

REAL PEOPLE – REAL FAITH

A Glimpse into the lives of Ordinary People who Trusted God

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STUDY TIME SUGGESTIONS FOR THIS SERIES

These lessons are designed for you to use in the way that best fits your own schedule and preferences. Whether you schedule a regular and predictable hour each week as your study time or you prefer to have shorter and more spontaneous times to do the lesson is entirely up to you. The important goal is that week by week you find time to focus and concentrate on God's Word and your relationship with The One Who loves you and longs for you to spend time with Him through the study of the Bible. If at all possible, find a quiet, uninterrupted time and place to meet with JESUS.

THE STORY -

As you begin your study time, it is always wise to quiet your heart and mind - to be still. Put aside the details and distractions of your life, so that you can focus on the events that are described in God's Word. If possible, read the Scripture passage in two or three different translations so that you can begin to visualize the people, their situation and their choices. The questions will help you consider various aspects of this story and its significance. Take your time.

QUESTIONS TO PONDER -

The questions in this section are designed to help you think about the passage of Scripture that you have just read. As you consider your answers, you will find yourself looking at God, at the people, and at the events from various angles. There are no "right and wrong" answers to these questions, so that you can ponder them and come up with your own answers and thoughts. It's sometimes challenging to do this because we are all prone to depend on the insights of teachers and authors but studying for yourself is the very best way to integrate the lessons that God has for you into your own thinking and to remember what He has said to you in His love letter to you.

LESSONS TO LEARN -

Now it is time to think about the information that you have just read. What did it mean? What did you learn about God through these Scriptures? What did you learn about yourself? Ask your own questions, pause, and consider the implications of this story and these events. Take your time. Listen to the prompting of the Spirit of God.

YOUR PRAYER -

What are the ideas and thoughts that the Holy Spirit has been putting into your mind? How will you respond?

You will also find this study and many other ones on www.westudytogether or on www.women-in-the-word.com

REAL PEOPLE – REAL FAITH

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LESSON 1 - TRUSTWORTHY - Abraham's Nameless Servant

"Praise the Lord, the God of my master, Abraham," he said. "The Lord has shown unfailing love and faithfulness to my master, for he has led me straight to my master's relatives." Genesis 24: 27

THE SETTING –

Abraham was a very old man. His wife Sarah had died. He was living in a new land, far from his family. He had made mistakes and sometimes done things his own way, but ultimately he is remembered in Scripture as a man who obeyed God and trusted in Him. When God asked him to leave his home and go to another land that He would give him as his inheritance, he went. (Hebrews 11: 8) It was by faith that Abraham and Sarah were eventually able to have their own miraculous child. It was through Isaac that God would continue to keep His covenant that He gave to Abraham – a promise that He would make a great nation from his seed and that He would bless Him and through him all the families on earth would be blessed. (Genesis 12: 1 – 3) When it was time for Isaac to get married, Abraham knew that this woman must not be a Canaanite woman, but rather she must come from his homeland, so he chose an older and reliable servant to go and find this wife. A big job – for someone who had been a servant his entire life.

THE STORY - Read Genesis 24

1. Who are the people in this story? What are their relationships and importance?
2. Where do the events in this story take place? Is there any significance to these places?
3. When did this story take place? Is the timing of this event significant?
4. Why do you think this chapter is included in the Bible historically?

QUESTIONS TO PONDER -

1. What impresses you as you think about who Abraham's nameless servant is and what he is asked to do?
2. In what ways does this servant demonstrate his faith and dependence on God?
3. What do you notice about the prayers of the servant as he goes on this adventure of faith?
4. Why do you think it was important to Abraham that Isaac not go with his servant?
5. What impressed you about Rebekah and her family?

LESSONS TO LEARN -

1. If this servant were telling his story about this journey, what would he want you to know, to remember, and to understand?
2. How did his faith in God influence the way he served Isaac and the way he carried out his assignment?

