  
so that Christ's power may rest on me."  
(2 Corinthians 12:9)*

Gideon was, by all appearances, the least likely man to be called by God to lead an army. His story, found in Judges 6–7, reveals a man filled with fear, insecurity, and self-doubt - hardly the traits of a military hero. Yet it was precisely Gideon whom God chose to deliver Israel from the oppressive hand of the Midianites. His calling underscores a powerful biblical truth: **God does not call the qualified; He qualifies the called.**

When we first meet Gideon, he is threshing wheat in a winepress (Judges 6:11) to hide it from the Midianites. A winepress in ancient Israel was a small, enclosed space, often hewn out of rock or dug into the ground. It was meant for crushing grapes, not grain. Threshing, on the other hand, typically required an open, elevated area, where oxen or threshing tools could be used to separate the grain from the chaff. The open setting allowed the wind to blow away the lighter chaff during the winnowing process.

But Gideon had no such luxury. He wasn't using oxen. He had no breeze to help winnow. He was crouched in a confined space, doing a job that wasn't meant to be done there. It was inefficient, difficult, and small-scale. This picture reveals Gideon's fear and his instinct to avoid confrontation. He was not rallying troops or preparing for war. He was simply trying to survive.

Actually, Gideon's actions mirrored the spiritual and emotional state of the entire nation of Israel at the time. The Midianites had oppressed Israel for seven years (Judges 6:1), and the people were living in fear, hiding in caves and mountain strongholds (Judges 6:2). The nation was physically, emotionally, and spiritually crushed - just like the grapes in a winepress.

Gideon's strategy of working in secrecy, limited by his environment, reflected not only his personal fear but the collective despair of God's people.

When the angel of the Lord told Gideon he would deliver Israel, Gideon immediately questioned his qualifications saying, *"Pardon me, my lord,"* Gideon replied, *"but how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family."* (Judges 6:15). This one sentence spoken by Gideon revealed a great deal about his self-perception, his background, and the cultural context in which God called him. It was not just a personal protest; it was a declaration of disqualification in every category Gideon could think of.

In Israelite society, tribe and clan determined much about a person's status, authority, and influence. Gideon was from the tribe of Manasseh, which was already considered one of the less dominant tribes, overshadowed by tribes like Judah, Ephraim, and Levi.



But Gideon drills down even further: not only was Manasseh a lesser tribe, but his **clan** within Manasseh was the weakest, likely small in number, lacking in wealth, prestige, or military strength. To Gideon, this was a clear and logical reason for why he could not possibly be God's choice. He was from the margins rather than the center.

And Gideon didn't stop at his clan's low status. He went a step further and diminished his own worth within that low-ranking family. In other words, he was saying, "Even if someone from my family *was* chosen, it wouldn't be me. I'm at the bottom of the bottom."

Gideon saw himself through the lens of his limitations - his social status, his family background, and his personal weakness. This was not false humility. It was his honest assessment of his own limitations. And it's important to note: **God didn't correct him on the facts.** Gideon might have been right about all those things, but God wasn't choosing him based on human credentials.

But despite Gideon's fear and insecurity, the angel of the Lord called him a "mighty warrior" (Judges 6:12). God saw not who Gideon was, but who he would become through divine empowerment. The Lord responded saying, "*The Lord is with you, mighty warrior.*" (Judges 6:12) "*I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites, leaving none alive.*" (Judges 6:16). These promises weren't based on Gideon's ability, but on God's presence and power.

Then God took it a step further. At the beginning, Gideon had 32,000 men—already a small force against the Midianite army, which numbered about 135,000 (Judges 8:10). From a human perspective, Gideon was already the underdog. But God looked deeper - not at the numbers, but at the hearts of the people. He knew the human tendency to take credit for victories, even when outnumbered.

God was not just interested in winning the battle. He was interested in shaping the faith and character of His people. A military victory achieved through sheer numbers might have built confidence in themselves rather than trust in Him. So God reduced the army drastically by shrinking the army from 32,000 to 300 (less than 1% of the original size).

Gideon's army wasn't just trimmed down; it was left with no military advantage at all. No surprise attack, no superior weapons, no war horses - just trumpets, clay jars, and torches (Judges 7:16–20). This was not a strategic maneuver; it was an act of radical obedience.

Gideon had to trust ...

- that 300 men were enough.
- that God would fight for them.
- that faith was more powerful than force.

God was training His people not for war, but for dependence. The odds were laughably impossible, but God specializes in the impossible.

Gideon's story is a powerful reminder that God often chooses those who feel inadequate. He uses the weak to display His strength (1 Corinthians 1:27). Like Gideon, we may feel unqualified, but God sees our potential and equips us for the task. All He asks is our obedience and trust.

1. Where was Gideon in the beginning of this narrative, and what was he doing? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Explain why threshing wheat in a winepress was an unusual and inefficient activity. How does this specific detail symbolize Gideon's and Israel's condition under Midianite oppression? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. What specific reasons did Gideon give for his perceived inability to save Israel?
  - a) \_\_\_\_\_
  - b) \_\_\_\_\_
4. What contrasting title did the angel of the Lord use to address Gideon, and what did this signify about God's foresight and power? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. What was the initial size of Gideon's army and how many was he left with? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. What was God's primary motivation for this drastic reduction in numbers? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. List the three unconventional items given to the remaining men in Gideon's army as their weapons for the upcoming battle.
  - a) \_\_\_\_\_
  - b) \_\_\_\_\_
  - c) \_\_\_\_\_

8. How does Gideon's story challenge our current culture's view of strength and success, and what does it reveal about God's ways? \_\_\_\_\_

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9. What does Gideon's story reveal about God's ability to use someone who appears weak or unqualified for a significant and powerful assignment? \_\_\_\_\_

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10. Have you ever felt like your "resources" were being stripped away before a challenge? How did that affect your faith? (Personal thought question; answers will vary.) \_\_\_\_\_

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## CHAPTER 3

### The Inner Circle

*"Come, follow me, and I will send you out to fish for people."*  
(Matthew 4:19)

I have to be honest ... if it were up to me to plant a new church or launch an entirely new denomination, I know exactly the kind of leaders I'd be looking for. I'd scout out individuals with advanced theological degrees, polished resumes, and a proven track record in administration, leadership, and strategic planning. In other words, I'd look for the kind of people we might expect to lead a successful organization by today's standards.

But God doesn't operate according to human logic or cultural expectations. His ways are higher than ours (Isaiah 55:8), and His choices often defy conventional wisdom. Time and again in Scripture, we see God selecting the least likely candidates for key assignments.

When Jesus began His public ministry, He didn't head straight to the temple to recruit priests or seek out scholars of the law. Instead, He walked along the shores of the Sea of Galilee and called four fishermen to follow Him, men who would become part of His innermost circle of disciples. The chosen fishermen were Simon Peter, Andrew, James, and John.

The fishermen of Jesus' time were generally not wealthy. They were part of the lower economic class in Galilean society, though not the very poorest. Their income depended on daily labor and a good catch. Fishing was often a family business, passed down through generations. Sons worked alongside fathers and brothers, as seen in the case of James and John, the sons of Zebedee. While some may have owned their boats, like James and John's family (Mark 1:19–20), many worked in partnership with others or were hired hands.

Fishermen typically had not received formal religious education beyond basic instruction in the synagogue. Few (if any) would have been trained as rabbis or scribes. They were literate enough in basic Hebrew and Aramaic to function in society and do business, but their lives were focused on physical labor, not scholarly pursuits.

Fishermen were seen as ordinary and unremarkable by the religious elite. Their trade was tough, smelly, and physically demanding. While not dishonorable, it lacked prestige and certainly was not a glamorous profession. It was hard, dirty, physically exhausting work. Fishermen labored long hours, often through the night, casting nets, hauling in fish, and repairing their equipment (Matthew 4:18–22). In Acts 4:13, Peter and John are described as "unschooled, ordinary men".

This made it all the more surprising that Jesus chose several of them to become His inner circle and leaders of the early church. Jesus saw beyond their calloused hands and sun-worn faces. He saw their potential, not in their qualifications, but in their character. They didn't hold positions of power or influence. But what they did have was teachability, courage, and the ability to work hard and persevere, qualities Jesus would further shape for Kingdom work.

Jesus' invitation to these men was simple yet life-altering: “*Come, follow me, and I will send you out to fish for people.*” (Matthew 4:19)

Peter and Andrew dropped their nets immediately. So did James and John, who even left their father in the boat (Mark 1:20). Their instant response shows both the compelling nature of Jesus' invitation and the readiness of their hearts.

These four fishermen didn't just become followers; they became foundational leaders in the early church. Jesus brought them into His inner circle, drawing them closer during critical moments in His ministry:

- Peter, James, and John were present at the raising of Jairus's daughter (Mark 5:37), the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1–2), and Jesus' agony in Gethsemane (Mark 14:33).
- Peter became the outspoken leader of the apostles, boldly preaching at Pentecost and helping launch the church (Acts 2).
- John, the “beloved disciple,” became a writer of Scripture and a key voice of love and truth.

From a human perspective, Jesus' selection made little sense. Why not choose religious experts, respected community leaders, or wealthy patrons? But Jesus' choice of fishermen reveals something deeper. The fishermen Jesus called were rugged, hardworking, likely uneducated men by rabbinical standards. Yet Jesus saw in them the potential to lead, preach, heal, and change the world - not because of their résumé, but because of their willingness to follow and be transformed.

Jesus' decision to build His closest circle from among fishermen shows us that no one is too common, too unskilled, or too unlikely for God to use. Jesus chose ordinary men to carry an extraordinary message, so that it would be clear that the power came not from them, but from God (2 Corinthians 4:7). What He looks for is not perfection, but a willing heart.

Just as Jesus called those fishermen from the shore - men who were mending their nets, going about the routines of ordinary life - He still calls people today. The call is the same now as it was then: “*Follow Me.*” It's not a call to comfort or predictability, but to transformation, purpose, and eternal impact. He doesn't wait for us to perfect ourselves or earn impressive credentials. He meets us right where we are, in the middle of our work, our families, our failures, and our questions, and invites us into something far greater than we could build on our own.

Jesus took ordinary men and reshaped their lives so profoundly that they became the foundation of a movement that would change the world. And He does the same with us. He calls teachers, truck drivers, students, single moms, retirees, and businesspeople. He calls people who feel unqualified, unnoticed, or unsure. What matters most is not our background, but our response.

When we leave behind our “nets” (the things that define or limit us) and follow Him, He begins to reframe our lives. He teaches us to fish for people, to build His Kingdom, to walk by faith, and to trust that in His hands, even our ordinary lives can become vessels of extraordinary accomplishments for His glory.

1. What kind of qualities would someone in today's culture typically look for in choosing the right person to launch a new church or denomination? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. How does God's method of choosing leaders often differ from human logic and cultural expectations? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Briefly describe the typical economic and educational background of fishermen in Jesus' time.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. What specific character qualities did Jesus see in the four fishermen that He deemed valuable for "Kingdom work"? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. What were some of the challenges or sacrifices the fishermen must have faced in leaving everything to follow Jesus? (Thought question, answers will vary.) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. What did their immediate response say about their hearts or their readiness? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. What does the text suggest is the ultimate purpose of Jesus calling ordinary people today? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. How can Ephesians 2:10 encourage someone who feels unqualified to serve God? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

9. How does 1 Corinthians 1:27–29 challenge the world’s idea of who is qualified to lead? \_\_\_\_\_

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10. What does it mean to "leave behind our nets" when Jesus calls? \_\_\_\_\_

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11. Are there “nets” in your own life that you might need to lay down in order to follow Jesus more fully? (Very personal; answer optional.) \_\_\_\_\_

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## CHAPTER 4

### The Scarlet Cord

*“By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies,  
was not killed with those who were disobedient.”*  
(Hebrews 11:31)

Rahab’s story is one of the most powerful reminders in Scripture that God delights in using the unlikely, the marginalized, and even the morally questionable to accomplish His divine purposes. Found in Joshua 2 and honored in Hebrews 11, Rahab’s life was marked not by a perfect past, but by a courageous faith that changed her future and history itself.

Rahab lived in Jericho, a heavily fortified Canaanite city marked for destruction (Joshua 2:1). The Bible introduced her in Joshua 2:1 without any attempt at hiding her occupation: *“So they went and entered the house of a prostitute named Rahab and stayed there.”*

The life of a prostitute in Rahab’s time was marked by isolation, danger, and dishonor.

1. In Canaanite society, prostitutes were considered **socially inferior**. Although prostitution was often tolerated, women in this role were viewed with shame and contempt. They were typically excluded from respectable family life, religious rites, and marriage prospects. Their homes were often located near or built into the city walls (Joshua 2:15), placing them physically and symbolically on the edge of society.
2. Rahab’s label as a prostitute would have meant she had **limited protection under the law**, few rights or freedoms, and constant exposure to danger and exploitation. Yet, Rahab’s home was a place where travelers and merchants likely stopped, a blend of lodging and illicit commerce. This gave her access to news from other lands, including stories about Israel’s God (Joshua 2:10).
3. Prostitution in ancient times was often a last resort for **economically vulnerable** women - especially widows, unmarried women, or those without a male protector (father, brother, or husband). It was rarely a “chosen” profession, but one usually entered out of desperation or coercion. In Canaan, where patriarchal systems ruled, Rahab may have been orphaned, abandoned, or a victim of war and displacement. Her profession, while shameful in many eyes, may have been her only means of survival.
4. Rahab lived in a **pagan, polytheistic culture**. The Canaanites worshiped gods like Baal and Asherah, often through fertility rites and ritual prostitution. Some temples even included cult prostitutes, both male and female, who engaged in sex as part of religious ceremonies. Though the Bible doesn’t tell us whether Rahab was a temple prostitute or a secular one, we know the spiritual environment of Jericho was deeply idolatrous and morally corrupt.



When two Israelite spies came to Jericho to scout the land, Rahab made a bold, life-altering decision. Instead of turning them in, she hid them on her roof and misled the king's men who came searching. Why would she do such a thing and bring danger to her own home? Because she had heard of Israel's God - the One who split the Red Sea, defeated kings, and went before His people with power. Despite her pagan upbringing, Rahab believed. "*The Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below,*" she declared (Joshua 2:11). Her faith moved her to act on behalf of the spies, even at the risk of her own life.

In return for hiding and protecting the Israelite spies, Rahab was given a remarkable promise. When Jericho was destroyed, she and her entire household would be spared. She was told to tie a scarlet cord in her window, the same window through which she had helped the spies escape (Joshua 2:18). This cord would serve as the visible sign of her faith and obedience, a mark that set her household apart amid the coming destruction.

More than as a safety signal, the scarlet cord today stands as a profound image of grace, rescue, and redemption. It echoes the blood smeared on the doorposts during the first Passover (Exodus 12:7,13), when death passed over every house marked by the blood of the lamb. It also foreshadows the cross of Christ, where the crimson blood of Jesus secured eternal deliverance for all who trust in Him. In Rahab's window, that simple thread of red became a bold statement of her faith in the God of Israel.

In her time, Rahab would have been judged by her profession, but the Bible does not stop with her past. Instead, Scripture highlights her faith, not her shame.

- Joshua 6:25: She was spared and lived among the Israelites.
- Hebrews 11:31: She was praised for her faith.
- James 2:25: Her faith was proven by her courageous actions.
- Matthew 1:5: She became the mother of Boaz, making her a direct ancestor of Jesus.

From prostitute to ancestor of the Messiah ... only God can orchestrate that kind of transformation. She was a Canaanite, a woman, and a prostitute - three strikes in the eyes of the ancient world. But Rahab's courage to believe and act on what she knew of God gave her a place not only in Israel but in the eternal story of redemption. Her life tells us that no one is too broken to be used by God, and faith can bloom even in the darkest places. Her life demonstrates God's grace can reach beyond cultural barriers, past sins, and human expectations.

Like Rahab, God can use any one of us, regardless of our past, to fulfill His purposes.

1. Describe the challenges and societal disadvantages Rahab faced due to her profession.

- a) \_\_\_\_\_
- b) \_\_\_\_\_
- c) \_\_\_\_\_

- d) \_\_\_\_\_
2. What unique advantage did Rahab's profession and home location likely provide her regarding information? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. How did Rahab conceal the two spies when the king's men came to her house looking for them? (Joshua 2:6) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. How did Rahab's understanding of God influence her decisions? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. What symbolic item became the sign of salvation for Rahab and her family? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. What other biblical concepts does this symbolic item parallel?  
a) \_\_\_\_\_  
b) \_\_\_\_\_
7. What does Rahab's inclusion in the genealogy of Jesus (Matthew 1:5) reveal about God's view of redemption? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. How can a "scarlet cord" moment (an act of obedience and faith) change the direction of someone's life? (Thought question; answers will vary.) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

9. How does Rahab's story challenge the preconceived notions of many about who God can or will use? (Thought question; answers will vary.) \_\_\_\_\_

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10. Can you identify a moment in your life when you took a risk because of your faith, like Rahab did? If yes, please share your story here. \_\_\_\_\_

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## CHAPTER 5

### She Said “Yes!”

*“I am the Lord’s servant. May your word to me be fulfilled.”*  
(Luke 1:38)

When God chose a woman to carry His Son into the world, He didn’t select a princess who lived in a palace or a woman of high social rank. He chose Mary - a young, unmarried girl from the humble town of Nazareth (Luke 1:26-27).

Nazareth was a small, agricultural village nestled in the hills of Galilee. It likely had a population of only 200 to 400 people who were close-knit, modest, and far removed from the political and religious centers of power like Jerusalem. Archaeological findings suggest that Nazareth had simple stone houses, terraces for farming, and a single spring that provided water for the community. Life there was humble and labor-intensive.

Located near the larger Roman-influenced city of Sepphoris, Nazareth was not entirely isolated, but it was far from affluent. Most residents were poor and worked with their hands. They were farmers, shepherds, and tradesmen like Joseph who was a carpenter (Matthew 13:55). There was little to no formal schooling available, and religious instruction would have taken place in the home or in a modest synagogue setting.

Socially and culturally, Nazareth was deeply Jewish, adhering to the traditions of the Torah. The people lived under the Roman Empire's rule, which meant enduring heavy taxation, military presence, and a constant undercurrent of unrest. Yet they maintained a strong sense of identity and hope in God's promises, especially the hope of a coming Messiah who would deliver them.

Nazareth had such little significance that it isn’t even mentioned in the Old Testament or early Jewish texts like the Talmud. In fact, it was so insignificant that Nathanael would later ask, “*Can anything good come from Nazareth?*” (John 1:46). This gives us a glimpse into how the town and its people were viewed by others of that time. This obscurity makes God's choice of a girl from Nazareth to be the mother of Jesus even more profound. When Gabriel appeared to Mary, it was not in a temple or palace, but in a quiet village the world had overlooked.

Life for a young girl like Mary from Nazareth at that time was simple, structured, and often difficult. Girls were typically betrothed in their early teens, and their lives revolved around domestic responsibilities. They would have spent their days drawing water, grinding grain, weaving cloth, preparing meals, and caring for younger siblings. Formal education for girls was limited. Instead, they were trained to manage a household and honor the traditions of their Jewish faith. A young girl was expected to be modest, obedient, and loyal to her family.

In this humble setting, with no wealth or worldly standing, Mary found favor in the eyes of God (Luke 1:30). Her story reminds us that God often chooses those the world overlooks, those whose hearts are ready, even if their circumstances are not.

She had no royal pedigree, no wealth, and no public acclaim. In fact, her lineage, though connected to David through Joseph (Luke 1:27; Matthew 1:20), did not place her in any position of earthly power. Mary's response to the angel Gabriel's shocking announcement reveals why she was favored: *"I am the Lord's servant,"* Mary answered. *"May your word to me be fulfilled."* (Luke 1:38). Her heart was surrendered, obedient, and full of faith. This was the kind of vessel God was looking for - not someone with royal influence, but someone with humble availability.

In her song of praise, the Magnificat, Mary herself acknowledges this contrast: *"He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty"* (Luke 1:52-53). Mary recognized that God exalts the lowly and uses the willing. She became a living example of 1 Samuel 16:7, *"The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."*

In Mary's time, becoming pregnant while unmarried was not just socially scandalous; it could even be life-threatening. In first-century Jewish culture, virginity before marriage was a sign of honor, obedience, and moral integrity. The entire community, especially in small towns like Nazareth, operated under a strict code of honor and shame. A young woman who became pregnant out of wedlock brought shame not only upon herself but also upon her entire family.

Mary would have faced intense public scrutiny. People would have assumed that she either had relations with Joseph or another man. Because betrothal in Jewish tradition was legally binding (even though the marriage had not been consummated), any infidelity during that period was considered adultery. Such a stigma could follow a woman for the rest of her life, affecting her ability to marry, find community support, or live in peace.

Under the Mosaic Law, adultery was punishable by death, most notably stoning (Deuteronomy 22:23-24). By the time of Mary's life, stoning was rare and more symbolic, especially under Roman rule, which restricted Jewish leaders from carrying out capital punishment. However, the law still stood as a terrifying possibility, and even if not enforced literally, the social execution, rejection, judgment, and isolation was just as painful.

Also, according to the Law, Joseph had the right to divorce Mary once he discovered her pregnancy (Matthew 1:19). Had he chosen to expose her publicly, it would have confirmed the perception that she had committed adultery. Joseph's decision to quietly divorce her was meant to spare her public humiliation. Only after an angel visited him in a dream did he accept her story and take her as his wife, protecting her and the unborn Christ (Matthew 1:20-24).

It's probable that Mary's own family struggled to believe her. Although Scripture doesn't record their reaction, the cultural norms suggest it would have been a difficult and painful experience. Mary left Nazareth to stay with her cousin Elizabeth for three months (Luke 1:39-56), which may have been due to the tension or judgment she faced at home. Even years later, people continued to question Jesus' legitimacy. In John 8:41, some opponents said to Jesus, *"We are not illegitimate children,"* possibly hinting at the rumors that had surrounded His birth. This suggests that Mary may have carried the burden of that stigma long after Jesus was born.

Despite the risks of public shame, a broken engagement, legal danger, and personal pain, Mary said **YES** to God. Her words, *“I am the Lord’s servant ... May your word to me be fulfilled.”* (Luke 1:38) displayed profound faith and courage. Her obedience came at a cost, but it also made her part of God’s greatest redemptive plan.

Her story reminds us that following God’s call is not always safe or socially acceptable, but it is always significant. By choosing Mary, God not only turned Mary’s world upside down, He turned the entire world’s value system upside down. With such an unexpected choice, God once again demonstrated that He doesn’t operate by human standards. The Messiah would not be born in a palace, but in a stable. He would not be raised by royalty, but by a humble carpenter and a young girl with a courageous, surrendered faith.

It was not lineage that qualified an ordinary person like Mary to become the mother of God. It was her heart.

1. Describe the typical social and economic conditions of Nazareth during Mary's time. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Why was Nazareth considered insignificant by others? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. What were the expected roles and daily responsibilities for a young girl like Mary in first-century Nazareth? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. How did Mary's response to the angel Gabriel reveal why she was favored by God? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Explain the social and legal ramifications for an unmarried woman becoming pregnant in Mary's culture. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

6. How did Joseph demonstrate compassion and protection towards Mary when he discovered her pregnancy? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. Why might Mary have left Nazareth to stay with Elizabeth for three months? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. Despite the challenges, what was the ultimate significance of Mary's "yes" to God? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. What qualities did God prioritize in choosing Mary, rather than outward appearance or social standing? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. What encouragement does Mary's story offer to people today who feel unqualified, unseen, or unworthy of being used by God? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## CHAPTER 6

### Chosen with Purpose

*“Here am I. Send me!”*  
(Isaiah 6:8)

I still vividly remember the day, now fifty years ago, when, like Mary, I said “yes” to Jesus. Until that moment, I had a works-based understanding of how to get to heaven. But I remain deeply grateful that God orchestrated every detail to place me in the right spot, at the right time, hearing the right message from the right person - one that finally made sense and transformed my heart.

And I remember just as clearly a moment that came four years later. I can still picture exactly where I was standing and who was ministering when I made the words of Isaiah in Isaiah 6:8 my own. Isaiah simply said, *“Here am I. Send me,”* and I repeated his wholehearted pledge out loud that day for anyone to hear. That promise has shaped my life ever since, leading to multiple relocations whenever God has said, “Go.”

Before Isaiah ever uttered the words, *“Here am I. Send me,”* he was already a man shaped by the spiritual and political tides of his time. He lived in Judah, the southern kingdom of Israel, during the 8th century B.C., a time of both prosperity and peril. His name, Isaiah, means *“Yahweh is salvation,”* a fitting title for a man whose life would become a living message of warning, hope, and redemption.

Isaiah was the son of Amoz. While Scripture doesn’t say much about Amoz, Jewish tradition holds that he may have been part of the royal family. Whether or not that tradition is historically accurate, Isaiah’s writings reveal a man who was not only well-educated but also closely connected to the inner workings of the palace and the priesthood. He was comfortable speaking to kings, rebuking leaders, and navigating matters of state. He prophesied during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah - a span of about 40 to 60 years. His ministry touched generations.

Isaiah grew up in Jerusalem, a city pulsing with religious activity but increasingly hollow in its devotion to God. Outwardly, Judah looked stable. Under King Uzziah, the nation had enjoyed a long season of prosperity, military success, and architectural expansion. But beneath the surface, things were rotting. The people had become complacent, greedy, and unjust. They worshiped in the temple while their hands were stained with blood (Isaiah 1:15). They observed sacred rituals but ignored the cries of the poor and the widow.

Isaiah had already begun his prophetic ministry by the time we arrive at chapter 6. The earlier chapters of his book record messages of judgment against Judah’s pride and injustice. He thundered warnings against their empty religion and declared woes against the corruption that had infiltrated the nation. His words were bold and unapologetic.