MY PRAYER:

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LESSON 2 - FEARLESS - Shiphrah and Puah, the midwives

“Because the midwives feared God, they refused to obey the king’s orders.” Exodus 1: 17

THE SETTING –

It had been almost 400 years since Joseph brought his father, Jacob, and his brothers from Canaan to Egypt. When he took them in to meet Pharaoh, they were given “the best land of Egypt – the region of Rameses” – and were supplied, even though there was a famine in both Canaan and Egypt, with all of the food that the entire family needed. God blessed Joseph in remarkable ways and the Israelites thrived. In the following decades, however, their status changed so that eventually they were treated as slaves. In spite of this, they “multiplied so greatly that they became extremely powerful.” Their numbers and strength became a great threat to a certain new king who had long forgotten their history, so he not only was ruthless in his treatment of them as slaves, but he wanted to totally limit the size of their population by killing all of the baby boys. The people must have wondered if God would ever keep the promise that He had given to their forefathers – Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

THE STORY – Read Exodus 1 – 2: 10

1. Who are the people in this story? What are their relationships and importance?
2. Where do the events in this story take place? Is there any significance to these places?
3. When did this story happen? Is the timing of these events significant?
4. Why do you think this chapter is included in the Bible historically?

QUESTIONS TO PONDER –

1. What kind of a person was Pharaoh, the new king of Egypt?
2. Describe what the life of the Israelites was like at this time in history. How does this fit with God’s promise to Abraham to make of them a great nation?
3. What do you think the phrase, “they feared God”, meant? (Vs. 1:21) How did this impact their choices and actions? What were the possible consequences of their choice? What were the rewards?
4. Not only did God protect Moses at his birth, but through some miraculous events He spared his life as a baby and toddler. As you think about the events in Exodus 2: 1 – 10, what are the miracles? What do you think this was like for Moses’ mother and family?

LESSONS TO LEARN –

1. How would you retell the story in Chapter 1 to someone else? What would you emphasize? What would you want them to notice and to consider carefully?
2. What do you think you would you have done if you had been one of the midwives?
If persecution against Christians and their Biblical convictions increases in your lifetime, how will you make your choices? Will you be more concerned about the risks or standing up for what you believe to be right?

YOUR PRAYER:

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LESSON 3 - RESPECTED - Jethro, Moses' Father-in-law

"Teach them God's decrees and give them His instructions. Show them how to conduct their lives."

Exodus 18: 20

THE SETTING –

Remember the story of Moses' escape to Midian? Though he was an Egyptian prince, he was so moved by the cruelty that one of his fellow Hebrew men was experiencing that he killed the Egyptian who was beating him. Word of this murder got out to others and to Pharaoh, so he had to flee for his own life. His destination was Midian, where some distant relatives had settled. It was about a 3-day journey. As he was resting beside a well upon arrival, Moses helped some girls who had come to draw water. Because of his kindness to them, he received an invitation from their father, Reuel, (also called Jethro), for dinner. Some time later Moses married one of those girls, Zipporah, and became the father of 2 sons. One day, many years later, as he was taking care of Jethro's flock, God spoke to Moses through a blazing bush and Moses' destiny was changed. "God had looked down at His people and knew it was time to act - Exodus 2:25. At just the right time God brought Jethro back into Moses' life again to give him some very wise counsel, as well as to bring his family to him as the Israelites began their journey to the Promised Land.

THE STORY – Read Exodus 18

1. Who are the people in this story? What are their relationships and importance?
2. Where do the events in this story take place? Is there any significance to these places?
3. When did this story happen? Is the timing of these events significant?
4. Why do you think this chapter is included in the Bible historically?

QUESTIONS TO PONDER –

1. What kind of a man was Jethro? Why was Moses willing to listen to him?
2. What were the concerns that Jethro had for Moses? What was his advice?
3. As you look at the qualifications for the new arbitrators/leaders, what impresses you?
4. What were the responsibilities that Moses would continue to have? Why would these be important?

LESSONS TO LEARN –

1. Do you think that some of Jethro's advice to Moses is applicable to leadership and/or ministry today?
2. How did faith motivate both Moses and Jethro? How did it influence their choices and actions?

YOUR PRAYER:

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LESSON 4 - COMPETENT - Bezalel and Oholiab, Skilled Artisans

“So Bezalel, Oholiab and every skilled person to whom the LORD has given skill and ability to know how to carry out all the work of constructing the sanctuary are to do the work just as the LORD has commanded.” Exodus 36:1

THE SETTING –

It had only been 2 months since the Israelites crossed the Red Sea, since they went from slavery in Egypt to freedom. They were finally on their way to the land of promise. In those 2 months, God had provided daily food and water and had helped them to defeat the Amalekites. Now they are at the base of Mount Sinai and the Israelites have declared a willingness to “do everything the LORD had commanded”, confirming God’s covenant with them. (Ex. 24: 3, 7-9) At this time God asked Moses to climb up the mountain so that He could give him explicit instructions for building the tabernacle, a visible and movable structure reminding the people of His constant presence among them, including who would be in charge of the project - Exodus 25 – 31. Upon his return, Moses discovered that the people had turned back to idolatry. While the results were disastrous, God did come to Moses and reassure him that He would keep the promises that He had given to them so long ago. In His kindness He showed Moses His glory and renewed the covenant He had made with them. Now it is time for the construction of the place where the glory of the LORD would reside.