But something changed in chapter 6. *“In the year that King Uzziah died,”* Isaiah wrote, *“I saw the Lord”* (vs. 1). It was more than a political timestamp. Uzziah’s death marked the end of an era.



After reigning for over 50 years, Uzziah's passing left the nation in a state of uncertainty. Assyria, the great superpower to the northeast, was rising with aggression. Fear had crept into the land.

And it was in that time of national insecurity that Isaiah had a personal encounter with divine holiness. In a vision, he saw the Lord seated on a high and exalted throne. The train of His robe filled the temple. Angelic beings cried out, "*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!*" The thresholds shook. Smoke filled the space. And Isaiah, the prophet who had boldly declared the sins of the people, suddenly saw his own sins as well. "*Woe is me,*" he cried. "*For I am undone! I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!*" (Isaiah 6:5).

It was a humbling moment. Isaiah realized that he could not speak for God until he had been cleansed by God. One of the seraphim flew to him with a live coal from the altar, touching his lips and declaring him clean. Only then did Isaiah hear the voice of the Lord: "*Whom shall I send? And who will go for Us?*"

This time, the prophet didn't hesitate. He didn't inquire about what the assignment would be. He didn't ask how difficult it would be or what it would cost. He simply said, "*Here am I. Send me.*" It was a turning point, not just in his ministry, but in his identity. Isaiah was no longer just a messenger of judgment; he became a vessel of hope, of Messianic prophecy, of God's unfolding redemptive plan.

From that day forward, Isaiah's life was marked by obedience, even when the message was hard. He would speak not only of a coming judgment, but also of a coming Savior. He would foretell the birth of a child born to a virgin, whose name would be *Immanuel, God with us*. He would describe a Suffering Servant, pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities. And through his words, the promise of salvation would echo for generations to come.

I believe that when God chose Isaiah, He wasn't making a random selection. Isaiah was uniquely suited for the ministry God entrusted to him. First, Isaiah was a gifted communicator, well able to speak and write with clarity, precision, and passion. Such skill was essential for the task ahead. He would need to confront wayward kings, rebuke an entire nation, and comfort the faithful remnant, often in the same breath. And his probable connection to the royal family may explain his ease of access to Judah's kings and political leaders.

Just as God had a specific calling for Isaiah, He has a unique ministry in mind for each of us. None of us were created without purpose, and none of our assignments are accidental. God does not hand out roles randomly like drawing names from a hat. He knows us intimately - our strengths, our struggles, our stories - and He crafts our callings accordingly.

Long before we were even aware of Him, God was preparing us for the work He planned for us to do (Ephesians 2:10). Every experience, every skill we've developed, every challenge we've overcome can become part of the ministry He entrusts to us. Like Isaiah, we may not feel ready or worthy. We may look around and think others are better qualified. But God is not looking for perfection. He's looking for willing hearts.

When Isaiah saw the holiness of God, he became painfully aware of his own inadequacy. Yet after God cleansed him, he didn't hesitate. He offered himself fully: "*Here am I. Send me.*" That same invitation is extended to us. God is still asking, "*Whom shall I send?*" And He is still equipping and sending those who respond with humble surrender.

So whether your ministry is on a platform or behind the scenes, in your home, your community, your workplace, or across the world ... know this: God chose your assignment with intention. **You were chosen with purpose.** You were made for this.

1. Describe the author's understanding of salvation before her transformative experience, and what changed afterward. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. What do we know about Isaiah's family and social status, and how might that have impacted his ministry? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Describe the political and spiritual climate of Judah during the time of Isaiah's ministry. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Describe Isaiah's reaction to his vision of the Lord, specifically highlighting what he realized about himself. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. How does Isaiah's response to God's holiness in chapter 6 reflect his spiritual maturity and readiness for deeper ministry? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. How does Isaiah's cleansing and commissioning in Isaiah 6 illustrate the truth of 2 Timothy 2:21? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

7. What does Isaiah's immediate surrender teach us about trust and obedience? \_\_\_\_\_

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8. According to the text, what is God's approach to assigning "ministry" or "calling" to individuals, and what is He ultimately looking for? \_\_\_\_\_

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9. Isaiah didn't question God about the challenges ahead before declaring, "*Here am I. Send me.*" What fears or doubts sometimes prevent people from saying "yes" to God's call? \_\_\_\_\_

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10. How can we discern the difference between our own plans and God's calling? (Thought question; answers will vary.) \_\_\_\_\_

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## CHAPTER 7

### No Season Wasted

*“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him,  
who have been called according to his purpose.”*  
(Romans 8:28)

In the last chapter, we looked at how Isaiah was uniquely qualified to serve as God’s prophet to the kings of Israel because of his family connections and his education. Now, we’re going to see how the first 80 years of Moses’ life likewise prepared him for God’s call in the 3<sup>rd</sup> season of his life.

Moses’ life unfolded in two dramatically different chapters - first as a prince in Pharaoh’s palace, then as a shepherd in the wilderness. Though these seasons may have seemed disconnected at the time, both were divinely orchestrated to prepare him for his extraordinary call to lead the Israelites out of Egypt and toward the Promised Land.

When Pharaoh’s daughter rescued Moses out of the Nile and adopted him as her own (Exodus 2:5–10), he became part of Egypt’s royal household. Acts 7:22 tells us, *“Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action.”* God used this royal training to develop leadership abilities Moses would need to oversee the logistical and spiritual care of over 600,000 men, not counting women and children (Numbers 1:46). His early life also gave Moses a deep understanding of Egyptian culture, politics, and leadership. He wasn’t intimidated by powerful rulers; he had grown up with them. And this gave him the courage to later return and boldly confront Pharaoh with God’s command: *“Let My people go”* (Exodus 5:1).

After killing an Egyptian to protect a Hebrew slave (Exodus 2:11–12), Moses fled to Midian, where he lived in obscurity as a shepherd for forty years (Exodus 2:15). This seemed like a fall from power, but it became God’s training ground for humility, patience, and spiritual maturity. As David later wrote, *“He chose David his servant and took him from the sheep pens... to be the shepherd of his people Jacob”* (Psalm 78:70–71). In a similar way, Moses was being shaped into a shepherd of God’s people.

Moses’ years as a shepherd taught him valuable lessons and skills, such as:

1. **Guiding the Flock:** Shepherds had to lead their sheep to good pastures and clean water—resources that were not always easy to find in the dry, rocky landscapes of the Middle East. This required a keen sense of direction, patience, and a deep knowledge of the land.

God would later call Moses to lead His people through a literal wilderness for 40 years. He had to discern God’s leading, wait on His timing, and guide the Israelites to places of provision (e.g., water from a rock in Exodus 17:6, manna in Exodus 16). *“He led them safely, so that they did not fear; but the sea overwhelmed their enemies”* (Psalm 78:53).

2. **Protecting the Sheep:** Shepherds constantly defended the flock from predators like lions, bears, wolves, and thieves. This involved courage, vigilance, and skill in using weapons like a staff or sling.

Moses needed this courage when confronting Pharaoh and when facing hostile nations in the wilderness. His leadership required spiritual warfare, intercession, and standing in the gap when enemies (both physical and spiritual) came against Israel. Just as David, another shepherd-leader, said: *“Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear”* (1 Samuel 17:36), so too was Moses being prepared to stand courageously.

3. **Caring for the Weak and Wounded:** Shepherds paid special attention to the sick, injured, or pregnant sheep. They often carried weak lambs on their shoulders and ensured none were left behind.

Moses had to care for a nation prone to grumbling, fear, and spiritual weakness. He interceded when they sinned (Exodus 32:11–14), pleaded for mercy, and reminded them of God’s promises. He was a shepherd to the spiritually fragile. *“He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart...”* (Isaiah 40:11).

4. **Knowing the Sheep:** In biblical times, shepherds often gave names to their sheep and knew them individually. The sheep, in turn, recognized their shepherd’s voice and followed him.

While leading a massive population, Moses still showed personal concern for individuals, such as mediating disputes (Exodus 18:13–16) and overseeing the needs of the tribes. Jesus used this shepherd imagery when He said, *“I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me”* (John 10:14). Moses foreshadowed that kind of relational leadership.

5. **Living Among the Flock:** Shepherds didn’t lead from a distance. They lived with the sheep day and night, usually sleeping near the flock to protect them. It was a 24/7 role filled with hardship, isolation, and exposure to the elements.

Moses didn’t lead the Israelites from a palace. He walked among the people, shared their hardships, and led by example. He was with them when they rejoiced and when they rebelled. *“Moses was faithful as a servant in all God’s house”* (Hebrews 3:5).

In Moses’ time, shepherding was not a stepping-stone to greatness. It was often a despised, lowly occupation. Yet God chose to shape a leader from that setting. By learning to care for literal sheep, Moses was being prepared to shepherd God’s people, Israel.

In this season of obscurity, Moses also came to know the solitude and silence in which God often speaks. The wilderness became his training ground for listening to God’s voice and obeying without question. This is how he was able to recognize God’s voice from the burning bush, and he learned to trust in God’s provision and obey, even when afraid or uncertain. God’s reassurance, *“I will be with you”* (Exodus 3:12), became the foundation of Moses’ leadership.

By combining palace wisdom with wilderness humility, God shaped Moses into a uniquely qualified leader. He was strong enough to stand before kings but gentle enough to care for a weary people. He understood systems of power, yet he had learned to depend entirely on the power of God. Through both the palace and the pasture, God had prepared a deliverer.

Moses' journey shows that God can use every chapter of our lives, even the ones that seem wasted or wandering. No season is wasted in God's hands. Whether we are in a palace of success or a pasture of obscurity, God is always preparing us for what lies ahead. As Romans 8:28 reminds us, *"In all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."*

1. What were the two dramatically different chapters of Moses' life before God called him to lead the Israelites out of Egypt?
  - a) \_\_\_\_\_
  - b) \_\_\_\_\_
2. What unique advantages did Moses gain from being raised in Pharaoh's palace (Exodus 2:5–10; Acts 7:22)? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. How did Moses' early exposure to Egyptian power and culture help prepare him to confront Pharaoh? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. What event triggered Moses' decision to leave his pampered life in Pharaoh's palace behind and flee to the wilderness? (See Exodus 2:11–15) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. What skills did Moses acquire in the wilderness as a shepherd that he couldn't/wouldn't have learned in the palace?
  - a) \_\_\_\_\_
  - b) \_\_\_\_\_
  - c) \_\_\_\_\_
  - d) \_\_\_\_\_

e) \_\_\_\_\_

6. How did learning to "know the sheep" help Moses in leadership, even though the population of his flock was massive? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

7. Beyond specific shepherding skills, what spiritual lesson did Moses learn in the wilderness that that was crucial for hearing his call from the burning bush? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

8. Compare David's boyhood years as a shepherd to Moses' years as a shepherd, and how those years molded both of them for leadership. (Psalm 78:70-72) \_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_

9. How does Romans 8:28 apply to Moses' life, and your own? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

10. This lesson teaches that NO season is wasted in God's hands. Can you identify a "palace" season in your life where you were being equipped, even if you didn't realize it? Or, was there a "wilderness" season in your life that turned out to be preparation for something bigger?

(Personal, answers will vary.) \_\_\_\_\_

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## CHAPTER 8

### Before the First Raindrop

*“By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen,  
in holy fear built an ark to save his family.”*  
(Hebrews 11:7)

Noah was called by God to fulfill a ministry assignment so extraordinary, it had never been done before and it has never been repeated since. His story is found in Genesis 6–9, and it demonstrates how an ordinary man who lives with unwavering faith and radical obedience can accomplish God’s purposes, even when the assignment defies all human logic.

In Noah’s time, the world was spiraling into moral and spiritual ruin. Genesis 6:5 paints a grim picture: *“The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time.”* The sinfulness of mankind during Noah’s time was not merely surface-level immorality or individual failings. It was deep, widespread, and systemic. Sin had infiltrated not only human behavior but also the very way people thought and imagined. The mind, which should have been a place of creativity, worship, and love, had become a factory of wickedness.

Two key words stand out in God’s description of the people in Genesis 11-12:

- Corruption: The Hebrew word here implies decay, ruin, or perversion. It means that people had twisted what was good and natural into something destructive and unnatural.
- Violence: Not just personal aggression, but social injustice, bloodshed, and abuse of power were likely rampant. The world was not just immoral; it was dangerous.

In the middle of all this corruption and violence, Noah stood out as someone different. Genesis 6:9 describes him as *“a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked faithfully with God.”* This statement is especially striking when you consider the culture Noah lived in. And yet, in the middle of that dark and hostile environment, Noah chose to live differently. He didn’t follow the crowd. He followed God. Noah’s *“walking with God”* suggests he had a personal, ongoing relationship with God, not just an occasional one but consistent devotion.

Genesis 5:28–29 tells us that Noah was born to Lamech, a man who prophesied that Noah would bring *“comfort”* amid the hardship of working cursed ground. This hints that Noah’s family was still holding onto a sliver of hope in God’s promises, passed down since the time of Adam. Noah likely grew up hearing the stories of creation, the fall, and God’s early dealings with mankind. He would have known the cost of sin, the consequences of Cain’s murder, and the faith of men like Enoch, who *“walked with God”* and was taken without dying (Genesis 5:24).