THE STORY – Read Exodus 31: 1 – 18 and 34 – 36: 7 (or to the end of the book)

1. Who are the people in this story? What are their relationships and importance?
2. Where do the events in this story take place? Is there any significance to these places?
3. When did this story happen? Is the timing of these events significant?
4. Why do you think this chapter is included in the Bible historically?

QUESTIONS TO PONDER –

1. What impresses you about the qualifications of Bezalel and Oholiab and the other skilled craftsmen? Why is this part of the story? What significance does this have?
2. Why do you think the people were so generous with their gifts?
3. As you read the instructions in chapter 34 what impressed you? Why did God give these commands?
4. What do you notice about Moses’ attitude before the LORD? How did God respond to the pleas of Moses?

LESSONS TO LEARN –

1. If these talented and capable men would tell you the story of the building of the tabernacle, what would they want you to know, to remember, and to think about with them?
2. What are the talents, skills or abilities that God has given you? How does this story broaden your ideas of the kinds of people that could/should be considered as valuable?

YOUR PRAYER:

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Lesson 5 - DISCERNING - Abigail, Nabal's wife

"Your life is safe in the care of the LORD your God, secure in His treasure pouch!"

I Samuel 25 : 29 (NLT)

THE SETTING –

The story of David sparing the life of King Saul who was the cave in Engedi in I Samuel 24 gives evidence to David's eagerness to listen to his conscience and to wait for God to keep His promises to him. How can it be that in the very next chapter, David's angry and impulsive desire for revenge almost drives him to kill his neighbor? When his neighbor, Nabal, is unwilling to respond kindly to a request from David, it triggers a rather volatile response within David and his temper takes hold of his mind and heart. Without the intervention of a decisive and capable woman, named Abigail, which means "source of joy", David's reputation could have been seriously marred.

THE STORY – Read I Samuel 25

1. Who are the people in this story? What are their relationships and importance?
2. Where do the events in this story take place? Is there any significance to these places?
3. When did this story happen? Is the timing of these events significant?
4. Why do you think this chapter is included in the Bible historically?

QUESTIONS TO PONDER –

1. What kind of a man was Nabal? What were his big mistakes and why do you think he made them?
2. Try to explain the difference in David's reactions and choices in chapter 24 and chapter 25. What happened?
3. How would you describe Abigail? What do you admire about her actions and the way she approached David?
4. What motivated Abigail to act quickly and humbly as she tried to divert David from his plan? Do you think she was a woman of faith? Why?

LESSONS TO LEARN –

1. As you think about how you would re-tell this story to someone who did not know it, what would you emphasize? What would you want them to remember? What are Abigail's strengths?
2. How does this story demonstrate the saying, "Yesterday's victories do not win today's battles." Put this idea in your own words. What do you think God might want you to learn or to be consider carefully?

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LESSON 6 - HOSPITABLE - Widow of Zarephath

“For the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry,
in keeping with the word of the LORD spoken by Elijah.” I Kings 17: 16

THE SETTING –

Ahab had just been anointed as the new king of Israel. At that time in history, God mightily used His prophets to make known His laws, to call people to obedience, to warn of Divine judgment and to foretell future events. These prophets, who often came from humble backgrounds and ordinary circumstances, were called and empowered by God to do His bidding. They often had the serious and sometimes life-threatening job of giving the king a message from God. Elijah’s assignment was to tell the king about a famine that would last for a few years. It was during this famine that Elijah was specifically sent to the house of a widow in Zarephath. The miracles that God performs during his stay there are a wonderful introduction to the events that God has planned for Elijah in the next few years.

THE STORY – Read I Kings 17

1. Who are the people in this story? What are their relationships and importance?
2. Where do the events in this story take place? Is there any significance to these places?
3. When did this story happen? Is the timing of these events significant?
4. Why do you think this chapter is included in the Bible historically?