By the time he was 500 years old (Genesis 5:32), Noah had three sons - Shem, Ham, and Japheth, and was raising them in a world where most other families had completely abandoned God. With his three sons, Noah probably engaged in the ordinary work of the time - farming, raising livestock, building shelters, or crafting tools. But unlike others, his work was done with a heart aligned to



God. He was not only productive but faithful. This likely made Noah an outsider. Even before he started building the ark, he had probably been mocked and ridiculed, and even resented for his uprightness. While others indulged in sin without shame, Noah's life was a quiet protest, a light shining in spiritual darkness.

God chose Noah for a task that seemed outrageous, to build an enormous ark in the middle of dry land. God knew He was planning to send a flood to cleanse the earth of its evil, and the ark would serve as the vessel of salvation for Noah's family and pairs of every kind of animal. *"So God said to Noah, 'I am going to put an end to all people ... So make yourself an ark of cypress wood ...'"* (Genesis 6:13–14).

This was not just a construction project; it included a prophetic task as well. Noah began preaching, by word and deed, about a judgment and salvation no one had ever seen. Hebrews 11:7 confirms this. *"By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family."*

Even more amazing, people had never seen rain or flooding before. *"Now no shrub had yet appeared on the earth and no plant had yet sprung up, for the Lord God had not sent rain on the earth... but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground."* It was a completely foreign concept. Noah couldn't refer to past weather events for proof of the possibility. There had been no rainy seasons, no thunderstorms, no rising rivers. The very idea of water pouring down from the heavens and flooding the earth sounded absurd. People must have found Noah's message rather amusing. Yet Noah worked for decades on this massive boat, staying faithful to God's instructions despite doubt, ridicule, or loneliness. He kept building and believing.

And finally, it rained for the first time in history. Not just a drizzle, but a torrential downpour combined with waters gushing from the deep. The entire world changed in that moment. Those who had mocked Noah's warnings now faced the terrifying reality of a God who keeps His word.

After the flood, God made a covenant with Noah and placed a rainbow in the sky as a sign of His promise never to flood the whole earth again (Genesis 9:11–13). This further confirms the uniqueness of Noah's calling; it was a one-time event in the history of God's dealings with humanity.

Noah's assignment was unique in every sense.

- He has been the only person in history instructed to build a vessel of salvation for the entire animal kingdom and the remnant of humankind.
- He endured the first and only global flood as God's instrument of judgment and renewal.
- He became the father of all post-flood humanity (Genesis 9:1), tasked with repopulating the earth.

Noah's life teaches us that God's call may seem absurd by human standards, but His purposes are perfect. Obedience is always required, even when we don't fully understand the purpose. Righteousness in a corrupt world sets us apart for God's work. One person's obedience can impact the course of history.

Though no one since Noah has been asked to build an ark, God still calls His people to walk in faith and obedience, often in ways that don't make sense to the watching world. Like Noah, we're called to live counterculturally, to prepare for what is unseen, and to trust in God's bigger plan - even when others scoff.

1. What does Genesis 6:5–6 tell us about the condition of the world during Noah's time? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. What does it mean that Noah "*walked with God*"? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. What prophecy did Noah's father, Lamech, make about him, and what does this suggest about Noah's family and background? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. How might Noah have been treated, being the only righteous man in a corrupt generation? \_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. What made Noah's assignment so unique in all of history?
  - a) \_\_\_\_\_
  - b) \_\_\_\_\_
  - c) \_\_\_\_\_
6. How would the fact that rain had never fallen before (Genesis 2:5–6) have made God's warning seem even more difficult to believe? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. According to Hebrews 11:7, what motivated Noah to build the ark? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

8. What are some of the difficulties Noah may have experienced emotionally, physically, or socially during the many years he spent building the ark? \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
9. What lessons can we draw from Noah's story about faith, perseverance, and obedience today?
- a) \_\_\_\_\_
- b) \_\_\_\_\_
- c) \_\_\_\_\_
- d) \_\_\_\_\_
10. Have you ever felt God calling you to do something that didn't make sense to others, or even to yourself? (Personal; answer optional.) \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## CHAPTER 9

### No Act of Service Is Too Small

*When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven you."  
(Mark 2:5)*

In Mark 2, we are told about four men who carried their paralyzed friend to Jesus. The house where Jesus was teaching was so crowded they could not get through the door. Undeterred, they climbed to the roof, removed part of it, and lowered their friend down right in front of Jesus.

We don't know the names of these four men and we don't know their occupations or status. But by stepping back into the cultural and social setting of first-century Galilee, we can paint a picture of what their lives and background might have been like. Capernaum, where this event happened, was a fishing and trade town on the Sea of Galilee. Most men there were laborers - fishermen, farmers, craftsmen, or tradesmen in the bustling market. It is likely that these four friends were ordinary working men, not religious leaders or people of great influence. Their willingness to carry a paralyzed man on a mat all the way up to the top of the roof suggests they had physical strength and a readiness to help with hard, practical tasks.

In Jewish culture, community and family ties were strong. Illness or disability often carried stigma; people believed sickness could be linked to sin or divine judgment. In those days, a paralyzed person would have been dependent on others for nearly everything – getting from place to place, food, even their very survival. These four men had likely been his lifelong friends and refused to let him be forgotten or pushed aside.

These four men surely didn't want to leave the paralyzed man behind when Jesus came to town because news about Jesus had spread quickly across Galilee (Mark 1:28). They must have heard stories about His healings and teachings. Their actions showed their deep conviction that if they could just get their friend to Jesus, something could change. They may not have fully understood who Jesus was, but they had enough faith to act.

Tearing open a roof was no small task. Roofs in that day were flat, made of beams covered with mud and branches. To dig a hole through the roof meant interrupting a teacher in a packed house and more than likely offending the homeowner. I can imagine dirt falling through the opening as they worked to widen it, probably landing on some of the spectators. Yet they valued their friend's healing more than their own reputation. This tells us they were men of courage, creativity, and persistence. They didn't preach sermons, perform miracles, or hold positions of influence. They just served in the only way they could - by carrying a stretcher, climbing a roof, and refusing to give up.

When we read about the four friends in Mark 2, we're reminded that Jesus didn't commend their strength, cleverness, or social standing. Instead, He noticed their *faith expressed in action*. Carrying a mat, climbing a roof, and lowering ropes may have seemed like small, menial tasks. Yet these very acts became the setting for a man's forgiveness and healing.

We often think only preachers, missionaries, or those with visible ministries do the “big” work of God. But the kingdom of God is built just as much on the unseen sacrifices: diapers changed, hospital visits made, floors swept, hands clasped in prayer, and encouragement offered. When we are faithful in small things, God weaves them into His larger story of redemption. Remember, Jesus Himself said, *“If you give even a cup of cold water to one of the least of my followers, you will surely be rewarded”* (Matthew 10:42).

Here are suggestions of small things we can do every day.

1. **Carry Someone’s Burden:** Identify one person in your circle who is struggling—emotionally, physically, or spiritually. Offer to help in a small, tangible way (a phone call, an errand, or even just sitting with them).
2. **Write It Down:** Take 10 minutes this week to write a short note or text of encouragement to someone God places on your heart. Words of kindness can carry more weight than you realize. My personal ministry is to create a small (3.5”x3.5”) drawing around a scripture and hand it to the person I’m near when I feel that nudge by the Holy Spirit.
3. **Small Hospitality:** Invite someone for coffee or share a meal. It doesn’t have to be elaborate. My husband has been in the hospital for two weeks now. Yesterday a friend picked me up from the hospital and took me out to lunch. Just imagine how much that short outing lifted my spirits.
4. **Pray With, Not Just For:** Instead of only telling someone, “I’ll pray for you,” pause right then and pray with them. It may feel small, but it can powerfully lift their spirit. If you’re texting with a friend about a problem they’re having, go ahead and text the prayer to them right then. They will read that text over and over throughout the day.
5. **Do the Unseen Chores:** Look for unnoticed tasks—washing dishes, picking up trash, helping set up or clean up at church. These “roof-digging” acts may never be praised, but God sees them.
6. **Step Past Inconvenience:** When serving others feels inconvenient or out of your comfort zone, choose to act anyway. Remind yourself about how the four men didn’t stop when they saw the large crowd, but pressed through to reach Jesus.
7. **Give a Cup of Cold Water** (literally or figuratively): Jesus used this phrase to remind us of the eternal value in even the smallest service. Ask yourself daily: *What “cup of water” can I give today?*

Never underestimate the value of your service, whether it feels big or small. In Galatians 6:2, we are reminded to ... *“Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.”* I pray that every small act we do becomes an opportunity for the love of God to be revealed. Like the four men on the roof, we may never have our names remembered, but the lives we help bring to Jesus through our small acts of service will never be forgotten.

1. Based on the description of first-century Capernaum in the text, what was the most likely social standing of the four friends who carried the paralyzed man? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. What cultural belief about illness in that era likely added a social stigma to the paralyzed man's condition? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. According to the text, what were roofs in that region and time period typically made from? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. What does the friends' choice to break through a roof and disrupt a crowded meeting show they valued more than social approval or personal convenience? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Why do you think the four men were so determined to get their friend to Jesus, even when obstacles stood in the way? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. What does it mean that Jesus "*saw their faith*" (v. 5)? Whose faith was He referring to - the friends, the paralyzed man, or both? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. How might the paralyzed man have felt being carried, lowered, and placed before Jesus? What does this teach us about humility in receiving help? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

8. Can you think of another way, not mentioned in the lesson, that we can “carry” our friends to Jesus today—spiritually, emotionally, or practically? (Thought question; answers will vary.)

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9. What can these four men teach us about teamwork in ministry and service? Do you think they repaired the roof after the crowd left? \_\_\_\_\_

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10. What can we learn from this lesson about the way God uses ordinary people through small acts of service? \_\_\_\_\_

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## CHAPTER 10

### When Obedience Means Resistance

*“But the midwives feared God and did not as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the men children alive.”*  
(Exodus 1:17)

When the book of Exodus opens, the descendants of Jacob have multiplied greatly in Egypt. A new Pharaoh, one who “*did not know Joseph*” (Exodus 1:8), was intimidated by their growing numbers and strength. In an effort to put the brakes on this increase in the Hebrew population, Pharaoh resorted to cruel oppression, forcing the Hebrews into slave labor. When that didn’t slow the birth rate, he turned to a more sinister plan: covert genocide ... or rather, infanticide.

Shiphrah and Puah were Hebrew midwives, possibly the heads of a guild of midwives, serving the Hebrew community in Egypt. Midwives in those days had a deep knowledge of herbal remedies, birthing positions, and how to handle complications without modern medical tools. In addition, a midwife wasn’t just someone who delivered babies. Midwives were ordinary women, serving in a trusted position as the one who offered prenatal advice, coached mothers through labor, and cared for newborns and mothers afterward.

As slaves, the Hebrews were building fortified storage centers used to store grain, weapons, and goods. These were essentially military and economic supply hubs for Pharaoh (Exodus 1:11). The midwives likely heard the groans of their people daily and knew the exhaustion and malnutrition affecting pregnant mothers. With the Egyptian economy prioritizing royal projects, they probably worked with minimal supplies, relying on skill and improvisation. Childbirth already carried high risks in the ancient world. For enslaved Hebrew women, the danger was even higher as they were usually forced to work until the day of delivery.

Pharaoh gave direct summons for Shiphrah and Puah to be brought into his presence. He personally commanded them to kill every Hebrew baby boy at birth and allow only the girls to live (Exodus 1:16). This was both a direct attack on God’s covenant people and a strategic move to eliminate future male warriors while assimilating female children into Egyptian culture.

Instead of obeying Pharaoh, the midwives “*feared God*” (Exodus 1:17), a phrase that means they revered and honored His authority above any human ruler. Their decision wasn’t passive resistance. It was active defiance against the most powerful man in the known world. They risked their lives to protect the lives of helpless newborns.

And this wasn’t a one-time decision. Imagine Shiphrah or Puah waking before sunrise, preparing their simple meal of bread and water, then walking dusty roads to attend a labor. Babies were being born every day, so these two women were living with the tension around the clock, wondering if



someone was watching. Their resistance was quiet and hidden; they acted without expectation of fame or reward. They had no promise God would protect them if Pharaoh discovered the truth.

When questioned by Pharaoh, they gave a clever answer: *“Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women; they are vigorous and give birth before the midwives arrive”* (Exodus 1:19). Whether this was literal truth, strategic understatement, or a polite form of refusal, the point was clear. They were not participating in Pharaoh’s murderous plan.

Their faith and obedience brought two results:

1. God blessed them with families of their own (Exodus 1:21), a deeply significant reward, especially for women in that culture.
2. They became the first recorded example of civil disobedience in Scripture, setting a precedent later seen in Daniel’s refusal to stop praying, Peter’s declaration *“We must obey God rather than men”* (Acts 5:29), and countless other acts of godly resistance recorded in the Bible.

There are four important lessons we can learn from the lives of these two women:

1. **We should fear God more than man.**  
When earthly commands conflict with God’s commands, obedience to God comes first - even at great personal risk.
2. **Courage isn’t always loud.**  
Shiphrah and Puah didn’t lead armies or confront Pharaoh in the palace. Their battlefield was a delivery room, and their weapon was refusal.
3. **God honors quiet faithfulness.**  
Their names are recorded for all time, while Pharaoh’s name in this passage is left unmentioned. History remembers the faithful, not the tyrants.
4. **You can serve God right there in your current position.**  
They didn’t need a public platform. They used the influence they had in the role and place where God had placed them.

Shiphrah and Puah were not queens, prophets, or warriors. They were simply ordinary women faithfully doing the work God had placed in their hands. When faced with Pharaoh’s cruel order to kill every Hebrew baby boy, they chose to obey God rather than man, even at the risk of their own lives. They had no armies to command and no political influence to wield, yet their quiet courage preserved countless lives and protected God’s covenant people. In God’s eyes, their faithfulness in an ordinary role became an extraordinary act of obedience with eternal impact.

1. Who were Shiphrah and Puah, and what was their role among the Hebrew people? \_\_\_\_\_

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2. What specific command did Pharaoh give to the Hebrew midwives? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. How did the midwives respond to Pharaoh's order? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. In Exodus 1:17, what is meant by the statement that the midwives "*feared God*"? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. What reason did the midwives give Pharaoh for not obeying his command? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. How did God respond to the faithfulness of Shiphrah and Puah? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. How might the midwives' actions have influenced the faith and courage of other Hebrews in Egypt? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. What four lessons can we learn from the lives of these two ordinary women?
  - a) \_\_\_\_\_
  - b) \_\_\_\_\_
  - c) \_\_\_\_\_
  - d) \_\_\_\_\_
9. What is a modern example of a time when believers may have to choose between following God vs. man's rules or cultural pressures? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. How can we cultivate the kind of courage Shiphrah and Puah showed in our own daily lives?  
(Thought question; answers will vary.) \_\_\_\_\_

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## CHAPTER 11

### Ministry in the Marketplace

*“Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for me.”*  
(Romans 16:3–4)

Priscilla’s story is a portrait of a faithful, wise, and courageous woman who used her home, her skills, and her knowledge of Scripture to strengthen the early church. Though her role was often seen alongside her husband, the repeated mention of her name first in several passages suggests she was a respected leader in her own right. If Priscilla could share her story with us personally, I think this might be what she would say ...

*“My name is Priscilla, though some of my friends call me as Prissy. My husband, Aquila, and I were living in Rome when Emperor Claudius ordered all Jews to leave the city (around A.D. 49). It was a hard season for us. We had to pack up our lives and move to Corinth, taking only what we could carry. But the Lord had plans for us that I just couldn’t see yet.*

*Aquila and I were tentmakers and tentmaking, in our day, was a respected trade and quite practical as all we had to do was pack up our tools every time we moved. In our time, tents for military or luxury purposes were made from tanned animal hides, while lighter, temporary shelters were made from a coarse, durable fabric called cilicium, woven from the black hair of goats. Our work was labor-intensive, requiring sharp knives or shears to cut thick cloth or leather, awls and sturdy needles to pierce the material, and strong flax thread or animal sinew to sew it together. We often crafted nomadic tents for herders and merchants, market stalls for city vendors, portable barracks for Roman soldiers, and awnings for homes and public spaces, as well as repairing worn or damaged structures.*

*In Corinth, we met a man named Paul who was a tentmaker like us. When we met Paul, he needed a place to stay, so we welcomed him into our home. We worked together with our hands during the day and shared long conversations about the Scriptures at night. He spoke of Jesus with such passion, and our hearts burned to serve this Messiah of which he spoke.*

*When Paul decided to sail for Syria, we went with him as far as Ephesus. There, he left us to continue the work the Lord had given him. One Sabbath, we heard a man named Apollos preaching in the synagogue. He spoke eloquently and knew the Scriptures well, but he understood only John’s baptism. Aquila and I invited him into our home, and over bread and oil, we shared the full truth about Jesus’ death, resurrection, and the baptism of the Holy Spirit. He listened humbly, and from then on, his preaching was even more powerful.*

*Our lives were not without danger. There was a time when Aquila and I risked our very lives to protect Paul. We did it gladly, for the sake of the gospel. Wherever we were living — whether in Ephesus, Corinth, or Rome — our doors were always open for the church members. Believers would gather under our roof to pray, worship, and encourage one another.*

*Looking back, I see how the Lord used an ordinary tentmaker's wife for His extraordinary purposes. I wasn't a great orator, and I never wrote eloquent letters like Paul did. But I opened my home, shared what I knew of God's Word, and stood ready to serve wherever He placed me. That was enough, because the work was His from the start."*

For Priscilla and Aquila, tentmaking was not only a means of livelihood but also a platform for sharing the Gospel, allowing them to labor side by side with Paul while using their home as a base for the early church. Priscilla's life reminds us that God often does His greatest work through ordinary people who are simply willing to be faithful where they are. She was not an apostle, prophet, or miracle-worker. She was a tentmaker, a wife, and a devoted follower of Christ.

Her ministry wasn't about grand stages or public recognition. It happened in homes, over shared meals, and in quiet conversations, like the time she and Aquila privately corrected Apollos (Acts 18:26). Yet her influence reached far and wide because she was faithful with what God placed in her hands: her home, her skills, her knowledge of the Scriptures, and her willingness to travel and serve.

Priscilla also modeled partnership in ministry. Whether working alongside her husband or with Paul, she embraced a collaborative spirit, showing that the spread of the gospel is rarely a solo effort. The fact that her name is often mentioned before her husband's suggests she was a recognized leader in the early church, a reminder that God calls both men and women to meaningful ministry roles.

Above all, Priscilla's story shows us that ministry is not defined by where you serve, but how you serve. Whether in Corinth, Ephesus, or Rome, in her home or in the marketplace, she made her life available to God's purposes. Her story reminds us that ministry isn't confined to pulpits. It happens in homes, workplaces, and everyday relationships through ordinary people like you and me.

Let's pray this prayer together: "Lord, help me to be faithful with what You've given me and where You've placed me. Teach me to open my heart, my home, and my life to serve You and others. Let me be willing to go where You send me, to speak truth when needed, and to support others in their calling. May my ministry, like Priscilla's, be marked by quiet faithfulness and eternal impact. Amen."

1. Under what circumstances did Priscilla and Aquila move to Corinth? (Acts 18:1–2) \_\_\_\_\_

2. What was their occupation, and how did this connect them to the Apostle Paul? (Acts 18:3) \_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Why do you think Priscilla and Aquila were willing to travel with Paul from Corinth to Ephesus? (Acts 18:18–19) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. How did Priscilla and Aquila respond when they heard Apollos teaching incomplete truth about Jesus? (Acts 18:26) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. What can we learn from the way Priscilla and Aquila corrected Apollos privately rather than publicly? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. How did Priscilla and Aquila risk their lives for Paul? (Romans 16:4) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. In what ways did Priscilla use her home for ministry? (1 Corinthians 16:19; Romans 16:5) \_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. How did Priscilla's tentmaking trade support her ministry work? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. What are some of the character traits you see in Priscilla's life that made her such an effective ministry partner? (Thought question; answers will vary.)
- a) \_\_\_\_\_
- b) \_\_\_\_\_
- c) \_\_\_\_\_

10. What does Priscilla's example teach us about teamwork in ministry? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## CHAPTER 12

### A Trusted Companion & Co-Worker

*"To Titus, mine own son after the common faith ..."*  
(Titus 1:4)

Titus was born a Greek Gentile, likely in a bustling Roman-influenced city somewhere in the eastern Mediterranean. His world was probably a mixture of Greek culture, Roman authority, and diverse religious traditions. From childhood, he would have been surrounded by the polytheism of the Greco-Roman world including temples to various gods, family rituals to household deities, and public festivals celebrating both religion and civic pride.

If his family had moderate means, Titus probably received a basic Greek education, learning to read and write, studying classic literature, and becoming familiar with the art of persuasive speech. These skills would later serve him well as a church leader. Like most Gentiles of his time, he lived in a morally diverse environment where dishonesty, immorality, and the pursuit of pleasure were commonplace. But God had a very different future in mind for him.

At some point in his young adult life, Titus encountered the Apostle Paul. We don't know the exact city where they met, but Paul would later refer to him as *"my true son in our common faith"* (Titus 1:4), indicating that Paul had personally led him to Christ. The gospel Paul preached was unlike anything Titus had ever heard before ... one true God, salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, and grace that transformed lives from the inside out. Titus embraced the message, leaving behind the idols and philosophies of his youth to follow Jesus Christ.

From the beginning, Paul recognized in Titus a unique blend of maturity, adaptability, and courage. As a Greek believer who was not circumcised (Galatians 2:3), Titus became a living example of the freedom found in Christ apart from the requirements of the Mosaic Law. Paul took him to Jerusalem alongside Barnabas during an important meeting with church leaders (Galatians 2:1–3). Titus' presence there affirmed the truth that Gentiles could be fully accepted into God's family without adopting Jewish customs, which was a key turning point in the early church's understanding of the gospel.

Over the years, Titus became one of Paul's most trusted co-workers. When tensions ran high in the church at Corinth, Paul sent Titus on a delicate mission to deliver a strong letter of correction and work toward reconciliation. Titus not only carried out the task but returned with the encouraging news that the Corinthians had repented and renewed their affection for Paul (2 Corinthians 7:5–7, 13–15). His skill in navigating tense situations earned him even greater trust.

Soon after, Paul placed him in charge of organizing a financial offering for impoverished believers in Jerusalem (2 Corinthians 8:6, 16–23), a responsibility requiring integrity, organizational skill, and spiritual discernment.

Perhaps Titus’ greatest challenge came on the island of Crete. Paul left him there to “*put in order what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town*” (Titus 1:5). Crete was a difficult place for ministry, known for dishonesty and moral laxity (Titus 1:12). Yet Titus took on the task of appointing leaders, teaching sound doctrine, confronting false teaching, and urging believers to live in ways that reflected the grace of God.

The New Testament letter to Titus reflected the themes Paul wanted emphasized:

- Grace that leads to godliness
- Leadership rooted in character
- A life of service that makes the gospel attractive to a watching world.

The last we hear of Titus in Scripture is found in Paul’s final letter, written from a Roman prison. Paul mentions that Titus had gone to Dalmatia (2 Timothy 4:10), continuing his ministry work even as Paul faced the end of his life. Church tradition holds that Titus later returned to Crete, serving there as a faithful leader until his death at an old age.

From his conversion to his final days, Titus was the man Paul could count on for the most challenging assignments. With every responsibility that Paul laid on his shoulders, Titus proved himself to be a courageous, dependable, and spiritually mature leader. He was able to successfully bridge the gap between Jewish and Gentile believers, to lead churches through difficult environments, and live as a steady example of grace in action. His life was marked by steadfast service, cultural bridge-building, and a firm commitment to the gospel of grace, leaving a legacy of leadership that still speaks today.

All our information about Titus comes from Paul’s letters, which makes his role as Paul’s highly trusted co-worker all the more intriguing. His life reminds us that God delights in using the lives of ordinary people, regardless of their background, to accomplish great things for His kingdom.

1. What does Galatians 2:3 tell us about Titus’ ethnic and religious background? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. What did Paul mean when he called Titus “*my true son in our common faith*”? (Titus 1:4)? \_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. What was the impact of Titus’ presence in Jerusalem alongside Paul and Barnabas for the early church? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. What did Titus' mission to Corinth reveal about his ability to handle conflict and restore relationships? (2 Corinthians 7:5-15) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. What challenges did Titus face when Paul left him in Crete? (Titus 1:5-12) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. Where did Titus go after Paul's final imprisonment, and for what purpose? (2 Timothy 4:10)  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. Why might Paul have chosen Titus for particularly difficult ministry assignments? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. How did Titus' willingness to serve in these difficult assignments and less prominent positions reveal the true motivation in his heart? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. How does Titus' background as an uncircumcised Gentile with no Jewish religious training show that God can use ordinary people from unexpected places and backgrounds to accomplish important kingdom work? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. What lasting leadership lessons can we learn from the way Titus carried out his ministry assignments? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



## CHAPTER 13

### Courage in the King's Court

*“I will save you; you will not fall by the sword but will escape with your life, because you trust in me, declares the Lord.”*  
(Jeremiah 39:18)

King Zedekiah, originally named Mattaniah, was the third son of King Josiah. He was placed on the throne in 597 BC by Nebuchadnezzar II, king of Babylon, after Nebuchadnezzar removed his nephew Jehoiachin and deported him to Babylon (2 Kings 24:17). Nebuchadnezzar changed Mattaniah's name to Zedekiah, a common practice in the ancient Near East symbolizing the overlord's control over even a person's name.

King Zedekiah ruled during a dangerous and tense political time. The Babylonians had cut off supplies and food was scarce. Factions in the court were bitterly divided between those urging surrender and those calling for military resistance with Egypt's help. Court politics were deadly and plots, betrayals, and sudden executions were not uncommon. In this tense environment, every decision was a balancing act. If King Zedekiah rebelled against Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar could respond with force. If he stayed loyal to Babylon, his own officials might accuse him of cowardice or betrayal.

In this political climate of unrest, Jeremiah had been prophesying an unpopular message, saying that the city would fall to Babylon, and surrender was the only path to survival (Jeremiah 38:2–3). Jeremiah's words were seen as treasonous. His opponents accused him of weakening the morale of the army and the people. With the king's reluctant permission, they lowered Jeremiah into a cistern - a deep pit with no water, only thick mud at the bottom, intending to leave him to starve (Jeremiah 38:6).

And here we meet our hero of this lesson. The Bible introduced him in Jeremiah 38:7 as “*Ebed-Melech the Cushite, an official in the king's house*”. The word *Ebed-Melech* means “servant of the king” in Hebrew, so this was probably his title rather than a personal name. This man is described as a Cushite, from the land of Cush, possibly modern-day Sudan or Ethiopia. People from Cush were recognizable by their darker skin tone, and their presence in Israelite courts was not unusual as foreigners often served in royal administrations as guards, advisors, or military specialists.

As a foreigner and possibly a eunuch (*Ebed-Melech* can also mean “castrated servant”), Ebed-Melech was probably in a vulnerable social position. Eunuchs in ancient Near Eastern courts often

held trusted roles in the palace because they were seen as loyal to the king and without political ambitions. However, being both a foreigner and a eunuch would also have meant he had a much lower social standing than native-born Judeans.

When Ebed-Melech heard what had happened to the prophet Jeremiah, he approached King Zedekiah directly and said: *“My lord the king, these men have acted wickedly in all they have done to Jeremiah the prophet. They have thrown him into a cistern, where he will starve to death while there is still bread in the city.”* (Jeremiah 38:9)

This was a bold move in that culture where such accusations could be taken as a personal insult to the king for allowing injustice in his court. Speaking against the king’s officials could have cost him his life. But Ebed-Melech valued righteousness over self-preservation, and the king gave him permission to take thirty men to rescue Jeremiah from the cistern. The large number suggests there was danger of resistance from those who wanted the prophet dead.

In the rescue effort, Ebed-Melech demonstrated both compassion and practicality. He brought along old rags and worn-out clothes to lower into the pit for Jeremiah to place under his arms so the ropes wouldn’t injure him as they lifted him out (Jeremiah 38:12). This small detail reflects kindness and an understanding of Jeremiah’s frail condition after several days in the mud. Although Jeremiah was released from the pit, he was still required to remain in prison.

Then God sent a message to Jeremiah to be shared specifically with Ebed-Melech (Jeremiah 39:15–18). The Lord promised: *“Because you have trusted in me, you will be kept safe. You will not fall by the sword but will escape with your life.”* This was remarkable. At a time when the city was going to be destroyed and many killed, God promised personal protection to this foreigner because of his faith and courage, just like He did for Rahab (Joshua 2:12-19; Joshua 6:22-25).

Ebed-Melech’s story is a reminder that God’s work is never limited to rank, nationality, or social standing. He was an ordinary man, an outsider to Judah’s bloodlines, possibly a eunuch, and merely a servant in the royal household. By every cultural measure of the day, he had little power and no influence over the great political currents shaping Jerusalem’s fate. Yet when the moment came, he acted with courage, compassion, and faith.

Ebed-Melech risked his position and possibly his life to rescue God’s prophet, and in doing so, he became part of God’s unfolding plan. His boldness stands in sharp contrast to the hesitation of King Zedekiah himself. And because he trusted in the Lord, God promised him personal deliverance when the city fell (Jeremiah 39:15–18).

Through Ebed-Melech, Scripture reveals an unchanging truth: God delights in using unlikely people to accomplish His purposes. You don’t need a title, wealth, or public recognition - just a willing heart, a faith anchored in Him, and the courage to do what’s right when it matters most.

1. Who was King Zedekiah, and how did he come into power? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. What was happening in Jerusalem politically and militarily at the time of Jeremiah 38? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Why was Jeremiah's message unpopular, and what happened to him as a result? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Who was Ebed-Melech, and what does his name mean? (Jeremiah 38:7) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. What bold action did Ebed-Melech take when he learned of Jeremiah's predicament? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. What did Ebed-Melech's preparation of ropes and rags reveal about his character? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. How did the culture of a royal court in ancient Judah affect Ebed-Melech's ability to act? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. What promise did God make to Ebed-Melech in Jeremiah 39:15–18, and why was it significant? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. Compare the contrasting leadership styles and moral courage of King Zedekiah and Ebed-Melech. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

10. In what ways does Ebed-Melech’s story show that God can use ordinary people for important tasks? \_\_\_\_\_

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## CHAPTER 14

### More Than Enough

*“There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two small fish,  
but what are they among so many?”*  
(John 6:9)

In the Jewish culture of the first century, children were valued as part of the family and as future heirs, but they were not socially influential. They were expected to be respectful, obedient, and to learn the family trade early on. A boy often started helping his family with the fishing, farming, or small-scale trading by the age of 10, and sometimes even younger.

The boy in this lesson likely came from a working-class family. Galilee was heavily agricultural, with fishing as a major trade along the Sea of Galilee. If his family lived near Capernaum or Bethsaida (close to where the miracle occurred), his father was probably either a fisherman, farmer, or tradesman. Young boys were responsible for simple errands like fetching water, carrying goods, or carrying meals for his father and brothers to eat while working away from home.

Jewish boys typically began formal Torah instruction around age 5–7, learning to read Hebrew and memorize Scripture. Even a poor boy would know the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4–5) and basic teachings from the Law and the Prophets. Festivals, synagogue readings, and Sabbath observance were central parts of life, so he would have been familiar with the hope of a coming Messiah—though he probably didn’t realize he was standing right in front of Him that day.

Clothing was simple. The boy in John 6 probably wore a tunic that day that his mother had made out of coarse wool or linen. He would have worn a belt or sash to tuck in the tunic when working or walking. And his sandals would have been made of leather straps tied around the feet.

The lunch he carried that day, five barley loaves and two small fish, was a typical peasant meal. Barley was regarded as simple food, inferior to wheat, more fit for animals than for people. But that was what the people in his village could afford. The boy’s fish were likely dried or salted to preserve them.

In the culture of that time, a child, especially one from a poor family, would never have been expected to play a role in solving a large-scale problem like feeding thousands of people. But let’s listen to the story of that memorable day, from the young boy’s perspective ...

“I never thought anyone would notice me. After all, I’m just a young boy from a small fishing village on the north side of the lake. We don’t have a lot of money. My father mends nets, my mother takes care of us and bakes barley bread for people in the village.

That morning my father let me take a day off from helping him to hear the Teacher everyone had been talking about. Before I left, my mother handed me a small bundle. “Here’s five barley loaves and two fish,” she said, tucking them into a cloth. “You’re going to need this if you’re going to be out all day.” The loaves were baked from the grain my father had traded for fish. The fish were small, salted to last. I wanted to snack on the meal while I walked along following the crowd, but I decided to hold off until everyone else stopped to eat.

The crowd followed the Teacher along the shore that day, and finally Jesus went up on a really high hill and sat down with His disciples. It was a great place for Him to sit because we could all see and hear Him clearly from below along the shoreline. Jesus didn’t look like a ruler or a soldier, but when He spoke, the words seemed to go straight into my heart. I forgot about time and I forgot about my stomach ... until I noticed lots of the people were starting to look hungry. And that reminded me, I was getting hungry too.

Then I heard the men with Jesus talking about food. One of them, a man named Andrew, looked around as if searching for something. When his eyes landed on me, he smiled. “What’s that you’ve got there, young man?” I hesitated. My lunch wouldn’t feed even one fisherman, much less the huge crowd spread across the hillside. But something in his voice made me unwrap the cloth and hold it out to him. Five loaves. Two fish. My whole meal.

Andrew thanked me and took it to Jesus. I didn’t know whether to feel proud or foolish. Knowing I no longer had my small snack made me feel even hungrier. But then Jesus looked up to heaven, gave thanks, and began breaking the bread. Over and over. He kept giving it to His disciples, and somehow, I don’t know how, it never ran out.

I watched people’s eyes widen as baskets of bread and fish passed by. Everyone ate until they were full. My five loaves and two fish had become enough for thousands. And when it was over, there were twelve baskets of leftovers. More than I’d started with.

That day I learned something I’ll never forget. **In my hands, what I had was small. In His hands, it was more than enough.”**

The boy’s identity is still unknown to this day. We don’t know his name, his background, or anything about the rest of his life. Yet his simple willingness to hand over what he had became the key part of a miracle that fed thousands (John 6:10–13). Can you imagine what he told his mother when he got home? “Mom, guess what!!! Jesus fed your barley bread to more people than I could count today! How did He do that? I have no idea, but the fish and barley bread just kept multiplying, and there were even leftovers!”

I imagine, as the boy grew to manhood and had children and grandchildren of his own, the story was told over and over at family dinners. It’s a reminder that in God’s hands, even what seems small or insignificant can have a massive impact. An ordinary person who is willing to place

whatever skills or goods that they have in the hands of Jesus, will see how God values and uses even the smallest contributions from those who might be overlooked by society.

When we place what we have in His hands, it will always be more than enough.

1. Describe the social standing and expectations for children in Jewish culture during the first century. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. What kind of family background did the boy in the story likely come from, and what were common trades in his region? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Why were the people following Jesus? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. What was probably the boy's initial thought when Andrew noticed his lunch? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Why do you think Andrew told Jesus about the five loaves and two fish, when it was obviously not enough to feed such a large crowd? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. In giving his lunch to Andrew, what character traits did the boy demonstrate? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. Describe the process of the miracle as witnessed by the boy. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. What lasting lesson did the boy learn from his experience that day? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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9. Has there been a time when God provided exactly what you needed in a time of desperate need, and you have been able to share your testimony about His goodness, the way the boy surely did for rest of his life? \_\_\_\_\_
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10. The text states, "An ordinary person who is willing to place whatever skills or goods that they have in the hands of Jesus, will see how God values and uses even the smallest contributions from those who might be overlooked by society." Discuss this statement from the perspective of your own life. Have you ever experienced this truth personally, when it seemed like you gave just a little but saw a big result? (Thought question; answers will vary.)
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## CHAPTER 15

### The Faithful Scribe

*“Should you then seek great things for yourself?  
Do not seek them; for behold, I will bring disaster upon all flesh, says the Lord.  
But I will give your life to you as a prize in all places, wherever you go.”  
(Jeremiah 45:5)*

Scripture is full of “unsung heroes,” men and women who may never headline a sermon series, yet whose quiet courage, steady obedience, or simple acts of faith set God’s plan into motion in ways far greater than they could see at the time. Baruch was such a person, yet you may never have heard his name mentioned before.

Baruch was the son of Neriah (Jeremiah 36:4). Neriah’s father was Mahseiah (Jeremiah 32:12), which tells us Baruch was from a family of some social standing. His brother, Seraiah was a high-ranking official, chief chamberlain and staff officer under King Zedekiah, who accompanied the king to Babylon (Jeremiah 51:59). From this we know that Baruch came from an influential, educated family with access to the royal court.

Baruch became the faithful scribe and companion of the prophet Jeremiah. Scribes in ancient Judah were part of a respected profession, responsible for legal contracts, royal decrees, and sacred writings. His skill as a scribe indicates that he was well-educated, and able to read and write Hebrew with precision. His role suggests that he probably trained formally at some time, perhaps serving in governmental or Temple-related scribal circles before beginning his job with Jeremiah.

But Baruch’s role was not just clerical. He was entrusted with recording God’s word as it came through Jeremiah. Despite his background of privilege, Baruch submitted himself to the prophetic mission of Jeremiah. Instead of seeking honor at court like his brother, he devoted himself to faithfully recording and preserving God’s word. His actions on behalf of Jeremiah tell us that he had strong personal faith, courage, and humility.

In the fourth year of King Jehoiakim of Judah, God told Jeremiah to write down all the words He had spoken against Israel, Judah, and the surrounding nations (Jeremiah 36). Because Jeremiah was barred from entering the Temple (likely due to his unpopular prophecies), he dictated God’s words to Baruch. Baruch carefully wrote them down on a scroll.

Jeremiah then instructed Baruch to read the scroll publicly in the Temple during a day of fasting, so that the people might hear and repent. Baruch obeyed, despite the risks. Jeremiah’s prophecies consistently denounced Judah’s kings, leaders, and their alliances with foreign powers. By reading these words aloud, Baruch was publicly challenging the legitimacy of Jehoiakim’s policies. The



king had already shown hostility toward Jeremiah's messages in the past, and Baruch's role as the messenger made him guilty by association. In other words, by reading Jeremiah's message, Baruch risked being accused of treason, undermining the morale of the people and the authority of the throne.

Jeremiah's words called the people to repentance, exposing their idolatry and false worship practices. The priests and religious elite who benefited from the Temple system could easily have branded Baruch as a blasphemer or enemy of the faith. Reading a scroll that condemned the nation's sins on a public fast day, when people were gathered to seek God's favor, would have intensified offense. I wonder if Baruch might have described the situation in his own words this way ...

*"I am Baruch, son of Neriah. A scribe by trade, trained in ink and parchment, accustomed to silence and careful lines of text. Yet today my voice shook the air of the Temple courts.*

*Jeremiah's words, not mine, poured from the scroll. Words of judgment. Words that cut like the very knife the king would later use to destroy them. I held the scroll tightly in my hands, but my heart trembled. I knew the risks. These were not polite words to soothe the ears of priests and princes. They were fire and hammer — condemning sin, exposing corruption, warning of Babylon's armies that even now sharpened their swords.*

*As I read, I could feel eyes boring into me. Some were wide with fear, some narrowed in anger, others turned away, unwilling to hear. I thought of my brother Seraiah in the king's court — what would this cost him, that his brother stood with the prophet all despise? Would my family turn their backs on me? And yet, how could I refuse? Jeremiah's voice had been silenced, locked out of the Temple. If I had held back, the word of the Lord would have been locked out with him. No, it had to be spoken — even through my unworthy lips.*

*When the princes summoned me, I followed, my stomach knotted. They listened, sober and unsettled, and then whispered urgent counsel: "You and Jeremiah must hide. The king will not suffer these words" (Jeremiah 36:19).*

*Hide. Yes. I understood. I had read my own death sentence in the lines I had just proclaimed. But even if Jehoiakim burned the scroll to ashes, the Word of the Lord is not so easily destroyed. Ink and parchment can perish — but the living Word abides.*

*I am Baruch. A scribe. A witness. Perhaps a marked man. But today I learned: even a scribe's voice can thunder when it carries the message of the Almighty."*

When King Jehoiakim heard the scroll, he reacted in anger. As the scroll was read, he cut sections of it with a knife and burned them in the fire. But God's word cannot be destroyed so easily, and Jeremiah dictated the same words again to Baruch, with additional warnings, and Baruch faithfully wrote them down once more.

Baruch's service to Jeremiah reminds us that God uses people with different gifts for His purposes. You may not be a prophet or preacher, but your role — whether writing, supporting, encouraging,

or serving — can be essential to the advancement of God’s message. Baruch’s courage and obedience in Jeremiah 36 highlight how God honors those who quietly but faithfully carry out their assignments. When God spoke directly to Baruch in Jeremiah 45:5, God promised His protection and reminded Baruch that his calling was not about personal advancement but about faithful service. It is still the same for us today.

1. Who was Baruch, and what do we know about his background? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. What did Baruch’s willingness to write down every word of Jeremiah’s prophecy, not once but twice, reveal about his respect for God’s Word? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Jeremiah had been banned from entering the Temple. How did God make it possible for His message to still be proclaimed? (Jeremiah 36:5–6) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. What risks did Baruch face by reading the scroll publicly in the Temple during a time of fasting? (Jeremiah 36:10) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. How does Baruch’s courage in reading the scroll challenge us to speak truth today, even when it may not be “politically correct”? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. How did the princes who heard the scroll respond? (Jeremiah 36:14–16) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. How does the king’s act of cutting and burning the scroll compare to the attitudes some (many?) people still have toward God’s Word today? (Jeremiah 36:23) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

8. What does this story teach us about the indestructibility of God's Word? (See also Isaiah 40:8, Matthew 24:35) \_\_\_\_\_

9. How might Baruch have felt after seeing his hard work in writing the scroll burned in the fire? What does this reveal about the need for perseverance? \_\_\_\_\_

10. What role does teamwork play in accomplishing God's purposes, as exemplified in Jeremiah and Baruch's partnership? \_\_\_\_\_

## CHAPTER 16

### Empty Jars and Open Doors

*"Then the woman said to Elijah, 'Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the Lord from your mouth is the truth.'"*  
(1 Kings 17:24)

In so many pages of Scripture, we find God at work in the lives of ordinary people—people who face hunger, loss, or even death, but discover that faith and obedience opens the way for God's power to be revealed. Two such women stand out in the Old Testament: the widow of Zarephath in the days of Elijah (1 Kings 17:8-16), and the Shunammite woman in the days of Elisha (2 Kings 4:8-37). Their lives and circumstances could not have been more different. And yet God used both women to show us how He will honor those who make room for Him ... whether through a handful of flour or a furnished room.

The state of affairs for widow of Zarephath when she first encountered Elijah was desperate. She was living during a devastating drought and famine, one that had been ravaging the land for many months. Food supplies were exhausted, and the daily rhythm of life had become one of survival. As a widow in that culture, she had no husband to provide protection or income, leaving her among the most vulnerable in society. Without land or resources of her own, she and her young son were left dependent on what little remained in their home.

When Elijah found her at the city gate, she was gathering just a few sticks, hardly enough to cook a meal, but that was all she needed because she had only a handful of flour left in a jar and a tiny bit of oil in a jug. Her plan was to prepare a final meager cake of bread for herself and her child before resigning to death by starvation. The language she used when speaking to Elijah underscored her hopelessness. She was not looking ahead with plans or expectations, only acknowledging what seemed to be the end.

Adding to her hardship was the social reality of being a Gentile widow in Zarephath, a Phoenician town outside of Israel. She was not among God's covenant people and would not have been regarded highly by the Jewish community. Yet in this unlikely place, God sent His prophet. The woman was not only destitute but also an outsider, marginalized both economically and socially.

When Elijah made his startling request for bread and water, the very idea must have seemed unthinkable. How could she give away the last of her food and watch her son starve more quickly? Yet this meeting became the turning point of her life. Her obedience in the face of certain death

opened the door to God's miraculous provision, where her jar of flour and jug of oil did not run dry for the duration of the famine.

The Shunammite woman's circumstances stand in sharp contrast to those of the widow of Zarephath. Rather than being destitute and on the edge of survival, she was described as a well-to-do or wealthy woman living in the town of Shunem, a fertile region in the Jezreel Valley. Her home was comfortable, large enough to host others, and her resources gave her influence and stability in her community. Unlike the widow, she was married, and her husband was still alive, though Scripture hints that he was advanced in years. Together, they had built a life of security and respect.

Yet, despite her prosperity, there was a silent grief that lingered in her life: she had no children. In that cultural setting, childlessness carried a deep sense of loss and even shame. Sons were considered a source of honor, security, and legacy, particularly in later years when parents depended on them for care. Although she lacked nothing materially, the absence of a child meant that her family line had no future and her heart carried an unfulfilled longing.

But instead of being consumed by her own unmet desires, she chose to extend kindness and hospitality to God's prophet. Whenever Elisha passed through Shunem, she urged him to stop for a meal, and eventually, she persuaded her husband to build an upper room for him - a space furnished with a bed, a table, a chair, and a lamp. This act was more than simple hospitality; it was a deliberate investment into the ministry of God's servant, a quiet demonstration that she valued spiritual things more than material comfort.

Her life took a dramatic turn when Elisha, moved by her generosity, promised her what she had long given up hoping for: a son. Though initially hesitant, maybe because she couldn't bear the thought of false hope, she eventually saw that promise fulfilled. Her circumstances shifted from quiet grief to unexpected joy as she held the son she thought she would never have.

The beloved sons of both women died unexpectedly. But God had seen their faith through their past actions and displayed His power over death by restoring the sons to life through His prophets.

In Zarephath, Elijah carried the widow's lifeless boy to the upper room, stretched himself out on the child three times, and cried out to the Lord, who answered by returning the boy's breath. In Shunem, Elisha laid the Shunammite woman's son on his own bed, prayed earnestly, and stretched himself over the child until warmth returned; after repeated prayer and persistence, the boy sneezed seven times and opened his eyes.

The stories of the widow of Zarephath and the Shunammite woman remind us that God often chooses to work through ordinary people, those who might otherwise be overlooked. One was a poor Gentile widow, gathering sticks for her last meal; the other was a wealthy woman of influence, yet silently bearing the grief of childlessness. Neither was a prophet, a priest, or a ruler. Yet God stepped into their homes, into their everyday circumstances, and performed some of the most remarkable miracles recorded in Scripture.

Their stories teach us that God is not limited by our status, resources, or background. Whether we stand in need with nothing left to give, or whether we live in abundance yet still ache with hidden longings, God can take the lives of ordinary people and use them to reveal His extraordinary power. In every generation, He calls us to trust Him, to make room for Him, and to believe that nothing is too hard for the Lord (Jeremiah 32:27).

1. What was the primary difference in the initial circumstances of the widow of Zarephath and the Shunammite woman when they first encountered a prophet? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. What factor, besides her poverty, contributed to the widow of Zarephath's status as a marginalized outsider? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. How did the widow of Zarephath's poverty shape the way she responded to Elijah's request? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. What miracle of provision did the widow of Zarephath experience after giving her last meal to Elijah? (1 Kings 17:14–16) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Despite her material prosperity, what was the source of the Shunammite woman's "silent grief"? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. How did the Shunammite woman's act of generosity differ from the widow of Zarephath's? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

7. What profound and tragic event did both women share, which then led to a powerful miracle?

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8. How did the Shunammite woman demonstrate remarkable calm and confidence after her son's death? (2 Kings 4:26) \_\_\_\_\_

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9. How do these stories remind us that nothing is too hard for the Lord? (Jeremiah 32:27) \_\_\_\_\_

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10. In what ways can generosity and hospitality become expressions of faith that open the door to God's blessing? \_\_\_\_\_

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## CHAPTER 17

### An Ordinary Woman with Extraordinary Influence

*“Because your heart was responsive and you humbled yourself before the Lord  
when you heard what I have spoken against this place and its people...  
I also have heard you, declares the Lord.”  
(2 Kings 22:19)*

The story in 2 Kings 22:14–20 unfolds during a pivotal moment in Judah’s history, under the reign of King Josiah. Josiah had ordered repairs to the Temple, and during this process the Book of the Law (likely Deuteronomy or a significant portion of it) was discovered. When it was read to the king, he was deeply moved and alarmed, realizing how far Judah had strayed from God’s commands. Wanting to know what this meant for the nation, Josiah sent a delegation of officials—including Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam, Achbor, Shaphan, and Asaiah—to inquire of the Lord.

Surprisingly, they did not go to Jeremiah or Zephaniah, who were both active and well-known prophets of that time. Instead, they went to Huldah who was a prophetess - one of only a handful of women in Scripture explicitly given that title (others include Miriam, Deborah, Noadiah, and Anna). She was the wife of Shallum son of Tikvah, the “keeper of the wardrobe.” This likely meant Shallum had a position in the royal court, perhaps overseeing the king’s garments or even the priestly vestments. She lived in Jerusalem in the “Second Quarter,” a residential area of the city, suggesting she was accessible to the people and leaders.

When the delegates made their inquiry, Huldah delivered a two-part message from the Lord:

1. **Judgment on Judah:** Because the people had forsaken God and worshiped idols, His wrath would be poured out on Jerusalem. Disaster was certain; judgment could not be avoided.
2. **Mercy for Josiah:** Because Josiah had humbled himself, torn his clothes, and wept when he heard the words of the Law, God promised that he would not live to see the coming disaster. Instead, he would die in peace before judgment fell.

Huldah’s role in this matter is striking. Although she lived in a male-dominated society, her prophetic authority was unquestioned. Josiah’s officials accepted her words as the voice of God. Her message carried both warning and comfort: judgment for national rebellion, but mercy for individual humility.



There are three lessons we can learn from Huldah's life story and her message.

- 1. God Chooses His Messengers.** Huldah's life and ministry remind us that God is not limited by human expectations, social structures, or cultural norms. In a time when prophets like Jeremiah and Zephaniah were active, Josiah's officials still went to Huldah for God's input on the situation and her voice carried unquestioned authority. This shows that spiritual authority comes not from position or gender but from the call and anointing of God. For us today, this means God may use anyone, - male or female, young or old, highly educated or seemingly ordinary like you and me - to speak His truth. We must be open to hearing God's message, no matter which messenger He chooses to send.
- 2. Humility Matters.** When Josiah heard the Book of the Law read, he tore his clothes and wept in repentance. Huldah confirmed that God had seen Josiah's tender heart and would grant him peace during his lifetime. This highlights a timeless principle: God honors humility. Pride resists God's word, but humility bows before it. Josiah's example shows us that true leadership isn't about power but about submitting to God with a repentant spirit. In our own lives, humility before God's Word positions us to receive mercy and guidance in times of crisis.
- 3. God's Word Will Always Stand Unshaken.** Huldah's message was clear: Judah's judgment was certain because of its long history of idolatry and disobedience. Even Josiah's reforms could not erase the consequences of generations of sin. This underscores the unshakable authority of God's Word. What He has declared will most certainly come to pass. Today, this reminds us that God's promises and warnings are equally reliable. His Word is not subject to negotiation, cultural trends, or human opinion. It will stand, and we must take it seriously, living in obedience and faith.

Though her appearance in Scripture was quite brief, Huldah's influence was profound. Her prophecy directed the course of Josiah's reign and confirmed the authenticity of the Book of the Law. In doing so, she helped shape one of the greatest reform movements in Judah's history.

Her example affirms that women, when faithful to God's call, can play significant roles in His kingdom purposes. Her story is both an encouragement and a challenge to use whatever platform God has given us, no matter how small it seems, to impact the lives of others for His glory.

1. What was Josiah's response when he heard the words of the Law, and what does this teach us about humility? (2 Kings 22:11) \_\_\_\_\_

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2. Why do you think Josiah's officials might have sought out Huldah instead of the more prominent prophets like Jeremiah or Zephaniah? (Thought question; answers will vary.) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. How did Huldah balance the message of judgment and mercy in her prophecy? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Why was judgment on Judah unavoidable, even though Josiah repented? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. What does Huldah's prophecy reveal about God's justice in dealing with sin? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. How did Josiah's personal humility influence the outcome of his life? (2 Kings 22:19–20) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. In what ways does Huldah's courage to speak truth to authority challenge us today? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. How can we prepare our hearts to respond tenderly to God's Word, like Josiah did? (Thought question; answers will vary.) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. What are three lessons we can internalize from the life and prophetic words of Huldah?
- a) \_\_\_\_\_
- b) \_\_\_\_\_
- c) \_\_\_\_\_

10. How might Huldah's presence as a recognized prophetess encourage women to use their spiritual gifts boldly for God's purposes today? \_\_\_\_\_

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## CHAPTER 18

### The Power of a Simple Welcome

*"Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God."*  
(Romans 15:7)

Billy Graham was a lanky farm boy of 16, more interested in baseball and mischief than in church meetings. In the autumn of 1934, a white canvas tent was pitched in Charlotte, North Carolina, for an extended evangelistic campaign by Mordecai Ham, a fiery Southern Baptist evangelist known for his uncompromising preaching on sin, repentance, and the urgency of salvation.

The city buzzed about Ham's meetings. Some came eager to hear what he had to say; others were skeptical. Graham, curious but not convinced, went with a friend to "see what all the fuss was about." When the two boys arrived, the tent was crowded. Rows of folding chairs filled the sawdust-covered ground, and the only seats visible were far up front — an intimidating spot for two teenage boys determined to remain under the radar.

They were on the verge of leaving when an usher (his name is not remembered today) noticed them at the entrance. He didn't just point vaguely. He smiled, welcomed them warmly, and personally led them to open seats near the front. This kindness disarmed their reluctance and made them stay. Billy Graham would later say in his autobiography: "That usher could never have known how God was using him that night through his simple yet faithful service."

That evening, Ham preached with a directness that cut past religious formalities. He warned of sin's reality, spoke of Christ's sacrifice, and pressed the need for immediate decision. Graham had heard sermons before, but this was different — urgent, personal, and uncompromising.

As Ham described the cross, Graham felt as if the preacher was speaking directly to him. His pride battled conviction, but the Holy Spirit's pull grew stronger. When Ham gave the altar call, Graham's friend nudged him, but Billy stayed seated. He returned the next night, and then the next. Each time he attended the meeting, his conviction deepened. Finally, one night, Graham walked forward to publicly surrender his life to Christ.

From that point, his life trajectory shifted. Within a decade, he was preaching his own evangelistic campaigns. Eventually, he would share the Gospel with more than 215 million people in over 185 countries, making him one of the most widely heard preachers in history.

Check out the ripple effect of that one man's actions.

- The Usher's Role: Without that simple welcome, Graham might have walked away that night.
- Mordecai Ham's Role: His bold preaching planted the seed of conviction that took root in Graham's heart.
- Billy Graham's Role: His "yes" to Christ that week led to millions hearing the Gospel over the next 80 years.

But now, let's look back even further in history. Actually, it all started with a man named Edward Kimble. Edward was an ordinary Sunday school teacher who made it a point to visit his Sunday school boys at their homes and workplaces, rather than just teach them on Sundays. In April 1855, Kimble felt a strong prompting to visit a 17-year-old student named Dwight at the shoe store where he worked for his uncle. Nervous and unsure of the right words, Kimble prayed as he walked down the street. He found Dwight in the back room, stocking shelves, and simply explained that Christ loved him and wanted his heart. I imagine it was a quiet day in the store, so the two guys were uninterrupted as they visited. And right there, among shoe boxes and leather smells, Dwight trusted Christ as his Savior. Dwight's last name was Moody. Today we remember him as D. L. Moody, who turned out to become one of the greatest evangelists in history.

Years later when Moody was preaching, a pastor named Frederick D. Meyer was deeply stirred, and as a result, he went into his own nationwide preaching ministry. On one occasion when Meyer was preaching, a college student named J. Wilbur Chapman heard him and accepted Christ. He went out and began to share the gospel, and he employed a young baseball player named Billy Sunday. Billy Sunday ended up being the greatest evangelist of his generation.

When Billy Sunday preached the gospel in Charlotte, North Carolina, it was such a great meeting that he was invited back. But when he couldn't be there, Sunday recommended a preacher named Mordecai Ham. Ham went to Charlotte and preached, but not many people responded to his invitation to accept Christ. But on one of the last nights, a tall, lanky boy who worked on the local dairy farm walked forward. That was Billy Graham.

So Edward Kimble, an ordinary man who taught Sunday school, reached D. L. Moody, who touched Frederick Meyer's heart, who reached Wilbur Chapman, who helped Billy Sunday, who reached businessmen in Charlotte, who invited Mordecai Ham. Then when Billy Graham came but would have left because he couldn't find a place to sit, the usher brought him forward to a front-row seat.

This sequence of events reminds us that in God's economy, there are no "small" roles. An usher, a greeter, a volunteer, or someone like that Sunday school teacher ... anyone performing any act of faithful service can open the door to eternity for someone else.

Every one of us can make a difference for the kingdom of God.

1. Describe Billy Graham's initial attitude toward the evangelistic meetings in Charlotte and what persuaded him to stay for the duration of the first meeting. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Who was Mordecai Ham, and what characterized his preaching style that particularly affected Billy Graham? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Who was Edward Kimball, and what simple act of service did he perform that had far-reaching consequences? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. What does Kimball's example teach us about the value of personal evangelism? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Trace the evangelistic chain from D. L. Moody to Mordecai Ham. Who were the key individuals in between them? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. How might history have been different if the usher had not approached Graham and his friend? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. What is the overarching message of this lesson regarding "small" roles or acts of service in "God's economy"? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. Scripture repeatedly affirms that even the smallest acts done in faith by ordinary people can have great impact in God's kingdom. How do these verses support that teaching?
  - a) Matthew 10:42: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

b) Zechariah 4:10: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

c) Luke 16:10: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

d) 1 Corinthians 15:58: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

e) Galatians 6:9: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

9. What have you learned from this course about “Ordinary People” that may impact your future actions and/or decisions? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## CHAPTER 19

### The Trickle-Down Effect

*"And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses  
entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others."  
(2 Timothy 2:2)*

I can't trace back through the generations, like we can with Billy Graham, to credit everyone whose influence eventually led to my own salvation. But I do want to share my testimony. I was raised in a devout and very strict Catholic home. By the age of twelve, I was already playing the organ for Mass at St. Catherine's Catholic Church, and I remained active in the music ministry there for many years. When guitars were first introduced into the liturgy, it was the nuns who taught me how to play. My faith continued to grow (or so I thought) through four years of theology classes at an all-girls Catholic university. I sincerely believed I understood the way to heaven: do enough good works to outweigh any wrongs, and you'd be okay. That was the framework of my faith for a long time.

I remember countless sleepless nights in my twenties, lying awake trying to work it out like a math problem, wondering if the good I'd done could possibly outweigh the bad. One of the most vivid memories from that time came after I had an appendectomy in the spring of '75. The incision became infected, and I developed such a high fever that I was completely delirious. My husband loaded me into the back seat of the car so I could lie down, then sped toward the nearest emergency room in Kansas City. I was convinced I was about to die. He was driving as fast as he could and at the same time, frantically trying to explain the salvation message to me.

Soon after that, my husband finally persuaded me to visit the Lutheran church just to give it a try. We attended a couple of services, and I agreed to sign up for the instruction classes. On the very first night, Pastor Robert Krueger began by laying the foundation that the Bible is true. He opened to Genesis and the story of creation, saying, "Some people don't believe God could do all that in seven days. I've always wondered what took Him so long!" That one line caught my attention and wouldn't let go. From that moment, I was hooked. I hung on every word he spoke, and that very night, I gave my life to Christ.

Then it became my personal mission to get the rest of my family saved.

My dad was the first victim of my overwhelming enthusiasm. I still remember the last time I tried to talk to him about Jesus. We were out at his farm and he was up on a ladder, working on the ceiling fan in the living room. I figured he was a captive audience (he couldn't exactly walk away) so I launched into the full salvation message. I made sure to emphasize that Jesus had already done everything necessary, and there was nothing we could add to earn it. When I finished, he looked down at me and said, "Linda, that's a really nice story ... but it's just too good to be true."

About a year later, my dad met and married Dora, and she convinced him to start going to church with her. One weekend, their church group decided to go camping. They ended up sitting around a campfire by the water ... I don't know if it was a lake, a river, or just a babbling brook. But as they sat swapping stories and roasting marshmallows, the conversation turned to spiritual things. And finally, that's when the lightbulb finally clicked on for my dad and he "got it." Right there, under the stars and surrounded by friends, he gave his life to Jesus. And since the water was right there, they baptized him. Just like that, my dad went from a sinner to a soaking wet saint all in one evening.

Now, my mother - well, she was a tougher nut to crack. She'd spent most of her formative years in a Catholic all-girls boarding school run by nuns, so the idea of *earning* your way to heaven was basically stamped on her soul like a return address. Works-based theology wasn't just a belief for her. It was her way of life. I tried talking to her about grace from time to time but the conversation never went well. Once she was so offended by our difference of opinion that she didn't speak to me for two or three years.

A few years after dad had died, my step-father needed surgery, so I left my poor husband alone and went to stay with my mother while Charlie was in the hospital. I was sleeping on the couch when she woke me up in the early hours of the morning, probably around 2 or 3 a.m. I sleepily asked her what was wrong, and she said, "I'm scared." I sat up and gently asked, "What are you afraid of?" She paused for a moment and then said, "I'm afraid to die. I don't know if I'll make it into heaven."

All those years of works-based teaching had planted seeds of uncertainty and now, in the quiet of the night, it was all rising to the surface. Whoa! Talk about an open door! I shared the whole message of salvation with her - again, but this time, it made sense to her. The fear, the doubt, it all gave way to understanding. Right there in the quiet of the night, we prayed the sinner's prayer together. Afterward, she looked at me, a bit amazed, and asked, "How did you know all that?" I couldn't help myself. I sang a line from the old children's hymn: "*Jesus loves me, this I know...*" and then grinned as I added, "*... for the Bible tells me so.*"

I also had the privilege of leading her sister, Aunt Helen, to the Lord although I use the word "*leading*" loosely. Since she'd been raised by the same group of nuns in that Catholic boarding school as my mom, it was another uphill theological hike. A month or two before she passed, she finally gave in and verbally accepted my version of salvation. But to be honest, I wasn't entirely sure if it was a heartfelt conversion or just a tactical move to get me to stop talking. (Let's face it, we can be a bit persistent when we're passionate about someone's eternity.)



But just a few days before she died, a nurse at the nursing home told me she'd had a quiet conversation with my aunt. She said there was peace in her voice, and she was confident my aunt had truly given her life to the Lord. That was all I needed to hear. Sometimes the seeds take a while to grow ... but God knows how to bring in the harvest.

After that, my personal mission grew into a desire to establish Therapon University in 2000, with the goal of better equipping people for ministry. And I'm just an ordinary woman, taking on assignments as the Lord reveals them to me, one at a time. Who knows how many seeds have been planted through that ministry? God knows — and He hasn't forgotten a single one. It's a blessing to understand that anything I've been able to accomplish with His help will continue to bear fruit and trickle down through the generations until Jesus returns.

1. What was the author's initial understanding of how to get to heaven? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. What significant health event occurred in the spring of 1975 that prompted the author's husband to share the salvation message with her (again!)? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. What specific statement by Pastor Robert Krueger during the Lutheran instruction classes "hooked" the author and dramatically shifted her perspective? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. After her conversion, what became the author's immediate personal mission? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. How did the author's father initially respond when she tried to share the salvation message with him at his farm? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. What circumstances led to the author's father's conversion and baptism? Do you think the "seed" planted by his daughter had any impact? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

7. Why was the author's mother considered a "tougher nut to crack" when it came to discussing grace and salvation? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. What was the author's concern regarding her Aunt Helen's initial verbal acceptance of salvation? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. In addition to her deep desire to share the message of salvation with her family, how did the author's conversion influence the broader direction of her life? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. What have you learned from this course about "Ordinary People" that may impact your actions and/or decisions in the future? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_