QUESTIONS TO PONDER –

1. Why do you think that the Lord sent Elijah to stay by the brook of Kerith until it dried up and then sent him to a Gentile woman who would provide a place and food for him?
2. As you read about the circumstances of this widow, what impresses you about her response to Elijah’s requests?
3. Waiting must have been a difficult challenge for Elijah. What kept him faithful to God’s leading?
4. What were the results of the miracles that God performed during Elijah’s stay with the widow?
5. Want to read the sequel to this story? It is found in I Kings 18 and 19.

LESSONS TO LEARN –

1. How would this widow describe the events in this story of her life and the visit from Elijah? What would be important for you to understand and to remember?
2. What do you hear the Holy Spirit whispering into your mind and heart as you think about this story?

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LESSON 7 - SINCERE - A Servant Girl for Naaman's Wife

"Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel." II Kings 5: 15

THE SETTING –

Naaman was a man of position, wealth and power. His military prowess was recognized by the king of Aram (Syria). He had one major problem, however. He suffered from leprosy, a contagious skin disease. Apparently when Aram defeated the Israelites in a battle some years before, they had captured a young girl who became a slave in the household of Naaman. She was assigned to assist Naaman's wife and, although she was far from home, she apparently won the trust of her mistress so that when the time was right, she suggested to her that there was a prophet in Samaria who could heal her husband from his leprosy. Naaman must have felt that there might be some truth in this advice because he went to the king seeking his counsel and permission to go to see the prophet via the king of Israel. Would the suggestion of a young servant girl prove to be valuable and right?

THE STORY – Read II Kings 5

1. Who are the people in this story? What are their relationships and importance?
2. Where do the events in this story take place? Is there any significance to these places?
3. When did this story happen? Is the timing of these events significant?
4. Why do you think this chapter is included in the Bible historically?

QUESTIONS TO PONDER –

1. As you think about this young servant girl, what impresses you? How did she feel when Naaman came home?
2. Why did the king of Israel become so upset when he got the letter from the king of Aram?
3. Why was Naaman so resistant to Elisha's counsel? How did his unnamed officers reason with him? What were the life-changing results that happened when Naaman finally humbled himself?
4. Why do you think Gehazi's story is included in this account? Can you think of other similar stories?

LESSONS TO LEARN –

1. How would you re-tell this story to someone else? How would you describe the young servant girl and her circumstances as well as her influence? In what ways does her life still make an impact on people?
2. What do you think that the LORD wants you to learn from both Naaman and the servant girl?

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LESSON 8 - DEVOTED - Jahaziel - One of the Men

“This is what the LORD says: ‘Do not be afraid!
Don’t be discouraged by this mighty army, for the battle is not yours but God’s.’” II Chronicles 20: 15b

THE SETTING –

Judah, the Southern Kingdom, had had some relatively peaceful years under the leadership of King Asa. When his son, Jehoshaphat, became king he followed the example of his father and he “sought his father’s God and obeyed His commands”. He did not always make wise choices, but after the LORD spared his life in a battle that he unwisely entered into with the wicked King Ahab of Israel, he realized the error of his choices – II Chron. 18. As a result of this experience, it seems that he really wanted to encourage the people to return to God. It was at this time, that another very severe threat of an attack came to his attention. What should he do? To whom should he turn to for help? What will the outcome be this time?

THE STORY – Read II Chronicles 19 – 20: 30

1. Who are the people in this story? What are their relationships and importance?
2. Where do the events in this story take place? Is there any significance to these places?
3. When did this story happen? Is the timing of these events significant?
4. Why do you think this chapter is included in the Bible historically?

QUESTIONS TO PONDER –

1. What were the significant things that Jehoshaphat, which means “the Lord is judge”, did when he got the news of a vast army that was coming to attack him?
2. Jahaziel has a good family background, but why did the king believe his words? Where did that trust come from?
3. Music seems to be a natural response of the people in this story. What are your observations?
4. After the men had gathered the plunder for 3 days, what did they choose to do before they went home? Why?

LESSONS TO LEARN –

1. When the enemy attacks, when temptation is lurking, when your own willful desires are strong, what is your strategy?
2. Do you have others who will eagerly go to the Valley of Beracah – the Valley of Blessing - with you and join you in giving praise to the Lord, for the victory which He will give to you? What needs to happen in order to do this?

YOUR PRAYER:

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LESSON 9 - RELIABLE - Shaphan, Hilkiyah, and Huldah

“The king (Josiah) stood by the pillar and renewed the covenant in the presence of the LORD – to follow the LORD and keep His commands, regulations and decrees with all his heart and all his soul. II Kings 23: 3

THE SETTING –

Can you imagine an 8 year old becoming the king of a nation? Although his father and his grandfather both “did evil in the sight of the Lord”, this young king “did what was pleasing in the LORD’s sight and followed the example of his ancestor David. When he was about 26, he sent the court secretary, Shaphan to the Temple to give Hilkiyah, the high priest, some instructions about paying the workers who were restoring the Temple of the Lord. It was at this time that Hilkiyah discovered the “Book of the Law of the LORD” which was written by Moses. Can you imagine the surprise that Josiah must have experienced as Shaphan brought it to him and began to read to him what was in it? It was both devastating and empowering and for a time the judgment of God would be delayed so that the people could renew their covenant with God and experience His blessing.

THE STORY – Read II Chronicles 34 – 35: 19 (II Kings 22 – 23:3)

1. Who are the people in this story? What are their relationships and importance?
2. Where do the events in this story take place? Is there any significance to these places?
3. When did this story happen? Is the timing of these events significant?
4. Why do you think this chapter is included in the Bible historically?

QUESTIONS TO PONDER –

1. Josiah’s great-grandfather was Hezekiah (II Chron. 29 32) and “he did what was pleasing in the sight of the Lord.” However, his grandfather, Manasseh and his father, Amon, did what was evil in God’s sight. How do you explain this? What could have influenced Josiah?
2. What did Josiah do to end idolatry and bring his people back to worshipping God alone? What impresses you?
3. Why do you think Hilkiyah, the high priest, gave the Book of the Law of the LORD to Shaphan instead of taking it directly to the King? How did Shaphan react? What did he do with it? (See II Kings 22:8 – 10)
4. What was there about the prophetess, Huldah, that made these men go to seek her counsel and wisdom? How do you think she was used by God at this particular time in history?
5. What was the impact and importance of celebrating the Passover for Josiah and for the people?

LESSONS TO LEARN –

1. How would you re-tell this story to others? What would you emphasize? What are some of the important details that you would want them to notice and to consider carefully? Try making a simple outline.
2. Is there some thing that God is whispering in your ear as you consider these people and their choices?

YOUR PRAYER:

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LESSON 10 - COMMITTED - Hananiah, Mishael, Azariah - 3 Young Men

“If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God whom we serve is able to save us. But even if He doesn’t, we want to make it clear to you that we will never serve your gods.” Daniel 3: 17 - 18

THE SETTING –

The destruction of Jerusalem happened just like Jeremiah had predicted. In 586 B.C. during the reign of King Nebuchadnezzar Jerusalem was destroyed. Little did the King understand how his life would be changed when he brought back some of the most capable young people from the royal families and the nobility of the Israelites to his palace in Babylonia. He had a great plan that he would enhance the life of these young men and put them through a training program for 3 years so that they could serve him and his kingdom. One of the first things that he did for 4 of these handsome and capable young men was to change their Hebrew names, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah to Chaldean names – Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Each of these new names was associated with a different Babylonian deity. While the king could change their names in the hopes of giving them a new identity, he was not able to change their hearts - a reality the king would soon discover for himself.

THE STORY – Read Daniel 1 and 3

1. Who are the people in this story? What are their relationships and importance?
2. Where do the events in this story take place? Is there any significance to these places?
3. When did this story happen? Is the timing of these events significant?
4. Why do you think this chapter is included in the Bible historically?

QUESTIONS TO PONDER –

1. What were the reasons that Daniel and his companions gave to the king for not indulging in the royal food? Do you think they recognized how God was enabling them to be strong and intelligent and capable?
2. Why did the young men refuse to bow down to the golden image of the king? What made them strong? Why were they unwilling to compromise their actions in order to please the king?
3. How did these young men explain what they believed to be true about their God? (Daniel 3: 16 – 18)
4. Why didn't God save them before they were thrown into the furnace rather than after they were in it? How would the results have been different or would they have been similar?

LESSONS TO LEARN –

1. Try telling this story from the viewpoint of one of the 3 young men. What would you want people to know and to remember? Would the story be about your choices and courage or about God's mercy and power and promises?
2. Have there been times in your life when God was able to show His power and presence more to you because of being "in the fire", the trials and testings of your faith, than if He had simply changed your circumstances?

YOUR PRAYER: