



Heaven Is For Women

Foreword

“In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you may be where I am.”

(John 14:2-3)

“Then Jesus said to the woman, ‘Your sins are forgiven.’ And again he said, ‘Your faith has saved you, go in peace’.”

(Luke 7:48, 50)

A tradition, often quoted in some parts of India, declares that whereas out of every thousand men only one will go to hell, out of every thousand women *only one* will be found in Paradise. The Qur’an appears to have a good word to say:

“Whoso have done the things that are right, whether male or female, and is a believer—these shall enter Paradise; good things unreckoned shall they enjoy therein.” (Qur’an 40:43)

But then a confusing mass of contradictions in teaching continue with others like the following:

- a) It is said that the Prophet, when asked why women were more numerous in Hell than men, replied, “Because they cursed others a great deal and were most ungrateful towards their husbands.”
- b) In heaven women, whatever be their age on earth, will be sixteen years old; if ugly on earth, they will be beautiful in heaven; and if a girl should die on earth as a virgin and then go to Paradise, God Almighty will see to it that she is married to a man there.
- c) Adulteresses will go to the second Hell and there remain everlastingly as pillars of fire. Those who sin with their eyes or mouth are to dwell in the third Hell, where lips grow to the size of mountains and eyes fall out of their sockets and yet continue to burn.
- d) A wife who is obedient and faithful to her husband passes her time in this world in peace and happiness, and in the world to come she will enjoy the favor of God; the Prophet has said that the wife who dies in the enjoyment of her husband’s favor will inherit Paradise.

How, then, does the Muslim woman hope to gain Heaven and avoid Hell? Is her immediate concern only to escape the torments of the Fire? Or is it to seek the favor of God (whatever that might be) and enjoy the good things unreckoned?

For the true believer who is found faithful, the delights of Paradise are depicted in extreme materialistic terms. In the tradition attributed to the Prophet,

“God said, ‘I have prepared for my good servants what no eye hath seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man’.”

(Qur’an 47:16)

This is made the text for many extravagances—the buildings in Paradise will be constructed

of gold and silver bricks; the mortar will be pure musk...The fortunate who go there will remain in peace and comfort, enjoying delicate foods and drinks. Those who drink of the water of *Kauthar* will never thirst any more. None will know sorrow or pain. Clothes will never become soiled or one's youth diminish.

The joys of Paradise are far more explicit for men in the palatial apartments which are plentifully supplied with ravishing virgin maidens (*houris*) for the faithful. Rivers of fragrant water, milk, clear honey and wine abound for the thirsty.

One thing lacking for both men and women is a clear statement of forgiveness of sin by God and one's restored fellowship with the Creator. No, Paradise is presented more as a place of reward, or *wages*, for the life one has lived, rather than the *gift* of eternal life and blessing as a result of God's grace toward believers whose sins are forgiven.

So the title for this model *HEAVEN IS FOR WOMEN* makes a statement concerning women and their right to the same *relationship* with God that believing men will enjoy. Further, it makes the statement that for the woman, heaven is a *place* in that it will be in the presence of the Father who loves all He has made, and the Son who suffered and died for their sins. It is also a *relationship* which begins in this life through belief in Jesus as her Savior and Lord. Because of the emotional needs of listeners, Heaven is presented more strongly in terms of the relationship with the Father through the Son. The roots of that relationship go back to the Garden of Eden and are evident in many ways in stories throughout the Old Testament and continuing into the stories of Jesus and the New Testament Church. This model set of story lessons will then attempt to explore this relationship with several objectives in mind.

- a) The first is to attract the attention and interest of women who live in primarily the Muslim rural world and also those in the Hindu and related world.
- b) Next is to begin building a bridge of trust in God's Word through the stories which involve women and expressions of God's grace for their lives.
- c) Then to lead women to see Jesus as the women did during his days on earth as the caring, Compassionate One who was willing to receive, forgive sin and bless with peace those who came to him for healing, deliverance, restoration of loved ones, and forgiveness of sin.
- d) The last and most important intent of the story lessons is to lead the listeners to see Jesus as their Savior and to express their faith in him while committing to follow him as their Lord.

For those whose cultures have a weak or nonexistent expression of sin and its consequence, the concept of salvation as God's provision for escaping that punishment is also weak. Eternal life is similarly misunderstood when it is used as a synonym for salvation. For the target women listeners *Heaven* is used as the state for believers beyond this life and implied in that is:

- a) the beginning relationship with the Father through the Son when one believes in this life,
- b) the state of grace and blessing beyond this present life, and
- c) the place where one will live in this blessed state with the descriptions that God's Word gives about the coming new heavens and earth.

The lessons are not intended as a fully explored theological treatise on Heaven but as an attempt to meet the Muslim woman (and to some extent Hindu woman) with an invitation to accept what God in His mercy and love has provided for those who believe in Jesus as Savior. And lead them to accept what God has provided for believers through Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection.

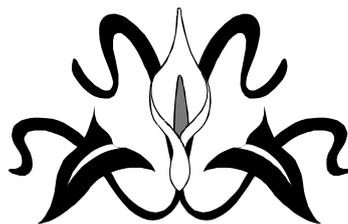
The stories and the accompanying lessons are submitted as a contribution toward this end, realizing that each storyer who will use them will add much more to the lessons from their own experience with Jesus and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. If these stories and lessons give an idea to get one started and help one along the way, then my task is successful.

The model set *HEAVEN IS FOR WOMEN* is offered for your use, revising and adapting, translating, and sharing. It will be distributed on a 'cost only' basis toward that end. In order for many to benefit from others' contributions to the model lessons, it would be helpful if copies of adaptations and translations would be shared with others.

For more information on how to do this send a note to <biblestorying@iname.com>. Any comments, suggestions for improvement or corrections would also be greatly appreciated.

This model is the third and last of a trilogy for women. The others are *God and Woman*, and *Good News for Those With Stories of Grief*.

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Heaven Is For Women

Worldview Issues For Women Regarding Heaven and Hell

There are many (and sometimes fuzzy and conflicting) worldview issues regarding the afterlife for women in the Muslim and Hindu worlds. It is not possible to accurately describe and comment on each and every one. You, the user, will need to do that for your own women listeners. The following issues and thoughts are gleaned from a number of writings, conversations among women in the subcontinent region of India, and observations and experience in using Bible stories to evangelize. To prepare a model set of Bible story lessons it was necessary to gather the more obvious issues and to generalize them.

As mentioned in the Foreword the concept of Heaven as a relationship in addition to that of a place was paramount because relationships touch the emotions. In gathering information for the *God and Woman* model stories it was clearly demonstrated again and again that women were far more interested in relationships and immediate benefits of those in the stories than in any doctrinal teachings. Women were interested in stories in which women and families were featured, and in which women's needs were met, particularly when a woman was distressed by pressing need or disgraced through barrenness. Other little details in the stories like the exchange of jewelry, marriage arrangements, and social proprieties were also important.

Among some Hindus and especially among many Buddhists it is believed that a woman must at some point in her cycles of life be reborn as a man in order to achieve the desired end state after life on earth. Among Muslims, while there are references to the rewards of Paradise which include both men and women, the general emphasis is upon the physical rewards for the man. And, to make matters even worse, many popular teachings and interpretations in the Hadiths strongly point to woman as the root cause of man's sin and downfall and therefore deserving of just punishment for her deeds.

“Had it not been for women, God would have truly, truly been worshiped.” (Kanz-el-‘Ummal, Vol 21, Hadith No. 825)

“God regarded woman as the first ranking lusts which He placed in the way of mankind...The woman then is absolutely the greatest affliction in a man's life.”

(Comment on Qur'an 3:13, Dr. M. S. R. al-Buti)

For most Muslim women it is for all practical purposes impossible for her to overcome her lack of attending *namaz* prayer due to the unclean period each month. So she is penalized for her sex. To this is added the insult of woman as the instigator of man's sin.

To look at the prospect of Heaven (or Hell) for women it is also necessary to explore some of the concepts regarding salvation and how one attains it. Islam in general is a religion of works with its attention to ritual requirements for men and women. However, it is very interesting to note that many of the worldview issues of Muslim women have to do with seeking help from the spirit world to overcome their powerlessness, and to change the circumstances of their lives and that of their families, especially their children. For more on this see the list of issues in the *God and Woman* model.

Another important aspect for many rural and poor urban women is the daily grind and press to feed their families and care for children with meager resources. Her focus is upon provision for the 'here and now' and not on the 'by and by'. In old age, if she approaches death in a conscious state of mind and not violently or suddenly, then she may have time to prepare herself by performing or speaking the required things. Otherwise, her life is entirely consumed with the daily grind and doing whatever is necessary to get by and to maintain her position in the communal society. To fail in these may cost her relationship with her husband, or the relationship with other women, or even cost her life.

Salvation—How, then, do the women hope to gain Heaven and avoid Hell? Immediate concern may be to escape the torments of the Fire, and in this connection four thoughts are often in their minds:

- a) The record of sins against them,
- b) Dependence on meritorious works,
- c) The inscrutability of the will of Allah,
- d) Faith in the intercession of their Prophet.

Sin is thought of, in the main, as opposition to, or rebellion against, the commands of Allah; the doing of what is *haram*, or forbidden, or the omission of prescribed duties. Some sins are small, such as failure to follow minute rules for ablutions (ritual cleansing) before namaz. Much depends upon whether these omissions were intentional or unavoidable. Then there are the great sins, such as false accusation or false witness, murder, and above all, *shirk*, the associating of a partner with Allah, polytheism.

But there is a way to be saved from punishment of such sins, if only a woman can weight the scales on the other side with good deeds. That is the chief concern of most, not the thought of moral regeneration or reconciliation with God.

“As regards salvation the Qur’an leaves no room for any illusion on this point. It is the direct result of our own deeds. Remember what the Prophet told his daughter, Fatima: ‘It would avail her naught on the Judgment Day that she happened to be his daughter,’ he told her. Her deeds alone would count.”

Women set themselves to atone for their sins by close observance of the pillars of Islam, especially prayers, fasting and almsgiving. They are ready to acknowledge in a general way that they fail to live up to their own standards of what is right, and even to call themselves sinners, but their fate, as the Qur’an affirms, is predestined by Allah, the Merciful.

Yet who knows the will of Allah? Does not the Qur’an say, “Allah will mislead whom He pleaseth?” Said one woman speaking of the Last Day, “How can we know if we are going to heaven; only the Great Judge knows whether it is heaven or hell for us. It is all His mercy. There is no need to be really frightened, we hope to be forgiven; but until we believe in Allah and do good deeds, how can we be certain?” We don’t know what we are in the sight of Allah; perhaps He sees some good in us. We are not frightened of Him, He is merciful, but we are frightened of his punishment.”

Others will say along with these thoughts there is the cherished hope that Allah is sure to forgive a faithful Muslim and that their Prophet will himself intercede for them; so all will be well in the end.

Some rest their hope on the fact that they are Muslims and they will be saved if with their last breath they repeat the *kalima* (There is no god but Allah, the *Prophet* is the Apostle of God.) Many Muslim women, however ignorant, usually know this kalima in Arabic and can repeat it as it has been taught them at a very early age. They will say it on waking, when a person is dying, while bathing, etc. A *pir* (holy man) has been known to tell his women disciples that if they recite it 125,000 times they will enter Paradise without being called to give an account! An old woman once said, “Teach me how to make a little prayer, for, look you, it’s my only chance at the Day of Judgment.” Educated women will say that performance of the namaz results in treasure in heaven which will be credited to their account.

Many women consider that the most important thing for them is to obey their husbands. This duty comes before all commands. As reported in the Foreword, A wife who is obedient and faithful to her husband will enjoy Allah’s favor in the world to come; she will inherit Paradise if she dies in the enjoyment of her husband’s favor.

The Muslim woman is further required to believe with her heart and confess with her tongue that Allah decreed all things; that nothing can happen in this world that is not already

contained in the written record of His decrees. This means that good and evil, obedience and disobedience, faith and infidelity, health and sickness, riches and poverty, life and death—all have been predetermined. Most accept this doctrine. Whatever happens is written in your fate. There is no remedy against fate, that which has already been measured. So that a woman considers it a primary obligation to accept whatever is ‘written on the forehead’ as the will of Allah for this life and the next. (This spirit of fatalism has insured the undisturbed control of their religion over the destiny of Muslim women throughout the centuries.)

This attitude of mind received confirmation in the remarks of a certain Muslim woman. She was speaking of the peculiar properties of a certain petition to Allah. She confidently confirmed that should a copy of this be found in the grave of the departed, Allah would unquestionably receive such a one into Paradise. On being asked if others knew of the leaflet she replied, “Only those in whose heart Allah has put the desire to praise Him.” Then she added: “As for the people who wish to walk the wrong road, their punishment is a settled thing. Allah puts a big curtain between the good and the bad, so that those who are wicked shall not know what is good. Allah will not even put the desire to repent in their hearts; they cannot desire good because they are predestined to punishment. They will go to Hell—that is their place.” When questioned about those who never had the opportunity to see the said leaflet, she replied, “Allah has fixed their lot; it cannot be anything else!”

Hell—Let us take the matter of Hell first and then follow with that of Heaven as it points toward the story lessons. The Bible has several references to the ignominy of sinners. In the story of Jezebel the prophecy said that dogs would lick her blood. Dogs are detestable, unclean animals which Muslims avoid. So this would be a picture of a bad end for a sinful woman.

Another reference for sinners would be the picture of one’s being exposed for her sins. So nakedness is used as a metaphor for shame and exposure of sins especially for spiritual prostitution.

“Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to *shame* and everlasting contempt.”
(Dan 12:2)

"I am against you," declares the LORD Almighty. "I will lift your skirts over your face. I will show the nations your nakedness and the kingdoms your shame." (Nah 3:5)

“They stripped her naked, took away her sons and daughters and killed her with the sword. She became a byword among women, and punishment was inflicted on her.” (Eze 23:10)

In the same vein righteous clothing to cover nakedness is to hide sin and shame and to make one acceptable in God’s sight. It is a powerful picture among those who live in shame cultures where to be exposed brings on great shame and disgrace. God’s work of covering sin and shame begins right in the story of Adam and Eve.

“The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.” (Gen 3:21)

Proper clothing to hide one’s shameful nakedness is to be sought:

“I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so that you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so that you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so that you can see.” (Rev 3:18)

Darkness is mentioned in the Parable of the Wedding (Mat 22:13) where there is weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth by those cast out from the festival.

Lack of preparedness is also used to picture those who are not ready at the return of the Lord. Those unprepared are locked out and not allowed to enter into the wedding festival.

(Parable of the Ten Virgins—Mat 25:1-13)

Jesus used the expression of a place “where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched” as a place of horror to be avoided. (Mrk 9:48)

Further, Jesus states that Hell is such a terrible place that it is better to enter life maimed with the loss of a hand, or foot or one eye than to have both hands, both feet and both eyes and be thrown into Hell. (Mrk 9:43-47)

The story of Lazarus and the Rich Man points to the finality of death as it separates the unbeliever from both the world of the living and the abode of the blessed. The rich man is pictured as already being in the flames of torment and very thirsty for even a drop of water to be placed on his parched tongue. Part of the rich man’s agony is his concern for his five brothers that he now longs to warn about coming to the place of torment. The writer of Hebrews reminds us, “Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment...” (Heb 9:27)

One writer has offered the thought that God in his mercy puts sinners to an early grave to end their sinning and to limit their punishment in Hell. Each sinner who is an unbeliever will stand judgment for their sins and be punished accordingly. Their sins will not be forgiven because they have not believed on Jesus; they are already under God’s condemnation in this life. (Jhn 3:18) And,

“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains in him.” (Jhn 3:36)

Eve’s disobedience of God led to problems for her and her daughter descendants in their lives in the generations to follow.

“To the woman he said, ‘I will greatly increase your pain in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.’”
(Gen 3:16)

Heaven—These thoughts about destruction and punishment for unbelievers need to be balanced out for the Muslim woman who looks to Allah to have mercy on her as a last resort to deliver her from an eternity in Hell. Paul quoting from Exodus 33:19 answers the question Is God unjust?

“I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will show compassion on whom I have compassion.” (Rom 9:15)

Salvation does not depend upon man’s desire or effort, but on God’s mercy. So the Muslim woman is partly right and partly wrong. For God’s mercy is expressed in His work to redeem sinners through Christ. His mercy is conditional for those who believe and accept what God has done in their behalf through Christ.

“But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.”
(Eph 2:4-5)

“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”
(Acts 4:12)

As to the attendance of Christ (or any other person or Prophet) at the entrance to eternal life the Scripture is very clear in the teaching that Jesus gave concerning the good shepherd.

“I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep...I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved.” (Jhn 10:7, 9)

Notice that there is a relationship between the sheep and the shepherd. For the shepherd knows his sheep by name. The sheep know the voice of their shepherd and hearken to him and follow him; they will never follow a stranger. The shepherd loves the sheep to the point

of laying down his life for his sheep.

Further, there is the picture of a shared fellowship in eating. While the common practice in many parts of the world the women do not eat with the men, there is the example of the two feedings of the multitude when Jesus fed both men and women without any reference to one being fed before the other. In the story of Hannah and Elkanah (1Sa 1:9) there appears to be a shared meal of both husband and wives. The feeding of the multitude and Jesus' reference to himself as the Bread of Life come down from heaven points to a satisfaction or filling so that one never hungers again. (Jhn 6:10-12, 33, 35)

Perhaps some of the greatest encouragement for the Muslim woman are the examples of God's mercy upon needy women in saving their lives and that of their families, providing them food and justice, and in the stories of Jesus providing healing, deliverance and forgiveness of sin. The kindness and compassion of Jesus points to God's mercy for women in meeting their daily needs as well as life's greatest need—forgiveness of sin and salvation with eternal life in Christ.

There are many references to the coming age after the return of Christ:

- a) A time of no more sorrow or tears. (Hos 13:14; Rev 21:4)
- b) All disgrace will be removed. (Hos 13:14)
- c) No more curses. (Rev 22:3)
- d) No night (darkness). (Rev 22:5)
- e) No death. (Luk 20:36; Rev 21:4)
- f) No hunger or thirst. (Rev 7:16, 17)
- g) No nakedness. (Rev 3:18)

Other teachings of Jesus speak about those taking part in the resurrection will be like the angels in heaven who neither marry nor are given in marriage". (Mat 22:30; Luk 20:35) And, of course, the saved will be properly clothed, not in their rags of self-righteousness, but in the of righteousness of God:

"I delight greatly in the LORD, my soul rejoices in my God.
For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed
me in a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head
like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels."
(Isa 61:10)

"Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from
God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to
God's righteousness." (Rom 10:3 NIV)

Heaven begins with a relationship in this life. This is the theme of these story lessons. It is realized that because of prevailing worldviews benefit for the women must be seen to begin in this life. So the lessons begin to explore the mercy and blessing of God upon women who need His forgiveness and peace. The lessons continue to explore the relationship with God as a beginning of their heavenly existence. It attempts to look beyond Heaven as just a place promised by and by to the faithful where delights abound, or even where the woes of this life and put away. It looks at the beginning of a blessed state which grows out of their response to the love and mercy of God which was expressed in the Old Testament stories and continued in the stories of Jesus and his ministry and teachings.

It is realized that there must be an emotional content as well as doctrinal truths for the women. In the stories they can identify with the women. The stories illustrate how a blessed state can begin and continue through what is promised to come to believers.

For many women this will be new information about things they may never have thought about. Many will have a hardened heart because of what they have been taught and their life experiences. These must be melted and displaced by the Word of God. The stories and lessons are not so much an attempt to confront the women head on with biblical truth, but to present that truth in a soft challenge so that the women can hear it, understand it, and desire to

have it for themselves and their families.

In all Bible storying the strength or success of the effort does not lie in the cleverness of the stories or lessons. A well thought out lesson and skillfully presented story greatly contribute to a good hearing. The storyer will need to bathe each lesson in prayer asking for divine wisdom in preparation and presentation. Also there must be expectation of results from the sharing of God's Word in a culturally appropriate and understandable manner.

Again, these lessons and their stories are being offered as a suggested model, a starting point, for developing your own presentation as God leads you. You will need to study the background scriptures and the stories to determine how you should tell them to your listeners. Then you should enjoy the fellowship with the women as you tell the stories and teach the lessons. May God give you a harvest of souls for your effort.



Heaven Is For Women

TELLING THE STORY & TEACHING THE LESSON

The purpose of the following stories and accompanying lessons is to engage the interest of women listeners regarding issues in this life and the life to come. Heaven (and all that it implies) must be seen as desirable and a result of God's love and mercy in spite of one's sinful state. So the stories will often look at how God redeemed someone's life and covered their shame, forgave their sin, or otherwise restored their well-being or gave them life.

Keep the stories intact. The stories carry the truth to be discussed. Try to keep the stories intact while telling so that the story will be received as a story, remembered as a story, and be preserved to be retold as a story. The pre-story discussion time (*Open the Women's Minds*) is to prepare the women's minds and hearts to hear the story. The post-story discussion (*Touch the Women's Hearts*) is to help the women internalize the truth of the story and the implication for their lives. A Verse for the ♥Heart is a memory verse to remind them of the story and its message.

Success depends upon preparation. Much of the success of a story lesson depends upon the preparation of the storyer-teacher. The lesson activities and questions are suggestions only. The storyer should be free to make their own adaptations, adding and deleting as needed, and restating according to the needs of their listeners.

Tell the stories well. The stories must be told naturally and as unashamedly as possible. Some of the stories have been shaped a bit for easier telling and to make clear who is speaking. It is also hoped that the simplified story will be easier to remember and recall. If there is any objection by the women to the altered story, then go back to the unaltered version in the Bible. There have been situations where Muslim women responded better to stories which were read directly from the Bible. Be prepared to do whatever is perceived as being most acceptable.

How long should a story lesson/session last? This depends upon a number of things. Some of the stories have more content than others. They will need more discussion time. Some of the stories contain issues which challenge the worldview of the women and may provoke more discussion. The stories themselves usually last 5 minutes or less. The pre-story discussion can take 10 minutes or longer as it should include some review of related earlier stories as well as the sensitizing discussion questions and any listening tasks or bridging stories.

The post-story discussion can easily take 15-25 minutes to allow for one or more retellings of the story by the listeners, the factual questions followed by the think-about-it questions and any applications suggested by the story. Take some time to go over the memory verse (or another verse deemed more appropriate).

So all in all the typical storying session should run around 40-45 minutes. It can go longer if there is keen interest or if more review is needed. Be aware of listener fatigue and leave the women a bit hungry to hear more rather than overfilled. Someone has likened the personal receptacles of the heart and mind as a basket that can only hold so much before it spills over. The goal is to just fill that basket so the listeners can take away a full basket to think about.

Pray! Pray! Pray! Prayer is an essential part of the preparation time when you are going over the lesson and working out what will be said. Pray before beginning the session

for open hearts and minds of the women. Pray after the session that God will keep Satan from taking away or confusing what the women have heard. Pray that a seed is planted which will bring fruit in due season.

Long pastoral prayers are usually not a good item to include in the actual session. If you do decide to use a prayer, especially in the beginning, keep it short and direct, asking God to bless the teaching of His Word. The teaching session is not a worship service. After the session, if some of the women have spiritual or physical needs requiring prayer, do for them whatever is needed, either while the group remains or after it has dispersed.

Let the women tell their stories, too! Do the women have a story to tell? This is one way in which people identify with stories—somehow they sense their story relates to the Bible story. Let them tell it. There is risk involved as their story may introduce some issues you'd rather not deal with. Pray for God to redeem their story, that it will contribute to the session by perhaps expressing some things in a way that will authenticate the Bible story.

If the women's stories bring up issues which are not pertinent at the moment but which do relate to later stories and lessons you plan to teach, tell them that you will get to that later. Avoid getting into a debate with the women. You are teaching what is in God's Word. They are entitled to their own beliefs and disagreement. Trust the power of God's Word to bring about needed change in the women's lives.

*The following stories and lessons are **RESOURCES** which you must adapt to your people's needs and worldview. Freely make any changes needed as you teach the stories.*



Heaven Is For Women

GOD COVERED EVE'S SIN AND SHAME

1

Bible Background: Gen 1:27, 28; 2:7-25; 3:1-23

For The Storyer:

This first story is crucial as it immediately expresses the problem of disobedience as sin and God's judgment of the sinner. The other focus is upon the mercy of God in that the man and woman did not die at that time, though their sin caused God to put them out of the garden, ending their fellowship with Him in the Garden of Eden. The relationship was broken.

But it was the man and woman who first broke that fellowship when they hid from God out of fear and shame. Notice that their first instinct upon realizing their nakedness was to become ashamed and attempt to cover their nakedness by their own work which was not a lasting covering. God had to provide a more lasting covering which implied that innocent animals gave up their lives to provide the skins for garments to cover the guilty man and woman. One day God promised that an offspring of the woman would crush (break the power of) the snake but that the snake would wound her offspring (not a permanent injury).

Open The Women's Minds:

1. What are some things that make people ashamed? Get the women to list some.
2. Have anyone in the group ever been ashamed? Can they talk about what happened?
3. What do we usually try to do when we are ashamed?
4. Have you ever thought about the fact that God sees all we do?
5. Do you think God is pleased with all that we do?
6. Where can we hide from God? (*Nowhere.*) Has anyone ever tried to hide from God?
7. Do you think disobeying God is sinful? If so, why? If not, why not?
8. We have today a story about the first people that God created. He put them in a garden where He provided all their needs. But the man and woman chose to listen to someone else and disregarded God's command. It led to their shame. Here's the story:

Read These Verses: Gen 3:7, 21

Tell The Story:

GOD COVERED EVE'S SIN AND SHAME

After God had created this world, the heavens and all the animals, birds and fish, He made the first man from the dust of the earth and breathed into him the breath of life. God made the man in his own image. God put this man Adam in a garden God had prepared where there were many trees providing fruit for his food. God warned the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of knowing good and evil; for when you eat of it you will surely die."

God saw that the man was alone with no suitable companion for him. So God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep, and while he was sleeping God opened the flesh of the man's side and removed bone and flesh and closed up the flesh. With the bone and flesh taken from

the man God fashioned a woman and brought her to the man. He was pleased to see the women and declared, “you are bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.” And so they were united as man and wife. They lived in the garden and were both naked but felt no shame. God blessed them and said for them to increase in number and rule over all the animals, birds and fish God created.

One day Satan spoke to the woman through a snake asking her, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’”

The woman replied to the snake, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die’.”

“You will not surely die,” the snake said to the woman. “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

When God came to the garden to walk and talk with the man and women they were not there to meet him, for they had hidden themselves out of fear and shame. God called to them saying, “Where are you?” The man answered saying, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.”

God said to the man, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree I commanded you not to eat from?”

The man Adam said it happened because of the woman God had put there with him. “She gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it,” Adam said.

So God first judged the work of the snake and cursed him for what he did. In doing so God said that one day an offspring of the woman would crush the head of the snake, but the snake would wound him.

God judged the disobedience of the woman saying that her pain in childbirth would be greatly increased and her desire would now be for her husband who would rule over her.

Because the man Adam listened to his wife and disobeyed God, the ground was now under a curse. From this time onward man would have to toil and sweat to grow his food. And one day he would grow old and die and return to the dust from which he was taken.

Because of their disobedience God put the man and his wife out of the garden so they could not eat from the tree of life and live forever in their sinful condition. The man named his wife *Eve* which means ‘living’ because she would become the mother of all the living.

The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife Eve to cover their sin and shame. God had judged their sin and now it would separate the man and woman from the presence of God. But God loved the man and woman and provided a better covering for their shame. One day God would provide an even better covering, but that day would not come for a long time.

Touch The Women’s Hearts:

1. Would someone like to retell the story about Eve and how God covered her sin and shame? (*Get several versions if the women are willing.*)
2. Have the women heard this story before? Have they heard a different version?
3. What can we say about the mercy of God in this story?

*(God saw the man had no companion.
God made the woman.*

God blessed the man and woman.

God provided their food.

God warned them about the consequence of disobeying his command.

God did not immediately put the man and woman to death for their disobedience, though He said that their disobedience would lead to death one day.

God provided a more lasting covering for the shame of the man and woman.)

4. What judgment did God speak against the woman for what she did? *(Her pain in childbearing would be increased; her desire would now be for her husband; he would rule over her.)*
5. Do you think God still loved the man and woman He had created? *(Yes.)*
6. How did God express His love (mercy)? *(By providing better covering for their nakedness.)*
7. How does God express his love (mercy) toward us today?
8. How has God expressed his love (mercy) toward you? Would someone like to share what God has done for them?
9. How do you think the offspring of woman would one day crush the snake (break his power)?
10. What do you think happened to the first man and woman when they died? What will happen when you die? How can you know for sure?

A Verse For The ♥Heart: “You covered the iniquity of your people and covered all their sins.” Psa 85:2



Heaven Is For Women

GOD HEARD HAGAR'S CRY

2

Bible Background: Gen 16:1-16; 21:8-21

For The Storyer:

We continue the theme of God's seeing the need of a woman and meeting the need in a compassionate way. As a slave girl Hagar had no rights and was totally dependent upon her mistress. In being rejected by her mistress she was now helpless. She had acted foolishly, provoking Sarah when she was going to bear a child, while Sarah remained barren and disgraced as a wife. Now there was no one to hear her cry of distress and no one to provide for her needs. She was destitute. It was at this point that God heard her cry and intervened.

Open The Women's Minds:

1. Has anyone ever acted foolishly and then had to suffer the consequences?
2. Did anyone notice what happened and offer to comfort or help?
3. Has anyone ever been rejected, sent away, or cut off from fellowship with others?
How did you feel? Lonely? Forgotten? Helpless?
4. Why would someone want to help a person in their time of need? To take advantage of them? Out of duty? Because of genuine love for that person?
5. What do you think is a woman's greatest need in her life?
6. Who do you think is best willing and able to help meet that need?

Read This Verse: Gen 16:13

Tell The Story:

GOD HEARD HAGAR'S CRY

Some time earlier Abraham and Sarah had gone down into Egypt. Along the way Abraham was afraid the Egyptians would see Sarah who was very beautiful and would report her to Pharaoh the king of Egypt. He would want her to be one of his wives and might have Abraham killed so he could have Sarah as his own wife. Abraham asked Sarah to say that she was his sister so that Pharaoh would act kindly toward him.

It happened just as Abraham suspected and Pharaoh took Sarah to be one of his wives. But the God was not pleased with this. So God inflicted diseases on Pharaoh and his household because of Abraham's wife Sarah. When Pharaoh learned this was happening because Sarah was truly Abraham's wife, he called for Abraham and angrily asked him, "Why did you mislead me? Now take your wife and leave Egypt!" In return for Sarah, Pharaoh had given Abraham menservants and maidservants, sheep, cattle, donkeys and camels. So Abraham left Egypt with his gifts and Egyptian servants.

Hagar was an Egyptian maidservant belonging to Sarah. When Sarah saw that she was getting old and still had no son for Abraham, she said to Abraham, "The Lord has kept me from having children. So take my maidservant Hagar and sleep with her. Perhaps I can build a family through her." So Abraham took Hagar and slept with her and she conceived.

When Hagar knew she was with child, she began to despise her mistress, Sarah. Sarah

saw that Hagar despised her, so she said to Abraham, “You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. I put my servant in your arms, and now Hagar knows she is with child, she despises me.”

“Your servant Hagar is in your hands,” Abraham replied, “do with her whatever you think best.” Then Sarah mistreated Hagar so that Hagar ran away.

The angel of God found Hagar near a spring in the desert. The angel said to her, “Hagar, servant girl of Sarah, where have you come from, and where are you going?”

“I’m running away from my mistress Sarah,” she answered.

Then the angel said to Hagar, “Go back to your mistress and submit to her.” Then the angel said, “I will increase your descendants so they will be too many to count.” Also the angel said, “You are now with child and you will bear a son. You shall name him Ishmael, for God has heard of your misery.”

So Hagar gave this name to God, “You are the God who sees me.”

Later Hagar bore a son to Abraham and gave him the name Ishmael.

After some years had passed and Abraham had another son by Sarah, it happened that Ishmael was mocking Sarah’s son. When Sarah saw what the son of Hagar the Egyptian was doing, she said to Abraham, “Get rid of that slave woman and her son.”

The matter greatly disturbed Abraham because it concerned his son. God said to Abraham, “Do not be disturbed about the boy and your maidservant. Do what Sarah tells you.” Early the next morning Abraham took some food and a skin of water and gave them to Hagar. He then sent Hagar away with her son. She departed and wandered in the desert.

When the water in the skin was gone, Hagar put her son under one of the small trees and began to weep. For she said, “I cannot watch the boy die.”

God heard the boy crying and the angel of God called out to Hagar from heaven, “What is the matter Hagar? Do not be afraid. God has heard the boy crying as he lies there. Lift your son up and take him by the hand, for I will make of him a great nation.”

Then God opened Hagar’s eyes and she saw a well of water. So she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink. God was with the boy as he grew up. He lived in the desert and became an archer. While he was living in the desert his mother Hagar got a wife for him from Egypt.

Touch The Women’s Hearts:

1. Would someone like to retell the story *God Heard Hagar’s Cry*?
2. What did Hagar do to anger Sarah? What did Sarah do to Hagar?
3. How did God show His mercy toward Hagar? (*Promised her a son, gave her son a name, and promised many descendants, and saved her son’s life.*)
4. Did God fulfill His promise of a son? (*Yes*)
5. When Ishmael mocked Sarah’s own son, what did Sarah demand?
6. What happened to Hagar and her son? (*They were sent away*)
7. The second time did God see Hagar’s distress? (*Yes*) What did God do for her?
8. If God sees our needs in this life, do you think He will care for us in the next life after we die? What kind of promise do we need from God about the coming life after our death? (*That He will love us and take care of us*)
9. God provided water for Hagar and her son’s thirst. We will see that God has a special water to quench our thirst. And it is available to everyone, whether man or woman.

A Verse For The ♥ Heart: “O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water.” Psa 63:1



Heaven Is For Women

GOD KEPT HIS PROMISE TO SARAH

3

Bible Background: Gen 17:19, 21; 18:10-14; 21:1-7

For The Storyer:

God makes promises and God keeps His promises. Again and again in the Bible we see God making promises and then fulfilling what He said He would do. He is faithful to follow through. God not only is faithful in this life, but it reminds us that God will be faithful to do what He has promised to do in the life to come. God was faithful to fulfill His promise to Sarah even though a long time had passed. The promise was fulfilled when God said it would be fulfilled.

Open The Women's Minds:

1. Has anyone made a promise to you? Did they keep their promise?
2. What might keep a person from fulfilling their promise?
3. Does a promise give you hope that it will be fulfilled?
4. What do you think is a woman's greatest need in life?
5. What if someone promised you that need would be met? Would you believe them?
6. Here is a story of how God took away a woman's disgrace and fulfilled His promise.

Read These Verses: Gen 21:1-2

Tell The Story:

GOD KEPT HIS PROMISE TO SARAH

Abraham and Sarah had been married a long time. But Sarah never had a son for Abraham. In the beginning God had promised to Abraham that one day he would have many descendants. His descendants would be like the stars in the heavens, too many to be counted. The years passed and there was no son for Abraham and Sarah. Many times Abraham asked God when he would have a family. Abraham trusted God to fulfill His promise.

Then one time when Abraham was asking God about who would inherit his possessions God said to Abraham, "Your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. Sarah will bear this son for you by this time next year."

Then it happened that three angels came to visit Abraham and Sarah. One was the angel of the Lord. Abraham invited the angels to come and take rest and eat some food. After they had eaten, the angel of the Lord asked Abraham, "Where is your wife Sarah?"

"There in the tent," Abraham replied.

The angel said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will bear a son."

Sarah was listening at the entrance of the tent and heard the words of the angel. Sarah was already quite old and well past the age of having children. When she heard the angel she laughed to herself as she thought, "After I am worn out and my master is old, will I now have this pleasure?" For she doubted the words of the angel which seemed impossible to her.

The angel of the Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Will I really have

a child, now that I am old?’ Is anything too difficult for the Lord to do? I will return to you at the appointed time next year and Sarah will have a son.”

Sarah was afraid, so she said, “I did not laugh.”

But the angel said, “Yes, you did laugh. I heard you.”

Then at the appointed time God did for Sarah what He had promised to do. For Sarah had become pregnant and gave birth to a son at the very time God had promised to both Abraham and Sarah. Abraham named him Isaac which means laughter. Sarah said, “God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me.” And she added, “I have borne Abraham a son in his old age.”

When Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him as God had commanded Abraham to do for all the males in his household.

Touch The Women’s Hearts:

1. What did God promise first to Abraham and then to Sarah? (*a son*)
2. Why do you think Sarah laughed when she heard the angel’s words? Would you have laughed?
3. What did the angel have to say about God’s ability to fulfill His promises? (*Nothing is too difficult for God.*)
4. Was God faithful to do what He promised to do? (*Yes*)
5. When did God fulfill His promise to Sarah? (*At the appointed time—the time God said He would do it.*)
6. If God promised to do something for you, do you think He would fulfill His promise?
7. What promises do you think God has made to us? Did you know that God has promised to do something for us in our lifetime, and also He has promised to do something for us after this life. Soon we are going to talk about the special promises that God has made—promises for you and for me. But we must believe God and do what He tells us to do in order to claim the promise.

A Verse For The ♥Heart: “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” 2Pe 3:9



Heaven Is For Women

GOD TOOK AWAY RACHEL'S DISGRACE

4

Bible Background: Gen 29:9-30:24; 35:16-19

For The Storyer:

Disgrace is a terrible thing. For it brings shame to the one who is disgraced and a deep hurt. It may cause others to look down upon the disgraced one. It may cause one to be rejected as unworthy. And it may lead to frustration and anger by the one who is disgraced. From a human standpoint there are certain things which bring disgrace. Among women in Bible times to be childless—especially lacking a son was a terrible disgrace. Later in the stories and lessons we will see that other things like impurity also brought disgrace. While we think of disgrace in earthly terms relating to our cultures, there is a greater disgrace that comes when we sin against the God who made us. For many that disgrace will remain to haunt them as they stand before God in judgment. God is a God of mercy and He desires to take away our disgrace and present us not as disgraced, but as one He has blessed and lifted up to honor.

Open The Women's Minds:

1. Among the women who are married, can they remember the first time they saw the person they married? Can they tell about that first meeting?
2. Has anyone in the group ever been deceived by another? Can they tell about it?
3. Does anyone in the group feel unloved by their husband? Is there any jealousy with another wife?
4. Does one normally think of clever ways to find attention and get needs supplied?
5. Or does one think of asking God to help with their need or to remove their disgrace?

Read These Verses: Gen 30:22-23

Tell The Story:

A SON FOR RACHEL

Jacob the grandson of Abraham had left his home to go find a wife from among Abraham's kinfolk. Nearing the place of his relatives he saw a beautiful girl who was a shepherd. Immediately his heart was filled with love for this girl and he kissed her. The girl's father asked Jacob to work for him and to name his wages. All Jacob desired was to marry the girl who was named Rachel. For seven years Jacob worked for his uncle in order to marry Rachel. At the end of the time a marriage feast was held for Jacob and Rachel. When it came time for Jacob to go in to his new wife, the uncle very cleverly put Rachel's older sister Leah in her place. When morning came Jacob found that his wife was not Rachel the one he loved, but Leah! So he had to work another seven years to get Rachel. Leah was the unloved wife.

Soon God opened Leah's womb and she gave birth to a son, then another, and soon two more. But Rachel remained barren and became jealous of her sister and angry with Jacob. Rachel said to Jacob, "Give me children or I'll die!" So that she might also have some sons

to call her own, Rachel gave her servant girl to Jacob to be his wife. Two sons were born to the servant girl. Then Leah saw what was happening and she gave her servant girl to Jacob to be his wife. And two more sons were born. But Rachel remained barren.

During the wheat harvest Leah's oldest son went out and found some mandrake plants which he brought to his mother. Rachel asked her sister Leah for some of her son's mandrake plants. But Leah said, "Wasn't it enough that you took away my husband? Will you take my son's mandrake plants also?"

"Very well," Rachel said, "Jacob can sleep with you tonight in return for your son's mandrakes." So when Jacob came in from the fields that evening, Leah went out to meet him. "You must sleep with me," she said, "I have hired you with my son's mandrakes." So Jacob slept with Leah that night.

God listened to Leah, and opened Leah's womb so that she gave birth to another two sons and a daughter. She said, "This time my husband will treat me with honor, because I have borne him six sons."

Then God remembered Rachel for it says He listened to her and opened her womb. She became pregnant and soon gave birth to a son and named him Joseph. She said, "God has taken away my disgrace. And now, may the Lord add to me another son." God did give Rachel another son a few years later just before she died. Jacob now had twelve sons, and the wife he loved had given birth to two of them.

Touch The Women's Hearts:

1. What happened when Jacob first saw Rachel? (*He kissed her*)
2. Do the women know of any situation where one wife was cleverly substituted for another?
3. What was Jacob's reaction when he found that he had the wrong wife? (*He was angry*)
4. Was Jacob willing to work another seven years to get the wife he wanted? (*Yes*)
5. Which wife began to have children? (*Leah*)
6. What did Rachel do when she saw that she was not having children? (*She accused Jacob first, then gave her servant girl to Jacob to get sons through her.*)
7. What did Leah do to get her husband back again? (*Gave some of her son's mandrake plants to Rachel in exchange for time with Jacob.*)
8. Did God finally give Rachel a son? (*Yes, he listened to her and gave her Joseph.*)
9. Do you think God had a plan for giving Jacob many sons? Jacob was the grandson of Abraham. How did Jacob's sons relate to God's promise to Abraham? Does anyone remember?
10. When God grants us His mercy does the group think it must somehow fit in with God's plan for us and for others?
11. Do the women think that God may have a plan for their lives? For the lives of their families? What does that tell us we should do? Be patient and wait for God's mercy?
12. Rachel waited a long time to have a son, for God to grant her mercy. What if God has already granted us His mercy but we haven't accepted it from Him? We'll find out later this is actually what has happened. God has granted us His mercy but many have not accepted it? Do you think that you have? Can you think what that mercy might be?

A Verse For The ♥ Heart: "As the eyes of slaves look to their master, as the eyes of a maid look to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the Lord our God, till he shows us his mercy." Psa 123:2



Heaven Is For Women

GOD SAVED RAHAB AND HER FAMILY

5

Bible Background: Jos 2:1-21; 6:17; 22-25; Ruth 4:17, 21; Mat 1:5; Heb 11:31; Jam 2:25

For The Storyer:

You will notice that the Israelites are referred to only as Abraham's descendants since this is primarily for Muslim listeners. Rahab is not referred to in the story as a prostitute as this may introduce other things you don't want to deal with at this time. The focus should be on her fear of God and her faith and obedience which the writer of Hebrews says was counted as righteousness. God honored the faith of this woman, who by her faith also led to the salvation of her family.

Open The Women's Minds:

1. Has anyone of the group ever wondered if their life was important to God?
2. Can anyone think of some ways in which God demonstrates His love and mercy for each person?
3. Would everyone be willing to do what God asked in order to save themselves and their families from harm?
4. Listen to this story about a woman named Rahab who had heard news about the God of Abraham's descendants. She feared Him. She loved her family and wanted to keep them safe from God's judgment upon her people who were very wicked in God's sight.

Read These Verses: Jos 2:12-13

Tell The Story:

GOD SAVED RAHAB AND HER FAMILY

Rahab was not a descendant of Abraham. Her people were Canaanite people who had lived in the land a long time before Abraham arrived. They worshiped false gods who they believed made their land fertile and their animals to produce more offspring. Rahab lived in Jericho, a city that had high thick walls surrounding it to protect the city from enemies. And the city guarded one of the entrances into the land of Canaan.

God had led Abraham's descendants out of Egypt after performing many miracles to punish the Egyptians who had made them slaves. God had even opened up the waters of the sea for Abraham's people to pass through safely. News of these happenings had spread far and wide.

To enter into the land of Canaan, Abraham's people had to pass through Jericho. So the leader sent two spies into the city to spy out the city. They had gone to the house of a certain woman named Rahab where they found lodging. The king of Jericho was told, "Look! Some of the foreigners have come here tonight to spy out the land." So the king sent this message "Bring out the men who came to you and entered your house, because they are spies."

But Rahab had taken the two men and hidden them. She said to the king's men, "Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they came from. At sundown, when it was time to close the city gate, the men left. I don't know which way they went. Go after them

quickly. You may be able to catch them.” But Rahab had taken the two men up to the roof of her house and hidden them under the stalks of flax she had laid out on the roof to dry.

Before the two men lay down for the night, Rahab went up to them on the roof and said, “I know that the Lord your God has given this land to you. A great fear has fallen on us. All who live in this country are melting in fear because of you. We have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the sea when you came out of Egypt. We have heard what your God did to the two kings who opposed you, our hearts sank and everyone’s courage failed because of you. The Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below.

“Now then, please swear to me by the Lord that you will show kindness to my family, because I have shown kindness to you. Give me a sure sign that you will spare the lives of my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and that you will save us from death.”

“Our lives for your lives!” the men assured her. “If you don’t tell what we are doing, we will treat you kindly and faithfully when the Lord gives us the land.”

So Rahab let the two spies down by a rope through the window, for her house was part of the city wall. She said to the men, “Go to the hills and hide yourselves there three days, then go on your way.”

The men said to Rahab, “This oath you made us swear will not be binding on us unless, when we enter the land, you have tied this scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down. And unless you have brought your father and mother, your brothers and sisters, and all your family into your house. If anyone goes outside your house into the street, his blood will be on his own head. As for anyone who is in the house with you, his blood will be on our head if a hand is laid on him. But if you tell what we are doing, we will be released from the oath you made us swear.”

“Agreed,” Rahab replied. “Let it be as you say.” So she sent them on their way. And she tied the scarlet cord in the window.

The Lord had revealed to the descendants of Abraham they should march around the city of Jericho each day for seven days and then the walls of the city would fall down. For God was going to deliver the city into their hands. So it happened just as God said, for on the seventh day after the seventh march around the city there was a terrible earthquake and the walls were destroyed. God had commanded the descendants of Abraham to destroy all the people in the city because of their wickedness and sin. The leader of the people said to the two spies who had stayed at Rahab’s house, “Go into Rahab’s house where the scarlet cord is hanging and bring her out and all who belong to her, in accordance with your oath to her.” So the young men who had done the spying went in and found Rahab, her father and mother, and her brothers and sisters, and all who belonged to them, and brought them out safely.

Later, one of the spies, named Salmon, married Rahab and had a son named Boaz. In another story you will hear who Boaz married and find that he was the ancestor of a famous prophet. All of this happened because Rahab feared the true God of Abraham’s descendants and trusted their God to save her life and the lives of her family.

Touch The Women’s Hearts:

1. Would someone like to retell the story of Rahab. Can they remember what she did and what happened to her and her family?
2. Do you think it was a coincidence that the two spies happened to go to Rahab’s house to find lodging? (*No, surely God knew Rahab’s heart and had a plan to help her.*)
3. Do you think that Rahab had a plan of her own to help the spies and save her family?
4. How did Rahab show her fear of the true God? (*She heard what He did and knew He was all powerful to deliver Abraham’s descendants from Egypt.*)
5. What was the agreement between Rahab and the two spies? (*Their safety for her and her*

family's safety.)

6. What was the arranged sign to mark her house for safety of its occupants? *(A red cord tied in the window.)*
7. Did Abraham's descendants honor this sign of safety? *(Yes)*
8. Did God provide safety for Rahab and her family? *(Yes)*
9. What did Rahab do so that she and her family would be safe? *(She obeyed what the spies told her to do by tying the red cord in her window.)*
10. What would have happened if Rahab had not obeyed? *(She and her family would have died.)*
11. What else did the spies tell Rahab that she and her family must do? *(Stay inside the house where they would be safe.)*
12. God's Word tells us that one day there will be a judgment of all people. Some will be safe from God's wrath and some will not. Those who are in the "safe place" will not be harmed. Those who are not in the "safe place" will face everlasting punishment.
13. Soon we will learn about the "safe place" God has provided for those who believe Him and do what He tells us to do.
14. Do you think God had a special reason for helping Rahab? *(Yes. God knew that she would be faithful. So He let her be an ancestor of a famous prophet.)* Can you guess who that person is? *(David)*

A Verse For The ♥Heart: "How shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him." Heb 2:3



Heaven Is For Women

GOD PROVIDED RUTH A NEW LIFE

6

Bible Background: Ruth 1-4; Mat 1:5-6

For The Storyer:

The story of Ruth is a story of new life for one whose young life had ended in tragedy and emptiness. Not only was her past empty but she faced a possible future as a husbandless shrine prostitute to earn a living. Ruth was from the Moabite people who worshiped the detestable god Chemosh (1Ki 11:7) whose appeasement demanded the life of a child. (2Ki 3:27) Ruth was a descendant of the incestuous relationship of Lot and his older daughter (Gen 19:37). The Moabite people were noted for sexual immorality as a part of the worship of their gods (Num 25:1-2). Intermarriage with them was later forbidden because of their detestable practices. (Ezr 9:1-2) As a people they were later destroyed for their pride and sin. (Isa 16:14; Amos 2:1-3)

Open The Women's Minds:

1. Has anyone in the group faced tragedy like the death of a husband or a child?
2. How did the tragedy change your life? Was it better afterward, or worse?
3. In losing a husband does one face a bleak future or is it possible to redeem the situation in some way?
4. What if your religion also influenced your future destiny? Would anyone be willing to seek a better faith (religion)?
5. Following is the story of a young woman who lost a husband, had no son, and came from a people whose religion often demanded the sacrifice of a child or the prostitution of a woman. God expressed His love for Ruth by rescuing her from such a terrible life and future. (If the storyer deems it helpful you can present some of the details of the religion of the Moabites.)

Read These Verses: Ruth 1:16-17

Tell The Story:

GOD PROVIDED RUTH A NEW LIFE

One time when there was a famine in the land where Abraham's descendants lived a man named Elimelech took his wife Naomi and two sons Mahlon and Kilion from Bethlehem over into the land of the Moabites. Soon Elimelech died leaving Naomi with only her two sons. They each married Moabite women, one name Ruth and the other Orpah. After they had lived there about ten years, both Mahlon and Kilion died. So Naomi was left without a husband and without her two sons.

When Naomi heard that the famine had ended and there was now food in Bethlehem she and her two daughters-in-law decided to return there to live. Along the road Naomi said to her daughters-in-law, "Go back, each of you, to your mother's home. May the Lord show kindness to you, as you have shown to your dead husbands and to me. May the Lord grant you rest in the home of another husband."

Then Naomi kissed each of her daughters-in-law who wept aloud and said to Naomi, “We will go back with you to your people.” But Naomi replied, “Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons who could become your husbands? Return home, my daughters, I am too old to have another husband. Even if I had another husband tonight, would you wait unmarried until they grew up?” The women wept again. Then Orpah kissed Naomi good-bye and left. But Ruth held on to Naomi. “Look,” Naomi said, “your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her.”

But Ruth replied, “Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there be buried. May the Lord deal severely with me if anything but death separates you and me.”

When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her. In Bethlehem where Naomi had lived before the whole town was stirred because of the two women. When the women exclaimed, “Can this be Naomi?” She replied, “Don’t call me Naomi. Call me Mara (*bitter*) because my life is very bitter.” It was the beginning of the barley harvest.

Naomi had a relative on her dead husband’s side named Boaz. And it happened that Ruth went into his field to pick up the left over grain the harvesters dropped. When Boaz saw Ruth in his field he asked, “Whose young woman is that?” When he learned that she was a Moabitess and had come back with Naomi, he said to Ruth, “Don’t glean in another field. Stay here with my servant girls. I have told the men not to touch you.” Hearing these words Ruth bowed down and said, “Why have I found such favor in your eyes that you notice me—a foreigner?” Boaz replied, “I’ve been told all about you and what you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband. May you be richly rewarded by the Lord, the God of Abraham’s people, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.”

When Ruth returned home to Naomi that night she told all that had happened. Naomi said, “The Lord has not stopped showing kindness to the living and the dead! That man is our close relative; he is one of our kinsman redeemers.”

One day Naomi said to Ruth, “My daughter, I should try to find a home for you, where you will be provided for. Tonight the men will be winnowing barley on the threshing floor. Bathe and perfume yourself and put on your best clothes. Then go down to the threshing floor but don’t let Boaz know you are there until he has finished eating and drinking. When he lies down, note the place where he is sleeping. Then go uncover his feet and lie down. He will tell you what to do next.”

In the middle of the night Boaz happened to wake up and discovered a woman lying at his feet. “Who are you?” he asked. “I am your servant Ruth,” she said. “Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a kinsman-redeemer.” “The Lord bless you, my daughter,” Boaz replied. “You have showed a great kindness to me and have not gone after the young men. Now, my daughter, I will do for you all you ask. All my fellow townsmen know that you are a woman of noble character.” So Ruth lay at Boaz’ feet until morning and got up and left before anyone recognized her.

Boaz went to the town gate and waited for the other kinsman-redeemer who was a closer relative. When he arrived Boaz said, “Sit here with the town elders. Naomi, who has come back from Moab, is selling the land that belonged to our brother Elimelech. You have the right to the land. Will you redeem it?” “I will,” the kinsman-redeemer said. Then Boaz said, “On the day you buy the land from Naomi and Ruth the Moabitess, you also acquire the dead man’s widow, in order to maintain the name of the dead with the property.”

“Then I cannot redeem it,” he said, “because I might endanger my own estate. You redeem it yourself. I cannot do it.” Then the kinsman-redeemer said to Boaz, “Buy it yourself.” So Boaz announced to the elders and all of the people, “You are witnesses that I have bought from Naomi all the property of Elimelech, Mahlon and Kilion. I have also

acquired Ruth the Moabitess, Mahlon's widow, as my wife." Then the elders and all the people gathered at the gate said, "We are witnesses." And the people blessed Boaz and Ruth.

So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. The Lord enabled her to conceive and she gave birth to a son. Naomi took the child, laid him in her lap and cared for him. The women living there said, "Naomi has a son." And they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse who was the father of David. God had redeemed the life of the young woman Ruth. In His love and mercy He provided a future for Ruth with a husband and a son. Ruth had said to Naomi, "Your God will be my God." Ruth had made a wise choice to leave her people and their gods and ways, to follow the God of Naomi.

Touch The Women's Hearts:

1. Can anyone retell all or part of the story of Ruth?
2. What happened to Naomi's life? (*Her husband died, then her sons died.*)
3. What happened to Ruth's life? (*She was childless and her husband died.*)
4. What do the women think about Orpah's decision? Why?
5. What do they think about Ruth's decision? Why?
6. Do the women know what Naomi's name means—"pleasant"? What did she tell the women to call her? (*Mara—"bitter"*)
7. Do the women think Ruth was just lucky to go to Boaz' field? Or do they think God was helping her?
8. What can the women say about Boaz? What did he say to Ruth?
9. What do the women think about Naomi's advice to Ruth when it came time to winnow the barley harvest?
10. Did Ruth obey what Naomi told her to do?
11. Was Boaz pleased with what Ruth did?
12. How did Boaz show that he was an honorable man? (*Gave the nearer kinsman-redeemer the first opportunity to buy the land of Naomi.*)
13. Do the women think God was still helping to provide a husband for Ruth?
14. How did God bless the marriage of Ruth and Boaz? (*Gave them a son.*)
15. What can the women say about the change in Ruth's life? Can they say she was redeemed—that is, she was literally bought back and given a new life?
16. Do the women know that God has a plan to redeem all people from their old way of life—both men and women?
17. This redemption would be through a descendant of David. So this story is important because it tells about something that affects each and every life today. Soon we'll hear the rest of the story and learn how God can redeem each woman's life.

A Verse For The ♥Heart: "...Put your hope in the Lord, for with the Lord is unfailing love and with him is full redemption." Psa 130:7

Note: *You will find in the early lessons a deliberate use of "Abraham's descendants" for "Israel" or "Israelites". This is deliberate as the lessons are primarily intended for Muslim listeners. If the storyer feels freedom to use the original words, then by all means do so. Just be sure this does not cause a hanging point or early rejection of the message of the stories. In the above verse, the first two words "O Israel" have been left off.*



Heaven Is For Women

GOD REMEMBERED HANNAH

7

Bible Background: 1Sa 1:1-2:10

For The Storyer:

The story of Hannah is somewhat redundant and could be skipped if the schedule is tight. It is included as a story in which God specifically hears the prayer of a woman in deep distress and answers with a son. It is also included because of the tender concern of the husband Elkanah toward his barren wife and because there is some implied sense of equality in that husband and wives ate the sacrifice together. In a later lesson the thought of being included is developed as well as the prepared invitation for all. For the fellowship offering which the worshipers may eat see Lev. 7:11-16.

Open The Women's Minds:

1. Has anyone in the group been mocked by another person? Perhaps by a close member of their family. Would they like to tell about it?
2. Do the women have any expressions like: When bad things happen to good people?
3. When our need or distress is great what should we do? (*Turn to God in prayer*)
4. Does God hear the prayer of all people? If not, why not?
5. If a person prays and doesn't believe God will hear and answer the prayer, is that good?
6. Which wife do the women think a man would favor most, one who was barren, or one who had given him children?
7. Here is a story which may surprise the women in what the husband did and what the woman did?

Read These Verses: 1Sa 1:13-16

Tell The Story:

GOD REMEMBERED HANNAH

There was a certain man named Elkanah who had two wives. One was called Hannah and the other Peninnah. Peninnah had children. But Hannah was barren.

Year after year this man went up from his town to worship and sacrifice to the Lord at the temple. Whenever the day came for Elkanah to sacrifice, he would give portions of the meat to his wife Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters. But to Hannah he gave a double portion because he loved her, and the Lord had closed her womb.

And because the Lord had closed her womb, her rival Peninnah kept provoking her in order to irritate her. This went on year after year. Whenever Hannah went up to the house of the Lord, her rival provoked her until she wept and would not eat. Elkanah her husband would say to her, "Hannah, why are you weeping? Why don't you eat? Why are you downhearted? Don't I mean more to you than ten sons?"

Once when they had finished eating and drinking, Hannah stood up. Now Eli the old priest was sitting on a chair by the doorpost of the Lord's temple. In bitterness of soul Hannah wept much and began to pray to the Lord. She made a vow saying, "O Lord

Almighty, if you will only look upon your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the Lord for all the days of his life." As Hannah kept on praying to the Lord, Eli was watching her mouth.

Hannah was praying in her heart, and her lips were moving but her voice was not heard. Eli thought she had been drinking too much and was drunk. So he said to her, "How long will you keep on getting drunk? Get rid of your wine."

"Not so," Hannah replied, "I am a woman who is deeply troubled. I have not been drinking wine or beer. I was pouring out my soul to the Lord. Do not take your servant for a wicked woman; I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief."

The priest Eli answered Hannah, "Go in peace, and may the God of Abraham's descendants grant you what you have asked of him." Hannah said, "May your servant find favor in your eyes." Then she went her way and ate something. And her face was no longer downcast. Early the next morning Elkanah and his wives and children arose and worshiped before the Lord and then went back to their home. Elkanah lay with his wife, and the Lord remembered her. In the course of time Hannah conceived and gave birth to a son and named him Samuel, saying, "Because I asked the Lord for him."

Later when Elkanah went up to offer the annual sacrifice to the Lord, Hannah did not go. She said to her husband, "After the boy is weaned, I will take him and present him before the Lord." "Do whatever seems best to you," her husband replied. "Stay here until you have weaned him." So Hannah stayed at home and nursed her son until she had weaned him.

After he was weaned, she took the boy with her, along with a sacrifice, and brought him to the house of the Lord. After the sacrifice she said to Eli the old priest, "As surely as you live, I am the woman who stood here beside you praying to the Lord. I prayed for this child, and the Lord has granted me what I asked of him."

Then Hannah prayed and said:

"My heart rejoices in the Lord...

There is no one holy like the Lord;

There is no one besides you;

There is no rock like our God.

The Lord brings death and makes alive;

He brings down to the grave and raises up.

He humbles and he exalts,

He raises the poor from the dust,

And lifts the needy from the ash heap."

Touch The Women's Hearts:

1. What was the situation in the family of Elkanah? Who had children and who did not?
2. Did Elkanah love Hannah who was barren? (*Yes*)
3. How did Elkanah try to show affection for Hannah? (*He spoke kindly to her and gave her a double portion of meat from the sacrifice*)
4. Did Elkanah's love for Hannah depend upon her having children? (*No*)
5. In Hannah's deep distress what did she do? (*She prayed to the Lord to give her a son*)
6. What did the priest Eli think about Hannah? (*That she had been drinking too much*)
7. When Hannah ate something after her prayer and her face was no longer downcast, what did this say about Hannah? (*She was comforted. She had faith and believed that God would answer her prayer*)
8. Did God answer Hannah's prayer? (*Yes. Soon after returning home and being with her husband she conceived.*)
9. Did Hannah thank God for hearing her prayer and giving her what she wanted? (*Yes*)
10. After Hannah had offered her sacrifice and given her testimony to the priest Eli, what did

she do? (*She sang a song and rejoiced at what God had done for her.*)

11. Do the women believe that God loves them? Can they think of some ways in which God demonstrates his love to them?
12. Do the women believe that God knows the deepest thoughts and needs of their hearts?
13. If God knows their deepest need and offered to grant it, would they be willing to accept what God was giving them?
14. What do they think might be their greatest and deepest need in God's sight?
15. Did anyone happen to mention forgiveness of sin? If not, suggest it along with the other things the women may be talking about.
16. In the story it was Elkanah and Hannah who offered the sacrifices to God. Do the women know that God himself offered a sacrifice for them? It was a sacrifice needed to cover their greatest and deepest need. Soon we will talk about it.

A Verse For The ♥Heart: "...The Righteous One, He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world." 1Jn 1b, 2



Heaven Is For Women

GOD'S GRACE FOR A TIME OF NEED

8

Bible Background: 1Ki 17:7-24

For The Storyer:

In the story of the widow of Zarephath there is a picture of God's grace in time of physical need and God's mercy in time of death. God is God of both the living and the dead. The theme of God's mercy is continued for this widow who had little or no means of support for herself and her son. As God provides for needs in this life, so He will faithfully provide for the life to come. There is also the theme of faith (in what Elijah told the widow to do) and obedience (she did what he told her to do). God expressed His love but the widow had to trust God's word through the prophet and obey it in order to benefit from it.

Open The Women's Minds:

1. Is there a widow in the group of women? Who provides for her needs? If there is none, ask the group if they know a widow and know who provides for her needs? Who does she look to?
2. Is the widow required to do anything in order to have her needs met?
3. If God sent someone to help the women in their time of need, would they listen to that person's words and do what that person said to do in order to be helped?
4. Here is a story about a widow, a foreign woman, not one of Abraham's descendants. God saw her need and sent His prophet to help her.

Read These Verses: 1Ki 17:12-13

Tell The Story:

THE WIDOW'S FLOUR AND OIL

During those days there was a famine in the land due to lack of rain from God's judgment upon the sins of the people. The word of God came to the prophet Elijah and said, "Go to such and such a place and stay there. For I have commanded a widow in that place to supply you with food."

So Elijah went to that place and when he came to the town gate, a widow was there gathering sticks. He called to her and asked, "Would you bring me a little water in a jar so I may have a drink?" As she was going to get it, he called, "And bring me a piece of bread."

"As surely as the Lord your God lives," she replied, "I don't have any bread—only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it—and die."

Elijah said to her, "Don't be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small cake of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son. For this is what the Lord, the God of Abraham's descendants, says: 'The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the Lord gives rain on the land.'"

The widow went away and did as Elijah had told her. There was food every day for Elijah

and for the woman and her family. 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 the prophet Elijah.

Some time later the son of the widow who owned the house became ill. He grew worse and worse, and finally stopped breathing. The widow said to Elijah, "What do you have against me, man of God? Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?"

"Give me your son," Elijah replied. He took the boy from the widow's arms and carried the dead boy to the upper room where he was staying, and laid him on his bed. Then Elijah cried out to the Lord, "O Lord, my God, have you brought tragedy also upon this widow I am staying with, by causing her son to die?" Then Elijah stretched himself out on the boy three times and cried to the Lord, "O Lord, my God, let this boy's life return to him!"

The Lord heard Elijah's cry, and the boy's life returned to him, and he lived. Elijah picked up the child and carried him down from the room into the house. He gave the boy to his mother and said, "Look, your son is alive!"

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!"

Touch The Women's Hearts:

1. Did God have a plan to provide food for Elijah during the drought? (*Yes*)
2. Did God have a plan to provide food for the widow and her son? (*Yes*)
3. Had the widow given up all hope of being able to continue living? (*Yes. She was going to prepare one last meal before they starved.*)
4. When Elijah asked the widow to first bake him some bread and then bake some for herself and her son, what thought may have passed through her mind? (*I have so little for myself and my son, and the prophet is asking to eat first before us.*)
5. What did Elijah say to assure the widow that all would be well if she did what he asked her to do? (*The flour and oil would not run out.*)
6. Did the widow believe Elijah and obey what he told her to do? (*Yes*)
7. Did the supply of flour and oil continue as God had promised through Elijah? (*Yes*)
8. Do the women think that God caused the widow's son to die to punish her? (*No. He just became ill and died. God knew this would happen and through Elijah God would help the widow's son to live again.*)
9. When God answered Elijah's prayer and restored the boy's life was the widow thankful? (*Yes. She praised the prophet saying she knew he was a man of God and that he spoke the truth from God.*)
10. If God sent a prophet to help you in your time of need, would you listen to his words and do what he told you to do?
11. God did send a prophet to feed us spiritual bread so we would not be hungry. He said, "...here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a person may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven, giving life to the world. The one who comes to me will never go hungry." (Jhn 6:48-51, 33, 35)
12. The widow and her son ate what God provided by the prophet Elijah and they lived.
13. Would you be willing to eat this living bread that God has provided through another and greater prophet so that you will live and not die? To receive this bread you must obey what God tells you to do.
14. Through the prophet Elijah God raised the widow's son to life again. Through a greater prophet than Elijah God has promised to raise us to life again if we have faith in him.

A Verse For The ♥Heart: "For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." Jhn 10:33



Heaven Is For Women

GOD'S WARNING TO STUBBORN WOMEN

9

Bible Background: Jer 7:13, 18-19; 44:15-28

For The Storyer:

This story may or may not be for your women. It is included because it is a warning that both men and women should turn from their wicked ways—whatever those ways may be. Many of the women who actually practice folk religion whether Muslim or Hindu would likely trust in spirits or idols (a person, place or thing) in order to satisfy their needs. The women bear responsibility for their actions if not faithfully trusting God and doing or not doing whatever He warns them about.

Open The Women's Minds:

1. Can the women think of any customs among their people or any ways they worship which might be offensive to God?
2. If the women were warned about something displeasing to God in their lives, would
3. they be willing to stop doing it?
4. Where does their knowledge of who and how to worship come from? Where did that person (source) learn what pleased God in worship?

Read These Verses: Jer 44:3 (Beginning with "They provoked me...)- vs. 5

Tell The Story:

GOD'S WARNING TO STUBBORN WOMEN

In the days of the prophet Jeremiah there were descendants of Abraham living down in the land of Egypt. They followed a false religion and custom which had come from another land. It was a religion and custom which greatly angered God. The people worshiped a false god and did not listen to the true and living God who sent the prophet Jeremiah to warn them about their sin.

Their false god was a woman god called the Queen of Heaven who, according to their custom, each year mourned for her dead son, who would then come back to life again. The women burned incense to the Queen of Heaven and worshiped her with food offerings.

God spoke through the prophet Jeremiah saying: "The people provoked me to anger by burning incense and worshiping other gods. Again and again I sent my servants the prophets who said, 'Do not do this detestable thing that I hate!' But they did not listen or pay attention—they did not turn from their wickedness or stop burning incense to other gods." So the Lord said that He was determined to bring disaster on the people for their stubbornness for not showing humility or reverence for their God.

Then all the men who knew their wives were burning incense to other gods, along with all the women who were present—a large assembly—said to the prophet Jeremiah: "We will not listen to the message you have spoken to us in the name of the Lord! We will certainly do everything we said we would: We will burn incense to the Queen of Heaven and will pour out drink offerings to her just as we and our fathers and our rulers did. At that time we had

plenty of food and were well off and suffered no harm. But ever since we stopped burning incense to the Queen of Heaven and pouring out drink offerings to her, we have had nothing and have been perishing by sword and famine.”

The women added, “When we burned incense to the Queen of Heaven and poured out drink offerings to her, our husbands knew we were making cakes like her image and pouring out drink offerings to her.”

Then Jeremiah said to all the people, both men and women, “Did not the Lord remember and think about the incense burned in your towns and streets by you and your fathers? When the Lord could no longer endure your wicked actions and the detestable things you did, your land became an object of cursing and a desolate waste. This is what the Lord Almighty says: ‘You and your wives have shown by your actions what you promised when you said, We will certainly carry out our vows we made to burn incense and pour out drink offerings to the Queen of Heaven. Go ahead then, do what you promised! Keep your vows!’ But hear the word of the Lord: ‘I am watching over the people for harm, not for good. The people will perish by sword and by famine until they are all destroyed. Then the people will know whose word will stand—theirs or mine!’”

Touch The Women’s Hearts:

1. What were the women doing that was displeasing to God? (*Worshiping a false god by burning incense and pouring out drink offerings*)
2. Did God warn them to stop worshiping the false god by burning incense and pouring out drink offerings? (*Yes*)
3. Did the people listen to the words of God spoken by the prophet Jeremiah? (*No*)
4. What did the people say they would do? (*They would continue doing what they had been doing by worshiping the Queen of Heaven*)
5. Why did the people want to continue doing this detestable thing? (*They thought their misfortune was due to stopping their worship of the Queen of Heaven.*)
6. What did God say was going to happen to the people if they continued in their sin? (*He would destroy them by sword and famine.*)
7. If you were doing something which God said was detestable to Him, would you stop? If so, why? If not, why not?
8. What do you think might happen to you if you continue in your sin?
9. In what way does God warn us about what is right and what is wrong to do? (*By His Word the Bible—you may want to quote Psa 119:11*)
10. If God sent someone to warn us about the coming judgment and to tell us what we must do to escape the judgment, would you listen to their words and do what they said to do?
11. If we are disobedient, rebellious and stubborn, do you think God will be merciful to us?
12. Does anyone in the group have a stubborn heart that doesn’t want to hear God’s Word and do what God says? (Read Job 21:14)
13. What would it take to make them change their mind?

A Verse For The ♥Heart: “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.” Psa 51:17

or

“But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God’s wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed.” Rom 2:5



Heaven Is For Women

GOD BLESSED MARY OF NAZARETH

10

Bible Background: Isa 7:14; 9:7; 11:2; Mat 1:18-25; Luk 1:26-53; 2:1-12; 21-35

For The Storyer:

God had a very special role for the young woman Mary to play in opening up the kingdom of heaven to believers. The One who was to suffer had to be like us and yet be without sin. (2Co 5:21; Heb 2:17) He was to be born of a virgin to have our flesh, God's Spirit would rest on him, and he would inherit David's kingdom and rule over it forever. Mary was a descendant of David through his son Nathan, a brother of Solomon. (Luk 3:31; 1Ch 3:5) This was the stump of Jesse spoken of by the prophet Isaiah (11:1) after Solomon's line was cut off with the last king of Judah. (Another Nathan accused David of sin with Bathsheba.)

An obedient young woman was the first to know the Messiah was coming and soon. Remember that many Muslims think that Mariam the mother of Jesus was married to Amram the father of Moses. You may need to go back to cover that story to show that Mariam (Miriam) was the daughter of Amram and Jochebed who were descendants of Levi. The Promised One was to be a descendant of David who was himself a descendant of Judah. Some Muslim teaching confuses the Angel Gabriel with the Holy Spirit. And their tradition has it that Mariam give birth to her child under a palm tree. (Sura 19:23)

Open The Women's Minds:

1. What would the women think if one day God sent word they were chosen to give birth to the One that God had promised to send?
2. Would they believe the messenger and his message?
3. What qualifications would (should) such a woman have?
4. Would she give birth in a royal place or a humble place?

Read These Verses: Luk 1:26-33

Tell The Story:

GOD BLESSED MARY OF NAZARETH

Mary was a young woman living in the town of Nazareth who had been pledged in marriage to an older man named Joseph. Mary was herself a descendant of David as was her husband-to-be. Suddenly one day the messenger angel Gabriel came to Mary and greeted her saying: "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."

Mary was greatly troubled by the angel's words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will soon be with child and give birth to a son. And you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will rule over the house of Abraham's descendants forever. His kingdom will never end."

"How can this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin and have never known a man." "The Holy Spirit will cause it to happen so the holy one to be born of you will be

called the Son of God, that is, the One born of God.”

“I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May it be to me as you have said.” Later Mary sang a song praising God saying: “My soul praises the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name.”

Before Mary and Joseph came together as husband and wife Mary was found to be with child. Joseph wanted to spare her public disgrace so he planned to divorce her quietly. But an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and told him, “Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” The name Jesus means Jehovah, or God, is salvation. When Joseph woke up he did what the angel commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he had no union with her until after she gave birth to her son and gave him the name Jesus.

Mary and Joseph lived in Nazareth. But a prophet said the coming Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, the home of David. (Mic 5:2) Before it was time for the child to be born each family was required to return to their ancestral home to register for a census. Their home was Bethlehem. And it was there that Mary’s child was born in the humble place where animals were kept because there was no room for them in a proper inn.

God sent an angel to announce birth of Mary’s baby to shepherds near Bethlehem, “I have good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of a David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Lord’s Messiah.”

When the baby was eight days old he was circumcised according to the commandment God gave to Abraham as a sign of the covenant. (Gen 17:9-10) And he was given the name Jesus according to the words of the angel. Then when forty days had passed Joseph took Mary and the baby to the temple in Jerusalem so that Mary could offer a sacrifice for her sin and the sacrifice required for her cleansing according to the law God gave to Moses. (Lev 12) Also they had to pay the required redemption tax to redeem their firstborn son. (Exo 12:12-13; Num 18:15-16)

That day a righteous old man named Simeon was also in the temple. The Holy Spirit had revealed to Simeon that he would not die until he saw the Lord’s Messiah. The Spirit of God moved him and he took the baby Jesus in his arms and praised God saying, “...My eyes have seen your salvation, which you prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people, the descendants of Abraham.” Then Simeon blessed Mary and Joseph and said to Mary these words, “This child is destined to cause the rising and falling of many in this land, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And, a sword will pierce your own soul also.”

Later Mary and Joseph returned to Nazareth where Jesus the Messiah of God would grow up. After Jesus was born Mary and Joseph had children of their own: four sons and at least two daughters. (Mrk 6:3)

Touch The Women’s Hearts:

1. Who was Mary descended from? (*David*)
2. Why do the women think God chose Mary? (*She was descended from David, she was a virgin, she was humble and willing to accept what God was going to do through her.*)
3. When Joseph found that Mary was with child and he had not yet known her as his wife, what did he plan to do? (*Quietly divorce Mary to keep from publicly disgracing her. See Num 5 & Deu 22*)
4. What did the angel say to Joseph? (*Don’t be afraid to take Mary as your wife. Her son is conceived in her from the Holy Spirit. His name will be Jesus because he will save his*

people from their sins.)

5. Did Joseph obey the words of the angel? *(Yes. He took Mary home to be his wife but had no union with her until after the child was born.)*
6. Where did the prophet say that the Messiah was to be born? *(In Bethlehem, the home of David)* But where did Mary and Joseph live? *(In Nazareth)* Was the prophet wrong? *(No. It happened in Bethlehem just like he said.)*
7. What was the message of the angels to the shepherds? *(Today in the town of David a Savior is born. He is the Lord's Messiah.)*
8. How can we tell that Mary and Joseph were righteous people, that is, they obeyed the laws of God? *(They circumcised the boy baby as God commanded and went to the temple for Mary to offer her sacrifices as the Law required.)*
9. What did the Holy Spirit reveal to old Simeon? *(He would not die until he saw the Lord's Messiah.)*
10. What did Simeon have to say about Jesus? *(My eyes have seen your salvation, a light for the Gentiles and for the glory of Abraham's descendants.)*
11. Do Simeon's words include the women? *(Yes, whether they consider themselves Gentiles or Abraham's descendants.)*
12. What do you think Simeon meant by his last words to Mary, "And a sword will pierce your own soul." Do the women think that Mary will have some experience that will cause deep hurt in her heart? What could that be?

A Verse For The ♥Heart: "Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Lord's Messiah." Luk 2:11



Heaven Is For Women

JESUS FORGAVE A SINFUL WOMAN

11

Bible Background: Luk 7:36-50

For The Storyer:

This is a favorite story because of the interaction in the story between Jesus, Simon and the woman. Also from an Asian perspective the woman's act of touching Jesus' feet with her hair (her head) is an act of deepest worship and devotion. Her tears symbolized her contrition over her past (whatever it was), her wetting and drying the feet of Jesus her devotion and service, and her anointing an expression of Jesus' preciousness to her. Jesus honored the woman by commenting on her ministry to him, he forgave her sin(s), and sent her off with a blessing of peace. And it reminds us that how much we honor and love Jesus depends upon how much of our sin we have asked him to forgive.

Open The Women's Minds:

1. Can the women think of someone they admire very much who has honored them or helped them in some way?
2. What did the women do in return for the person who honored them or helped them?
3. Have any of the women ever asked that their sins be forgiven? Do they know that their sins hide God's face from them (prevent God from blessing them)? (See Isa 59:2 & 64:7)
4. What would the women be willing to do to have their sins forgiven? Who could do it for them? Do they know who that person is?

Read These Verses: Luk 7:37-39

Tell The Story:

JESUS FORGAVE A SINFUL WOMAN

During the days that Jesus walked on the earth there were a group of very religious people called Pharisees. In the beginning these men had carefully learned all the Scriptures in the Taurat and the various interpretations of God's Law as given by the teachers of the Law. But as time passed these men began to think they were better than ordinary people and especially the ones they considered to be sinners. And in that day a Pharisee often prayed thanking God that he was not born a woman, and not a sinner like other people!

So the Pharisees began to watch Jesus to learn how a person like him could teach with such great authority. One of the Pharisees invited Jesus to come to his house to have dinner. That way the Pharisee named Simon could watch Jesus closely. And since Jesus was being considered a prophet by many, it would bring honor to Simon to have him in his house.

In those days guests at meals reclined around a low table, leaning on their left elbow and eating with their right hand while their feet pointed away from the table. While Jesus and the other Pharisee friends of Simon were eating a woman entered through one of the open doors carrying a small stone box of precious perfume. She ignored Simon and the other guests and went straight to Jesus and knelt at his feet weeping so that her tears fell on his feet. Then she loosed her long hair and let it fall so that she could begin wiping Jesus' feet with her hair.

After carefully drying Jesus' feet the woman then bent down and began to kiss them and poured her perfume on them. The sweet smell filled the room.

Simon and all his Pharisee friends were watching what the woman was doing. Simon began to think in his heart, "If Jesus really were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of a woman she is—that she is a sinner!"

Jesus knew in his spirit what Simon was thinking. So he said to Simon, "Simon, I have something to tell you."

Simon forgot what he was thinking and was now delighted that Jesus was talking to him. "Tell me, Teacher," Simon said to Jesus.

"Simon," Jesus began, "Two men owed money to a moneylender. One man owed him a very large sum of money. And the other much less money. When it came time to repay the debt, neither of them had the money to repay the debt. So the moneylender cancelled the debts of both men. Now which of the two men will love the moneylender more?"

Simon answered, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt cancelled."

"Correct," Jesus said. "You have judged right." Simon was pleased that Jesus liked his correct answer.

Then Jesus turned toward the woman who was kneeling before him and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet. But this woman has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me the customary kiss of greeting. But this woman, from the time I entered has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put fragrant oil on my head to refresh me. But she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little."

Then Jesus said to the woman, "Your sins are forgiven."

The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?"

Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

Touch The Women's Hearts:

1. Why did Simon want Jesus to eat at his house? (*Perhaps to watch Jesus*)
2. What happened while the guests were eating?
3. What do the women think the guests were doing while the woman was wiping Jesus' feet? (*They had probably stopped eating and were watching to see what would happen.*)
4. What did Simon (and probably the other guests) think about the woman? (*She was a sinful woman which probably meant she had been a prostitute.*)
5. Do the women think the woman who came in knew who Jesus was? (*She probably did and had been waiting for an opportunity like this to show her gratitude.*)
6. What was Simon thinking about Jesus? Did Jesus know what Simon was thinking?
7. What did Jesus' story about the two men and the moneylender teach? (*The one who has the greater debt cancelled (forgiven) loves more.*)
8. How did Jesus compare Simon's hospitality with the actions of the woman?
9. What did Jesus conclude about the comparison? (*The woman who had more sins forgiven loved Jesus more.*)
10. What did Jesus say to the woman? (*Your sins are forgiven.*)
11. What did the other guests say among themselves? (*Who is this forgiving sins?*)
12. Do the women think Jesus can forgive their sins? Talk about it.

A Verse For The ♥ Heart: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." 1Jh 1:9



Heaven Is For Women

JESUS FREED A WOMAN FROM SATAN'S HURT

12

Bible Background: Luk 13:10-17; Jhn 5:16-24, 45-46

For The Storyer:

Each of the stories has begun to look at some facet of what Jesus has done for women. The last story looked at how Jesus forgave a woman's sin as she demonstrated to him her repentance and gratefulness. Now we see a woman who had been bound by Satan for 18 long years suddenly released. Luke doesn't explain how this thing happened in the first place, only that was her condition. Now she was free! The implication of the story and lesson is that Jesus is able to free one from Satan's bondage. And it demonstrates his compassion for those in such condition. Then the story moves to begin dealing with the sensitive issue of who Jesus really is? A great prophet or really the Son of God?

Open The Women's Minds:

1. Has anyone in the group been possessed by an evil spirit? If so, what did it do to the person? Did it manifest in any physical condition?
2. Who the women think is more powerful: Jesus or Satan? Why?
3. Do they think Jesus could release a person from Satan's grip even after a long time?
4. Here is the story of a woman who went to the worship hall suffering from a terrible crippling by a spirit of Satan. She had no idea what was going to happen to her.

Read These Verses: Luk 13:16

Tell The Story:

JESUS FREED A WOMAN FROM SATAN'S HURT

One Sabbath Jesus was in the worship hall teaching the people from God's Word. That day there happened to be in the worship hall a woman who had been seriously crippled by an evil spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. When Jesus saw her, he stopped teaching and called her forward to stand before him. When she stopped before Jesus he said to her, "Woman, you are set free from your infirmity." Then Jesus put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and began to praise God.

Some of the religious leaders and teachers of the law saw what Jesus did and they became indignant that Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the day of worship, when the law that God gave Moses commanded that no work was to be done. So the leader of the worship hall stood to address the people and said, "There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath!"

Jesus answered him saying, "You hypocrites! Doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water? Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?"

When Jesus said these words, all his opponents were humiliated. But the people listening were delighted with all the wonderful things Jesus was doing.

At another time when Jesus had healed a man on the Sabbath the leaders began to persecute him. Jesus said to them, “My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working.” For this reason those who opposed Jesus tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

Jesus gave them this answer: “I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees the Father doing, because whatever the Father does, the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. The Father judges no one but has entrusted all judgment to the Son that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; they have crossed from death to life.”

Then Jesus said to them, “Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set. If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for Moses wrote about me.”

Touch The Women’s Hearts:

1. When Jesus saw the crippled woman what did he do? (*Called her to him.*)
2. Did Jesus think it was more important to keep the Sabbath Law or to heal a woman in pain for many years?
3. How did the leaders feel about what Jesus did? (*They thought he had done wrong.*)
4. Which do the women think was the better choice? Helping the woman or keeping the religious rules?
5. Who is more powerful: Jesus or Satan? Why?
6. Jesus healed others on the Sabbath. Do the women think he had the right to do that? Where did Jesus get his authority to heal? Whom did Jesus say he was following who showed him what to do?
7. Do the women believe that Jesus was telling the truth about the Father and the Son?
8. If this is true then it means that the Father, that is God, helps us through the Son.
9. Jesus said that if we do not honor the Son, then we do not honor the Father.
10. We want God to bless us and to help us, to forgive our sins, and give us eternal life so we will live forever in heaven. So to honor the Father, that is God, to have a good relationship with God, we must have a good relationship with the Son.
11. We will see in more stories other things that God did for people through Jesus the Son.
12. Are these things problems for the women to think about and to talk about?
13. Has Satan kept anyone bound for a long time who needs to be set free?

A Verse For The ♥Heart: “Do not believe me unless I do what my Father does. But if I do it, even though you do not believe me, believe the miracles, that you may learn and understand that the Father is in me, and I am in the Father.” Jhn 10:37-38



Heaven Is For Women

JESUS HEALED A WOMAN AND MADE HER CLEAN

13

Bible Background: Lev 15:19-30; Isa 53:4; Mat 8:17; 9:20-24; Mrk 5:24-34; Luk 8:40-48

For The Storyer:

Another healing story but this one adds the dimension of making what is unclean to be clean again. Read the Law in Lev 15:19-30. The woman with the issue of blood was a living dead woman. She could not cook for a man without polluting the food. Wherever she sat or slept became unclean. Anyone she touched became unclean. And she was forbidden to enter the place of worship as she would pollute it. Luke did not mention the fact, but she had used up all her resources seeing many doctors but none could help her. She was destitute, unclean and without hope except for Jesus. Sin is like that. It pollutes us in God's presence and we cannot make ourselves clean. We need to touch Jesus in faith and receive his cleansing.

Open The Women's Minds:

1. What do the women think it would be like to be alive and yet dead?
2. If we are alive and yet not able to go and do the things we need to do, or touch anything belonging to another, it is like being dead.
3. Is there anything in their culture which makes a woman unclean so that she is not able to be a part of everyday life?
4. Here is the story of a woman who was ritually unclean, not able to cook for any man, sit or lie in any place where a man might sit or lie, go to the place of worship, or touch a person without making them polluted as she was. It was a terrible way to live and for so long with any hope of a cure until she saw Jesus.

Read These Verses: Mrk 4:24-29

Tell The Story:

NEW LIFE FOR AN UNCLEAR WOMAN

A large crowd had gathered around Jesus and was pressing against him on all sides. In the crowd was a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve long years. She had suffered very much under the care of many doctors and had spent all the money she had. Yet instead of getting better she grew steadily worse. God's Law from the days of Moses was very strict about such a condition saying that such a woman would be unclean as long as the discharge continues. Any bed she lies on will be unclean, and anything she sits on will be unclean. Whoever touches her things also becomes unclean and must bathe with water. If she is cleansed then she must wait eight days and then make a sacrifice for her cleansing.

When the woman heard about Jesus she joined the crowd to see him. Moving through the crowd she came up behind Jesus and thought to herself, "If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed." She was able to get near Jesus and reached out to touch the edge of his cloak. Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was at last freed from her suffering.

At once Jesus felt that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd of

people and asked, “Who touched my clothes?”

When everyone denied touching Jesus one of the disciples said, “Master, you see the people crowding and pressing against you. How can you ask, ‘Who touched me?’”

But Jesus said, “Someone touched me. I know that power has gone out from me.” And he kept looking around to see who had done it. Then the woman, seeing that she could not go unnoticed, and knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at Jesus’ feet, trembling with fear. In the presence of all the people, she told him the whole truth of what she had done, why she had touched him and how she had been instantly healed.

Jesus said to the woman, “Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.” And the woman was fully healed from that moment.

Touch The Women’s Hearts:

1. Wouldn’t each of you like to rejoice with the woman for the wonderful thing that happened when she touched Jesus?
2. Why do you think she wanted to touch Jesus? (*She had heard about Jesus and believed that he could heal her, even if she just touched his clothes.*)
3. Do you think the people in the crowd knew about her condition? (*Probably not as they would have moved away from her.*)
4. Why do you think she tried to touch Jesus’ clothes without saying anything? (*Because she knew she was polluting him, making a popular prophet unclean.*)
5. Did the woman know she was healed? (*Yes. Instantly she felt the healing.*)
6. Did Jesus know that someone had touched him? (*Yes. He felt power go out from him.*)
7. Why do you think Jesus wanted to know who touched him? (*Perhaps so he could bless them and comment on their faith. Actually, this is an open question without any way of knowing the real answer.*)
8. What if each one of the group found they had a condition that made them unclean? What would they do? Where would they turn to be made clean again?
9. Listen to what David said in one of his prayer songs: “Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.” (Psa 51:1-2) And Isaiah’s words: “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be like wool.” (Isa 1:18) That sounds like we are stained with sin, our iniquities making us impure and unclean. We need to touch Jesus to be healed, to be made clean.
10. The prophet Isaiah said: “by his wounds we are healed...For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.” (Isa 53:5b, 12b)
11. Another prophet named Zechariah said, “On that day a fountain will be opened...to cleanse the people from sin and impurity.” (Zec 13:1) That fountain was Jesus whose sinless blood was shed to wash away our sins.
12. The woman who touched Jesus had faith that by touching him she would be healed. Though Jesus is no longer on earth today we can still touch him by reaching out in faith believing that he can cleanse us and make us clean again in God’s sight.
13. Wouldn’t it be wonderful if Jesus were to turn around and ask, “Who touched me?” and you could answer, “I touched you. I want to be clean again. I want to end my suffering from sin. I touched you.”

A Verse For The ♥Heart: “Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.”
Psa 51:2



Heaven Is For Women

JESUS TOOK AWAY A WIDOW'S SORROW

14

Bible Background: Luk 7:11-17; Mat 9:18-19, 23-26; Mrk 5:22-24, 35-43; Luk 8:40-42, 49-56

For The Storyer:

Jesus' ministry on earth was for only a few short years. Yet he was able to banish sorrow for many by healing the sick, restoring withered limbs, cleansing the lepers, giving sight to the blind and raising to life again the dead. This first story is more poignant because it was a widow's only son. No husband for support and now no son either. The woman was soon to be cast upon the mercy of her society to find a pittance of support and little if any respect.

In the second story which is the other half of the story of the woman who touched Jesus, we again see Jesus giving hope where there is none. This time Jesus said to the parents, "Don't be afraid; just believe." And he commanded the dead girl to wake up.

Open The Women's Minds:

1. Who in the group at one time or another have been without hope after something bad happened to them or a member of their family? Sometime do we feel there is no hope?
2. Who do we turn to for help? Has anyone in their village ever caused someone who was dead to live again? If so, was the person really dead, their spirit departed from them?
3. Jesus had compassion on people when he saw their need. Even when they did not ask him to do anything, Jesus just helped them. At other times the people knew that somehow Jesus could help them, perhaps by laying his hands on the sick person.
4. Have the women ever thought about the fact they might be dead, too, and don't even know it? Soon we'll find out how this can be and how they can live again.
5. Here are two stories about people that Jesus helped by giving life to their dead family members.

Read These Verses: Luk 7:13-15; Mrk 5:38-42

Tell The Story:

JESUS TOOK AWAY A WIDOW'S SORROW

While Jesus was in Galilee he traveled to a small town called Nain. His disciples and a large crowd walked along with him. As Jesus approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out for burial. He was the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. A large crowd from the town was with her following the dead son. When Jesus saw the widow whose son had died, his heart was deeply touched and he said to her, "Don't cry."

Then Jesus went up and touched the coffin. Those carrying it stood still. Jesus spoke to the dead body saying, "Young man, I say to you, get up!" Immediately the dead man sat up and began to talk. Jesus gave him back to his mother.

The people were all filled with awe and praised God. "A great prophet has appeared among us," they said. "God has come to help his people." This news about Jesus spread throughout the surrounding countryside.

At another time a man who was leader of the worship hall came to Jesus and said, “My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live.” So Jesus went with him to see his daughter, a girl of about twelve years. A large crowd followed and pressed around him. Jesus stopped to talk to the people. While he was still speaking, some men came from the house of the leader and said, “Your daughter is dead. Why bother the teacher anymore?”

Jesus ignored what the men said. Then to the leader of the worship hall Jesus said, “Don’t be afraid; just believe.” Jesus took with him three of his disciples. Arriving at the man’s house Jesus saw the noisy crowd and flute players with people crying and wailing loudly. “Why all this noise and wailing, go away!” Jesus said to the people. “The child is not dead but asleep.” The people all laughed at Jesus saying, “We know she is dead.” So Jesus put the noisy crowd of people outside and took with him his three disciples and the parents into the room where the dead girl lay.

Jesus took the dead girl by the hand and spoke to her saying, “Little girl, I say to you, get up!” Immediately her spirit returned and the girl stood up and walked around. Her parents were completely astonished. Jesus gave them strict orders not to let anyone know about this. Also he said to give the girl something to eat. But news of what happened began to spread all throughout that place.

Touch The Women’s Hearts:

1. Have the women ever seen such a wonderful thing happen as a dead widow’s only son restored to life again? What would her life be like without a husband or son to care for her?
2. What did Jesus say to the widow? (“*Don’t cry*”.) Did the widow know what Jesus was going to do? (*No. Perhaps she thought he was just a kind stranger.*)
3. What did Jesus say to the dead man? (“*Young man, I say to you, get up!*”)
4. Did the young man return to life? (Yes.)
5. Where did Jesus get the power to do raise the dead? (*From God. At another time Jesus said, “The Son only does what he sees the Father doing. Just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it.” Jhn 5:19, 21*) Do the women think Jesus was doing the work of God the Father?
6. When the leader of the worship hall came to Jesus, did he think Jesus could help his daughter who was dying? (*Yes. He believed if Jesus would put his hands on the girl, she would live.*)
7. Then what happened while Jesus was talking to the people? (*The girl died and men came to tell the worship leader, “Don’t bother the teacher anymore.”*)
8. What did Jesus say to the leader? (“*Don’t be afraid. Just believe.*”) Did the leader know what Jesus was going to do? (*Probably not. Perhaps he would come to their house to speak some words of comfort to the family.*)
9. Can anyone describe what was happening at the leader’s house?
10. What did Jesus say to the people? (“*Stop the noise. The girl is not dead but asleep.*”)
11. What did the people do? (*They laughed at Jesus knowing the girl was dead.*)
12. What did Jesus say to the dead girl? (*Little girl, I say to you, get up.*”) Did the girl return to life? (Yes.)
13. By what authority did Jesus command the man to wake up and the girl to get up? (*By the authority given to him by the Father.*) Listen to these words: All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” Mat 28:18
14. If you were dead do you think Jesus could raise you to life again? What if you found out that you really were, in a sense, dead? Do you think Jesus could restore you to life?
15. Here is something you might want to think about:

God's Word says: All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23)

If we ourselves claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. (1Jh 1:8)

The Bible says that sin entered the world through the trespass of one man (Adam) and death through sin, in this way death came to all people (men), because all sinned. (Rom 5:12) and The wages of sin is death. (Rom 6:23)

We have all died because our desire gives birth to sin, and sin when it is full grown gives birth to death. (Jam 1:15)

So that all who are now living and who have ever lived in this world since Adam and Eve have *died* because of sin in that death comes to all sooner or later. We are dead in our spirits because we are separated from God by our sin.

We need someone to raise us to life again. Someone like Jesus who has the authority and power to raise the dead to life again. Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. The Father has life in himself, he has granted the Son to have life in himself." (Jhn 5:25-26) "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." (Jhn 10:10)

Remember what Jesus said to Nicodemus: "You must be born again of the Spirit to enter the kingdom of heaven." Being raised from death in our sins to life again is like being born again. We have a new life. The Bible says: "If anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2Co 5:17)

Long ago Jesus spoke to the people, to those who were dead and gave them life again.

Today Jesus is speaking to you through the Bible story. Can you hear what he is

Saying?: "Wake up! Get up! I have come to give you life."

Soon you will hear how to receive this life that Jesus has promised and that Jesus alone can give us.

A Verse For The ♥ Heart: "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life." Jhn 5:24



Heaven Is For Women

JESUS IS THE BREAD OF LIFE THAT SATISFIES

15

Bible Background: Mat 5:6; 6:11; 14:15-21; Mrk 6:35-44; Luk 9:12-17; Jhn 6:5-14; 25-59

For The Storyer:

In the land of Jesus bread was the staple food of life. Normally it was baked with yeast but sometimes without for special occasions. To have enough bread to eat was to be satisfied. One was satisfied in life if they had their “daily bread”. Jesus used the picture of bread to speak of who he was—the bread come down from heaven. And to partake of him was to be filled, satisfied never to hunger again spiritually. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus was saying that those with a spiritual hunger for righteousness would be satisfied. And breaking bread with Jesus was a sign of fellowship with him. It was a woman’s role in the home to grind the grain and bake the bread. (Gen 18:6) The men grew the grain and cut wood for the fire, but the women baked the bread.

Open The Women’s Minds:

1. Have any of the women been hungry, really hungry, with nothing to eat? Talk about what it is like to be hungry.
2. What food best satisfies your hunger? Is it bread? Rice? Potato? Fish? Meat?
3. What is the largest crowd the women have seen being fed at one time? Were the people orderly? Was there enough food for all to be filled and satisfied?
4. Would the women follow someone who could feed them every day so they would not be hungry?
5. What if there are many hungry people but a serious lack of food to feed everyone or even to give all the people even one bite of food? What would you do?

Read These Verses: Mat 14:17-20

Tell The Story:

JESUS IS THE BREAD OF LIFE

Jesus had tried to find a solitary place to rest, but large crowds followed him on foot from the towns. He had compassion on them for they were like sheep having no shepherd. So he began teaching them many things and healed their sick. Soon evening approached and Jesus’ disciples came to him and said, “This is a remote place, and it’s already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go into the villages and buy themselves some food.”

Jesus replied, “They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.” Jesus already knew what he was going to do. He was testing his disciples.

One of the disciples named Philip said to Jesus, “That would take eight months wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat? This would only give each one bite of food.

Another of the disciples named Andrew spoke up saying, “Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish. But how far will this go among so many people?”

“Have the people sit down,” Jesus said, for there was plenty of green grass in that place.

Among the people were five thousand men plus all the women and children. Jesus then took the five barley loaves, gave thanks to God for the food, and began breaking and giving the loaves to his disciples to give to the people. He did the same with the fish. The people all ate until they were satisfied. Jesus instructed the disciples to pick up the pieces remaining and there were twelve basketfuls of broken pieces.

Later when the people again followed Jesus and they found him. He said to them, “You are looking for me not because you saw the miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.”

The people asked Jesus, “What work does God require of us?”

Jesus answered, “The work of God is to believe in the One he has sent you.”

Then the people said, “Our forefathers ate bread in the desert provided by Moses.”

Jesus said to them, “It was not Moses who has given you bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

The people said, “Sir, from now on give us this bread.”

Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry. I tell you the truth, whoever believes has everlasting life. I am the bread of life. Your forefathers ate bread in the desert, yet they died. But here is a bread that comes down from heaven, which a person may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. The one who feeds on me will live.”

Touch The Women’s Hearts:

1. What did Jesus do to test his disciples? (*He told them to feed the people.*)
2. What did the disciples say? (*How can we do it with so many people? It would take much money for even one bite of food.*)
3. How did Jesus feed the people? (*He took what food was available and asked God to bless it so he could feed all the people.*)
4. Did the people get enough food to eat? (*Yes. They ate until they were satisfied and food remained uneaten.*)
5. How many people did Jesus feed? (*Five thousand men plus all the women and children.*)
6. Why did Jesus say the people were following him? (*To get more bread.*)
7. What work did Jesus say the people must do to get the bread that Jesus gave? (*Believe in the One that God has sent.*) Who is the One God sent? (*Jesus*)
8. Who did Jesus say he was? (*The bread come down from heaven.*)
9. What about the person who eats the bread come down from heaven? (*They will never go hungry.*)
10. What else did Jesus say about eating the bread come down from heaven? (*If a person eats of the bread come down heaven they will never die—they will live forever, having everlasting life.*)
11. Would you like some bread that satisfies? Bread that gives life? Bread that lets one live forever? Your work to earn that bread is this: Believe in the One that God has sent—believe in Jesus who is the true bread come down from heaven. He will satisfy.

A Verse For The ♥ Heart: “Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.” Jhn 6:27



Heaven Is For Women

MARY MADE THE BETTER CHOICE

16

Bible Background: Luk 10:38-42

For The Storyer:

While this story is about making the right choices in life, it is also a comparison of two women and their attitude toward life. The story is not to say that what Martha was doing was wrong, but simply that Mary made a better choice. Martha wanted to serve Jesus in her own way by doing what she perhaps did best—cooking and serving food. Mary chose to listen to the words of Jesus, words of life. Jesus had said: “My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me.” (Jhn 7:16) And again Jesus said the wise person was the one who hears the words of Jesus and then puts them into practice. (Mat 7:24)

Open The Women’s Minds:

1. What do the women do best, cook and serve food, or listen to someone teach? Which would they rather do?
2. If a guest came in their home with an important message to share, should they neglect their hospitality to serve the guest in order to sit at his feet to listen?
3. Here is a story about two women and the choices they made when Jesus came to visit in their home.

Read These Verses: Luk 10:41-42

Tell The Story:

MARY MADE THE BETTER CHOICE

The village of Bethany is about three kilometers from Jerusalem. It is on one of the main roads leading into Jerusalem so that Jesus and his disciples often passed that way. Two sisters lived there named Mary and Martha. Martha was the older sister who owned the house. They had a brother named Lazarus.

One day when Jesus and his disciples were passing through Bethany they stopped at the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus. Martha had opened her home to Jesus and his disciples. Inside the house Jesus sat down and began to teach. Mary was sitting at his feet listening to what he had to say.

In the kitchen Martha was preparing food for the guests and was distracted by all the work she had to do. When she saw that Mary was sitting at the feet of Jesus and not helping her with the work, Martha came into the room and spoke to Jesus, “Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me with all the work to do by myself? Tell her to come help me!”

Jesus turned to Martha and said, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things. But really only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”

Touch The Women’s Hearts:

1. Where did the two sisters live? (*In Bethany, on one of the main roads leading to Jerusalem about three kilometers away.*)
2. Who was the older sister? (*Martha. She owned the house.*)
3. When Jesus and his disciples stopped to visit what did each sister do? (*Martha went to the kitchen to prepare some food to serve to the guests. Mary sat at the feet of Jesus to listen.*)
4. What disturbed Martha? (*That Mary was not coming to help her.*)
5. What did Martha say to Jesus? (*Don't you care that my sister has left me to do all the work? Tell her to help me!*)
6. What did Jesus say to Martha? (*You are worried and upset about many things. Only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, it will not be taken away from her.*)
7. Was Jesus angry with Martha? (*No. He was just telling her to chose what was more important and valuable.*)
8. Would listening to the words of Jesus be important to you? Jesus said, "Whoever hears my words and put them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down and the winds blew and beat against the house, but it did not fall down. But whoever hears the words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. When rains came and the wind blew his house fell down with a loud crash." Mat 7:24-27
9. Mary listened to the words of Jesus. Today you have listened to the words of Jesus. Now what will you do with his words? You will be hearing more words of Jesus from the stories about him. Jesus said, "The Spirit gives life...The words I spoke to you are spirit and they are life. (Jhn 6:63) Doesn't that sound important to know about?"

A Verse For The ♥Heart: "May your unfailing love come to me, O Lord, your salvation according to your promise." Psa 119:41



Heaven Is For Women

MARTHA'S CONFESSION OF FAITH IN JESUS

17

Bible Background: Luk 10:38-39; Jhn 11:1-45

For The Storyer:

In the last story it was Mary who did the right thing. In this story it is Martha who says the right thing in her confession of faith in Jesus and that he was the Messiah, the Son of God who was to come into the world. According to Jewish belief after a person died the spirit of the person would remain close by until the dead body began to smell bad—usually by the fourth day the smell would be bad and the person would be considered really dead. There was no doubt in Martha's mind that her brother Lazarus was really dead.

Open The Women's Minds:

1. Whom do the women turn to when a loved one is very ill?
2. Have they ever sent for a doctor to come but when the doctor arrived it was too late, the person had already died?
3. When something bad happens in their family, do they have hope that somehow God can help them?
4. When something bad happens in their family, do they want to blame someone for not coming or helping sooner?

Read These Verses: Jhn 11:21-27

Tell The Story:

MARTHA'S CONFESSION OF FAITH IN JESUS

There were two women named Mary and Martha. They had a brother named Lazarus. Martha was the older sister and owned the house where they lived. They were friends of Jesus and his disciples. And Lazarus was a special friend of Jesus.

One day when Jesus was in another part of the country teaching, the sisters sent word that Lazarus was sick. They were asking for Jesus to come and place his hands on Lazarus and heal him. At that time many enemies of Jesus were looking for him to kill him because they did not like his teaching. So Jesus stayed in that place two more days.

Then Jesus told his disciples, "The sickness of Lazarus will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." Then Jesus said, "Let us go to see Lazarus."

When Jesus arrived in the village where Mary and Martha lived, he found that Lazarus had already been dead for four days. Many of the friends of Mary and Martha had come from nearby Jerusalem to comfort them in the death of their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus had arrived at the village, she went to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

"Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "If you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know even now God will give you whatever you ask."

Then Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."

Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live even though they die. And whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

"Yes, Lord," she told Jesus, "I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who was to come into the world."

And after she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. "The Teacher is here," she said, "and is asking for you." When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to Jesus. Mary's friends saw her get up and they thought she was going to the tomb to mourn. So they followed her. When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died."

When Jesus saw her weeping, and also the sadness of Mary's friends, he was deeply moved and also began to weep. "Where have you laid his body?" Jesus asked. "Come and see," Mary said.

Some of the people who saw Jesus weeping said, "Look how much he loved Lazarus!" Others mocked Jesus saying, "Could not the one who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

When Jesus reached the tomb he said, "Take away the covering." Martha objected, "But, Lord, there will be a bad smell. He has been dead four days." Jesus said, "Didn't I tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" So they opened the grave.

Then Jesus looked up toward heaven and prayed, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I am praying this for the benefit of the people standing here, so they may believe that you sent me." When Jesus had finished praying he commanded in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!"

The dead man came out, his hands and feet still wrapped with the burial cloths. "Remove the cloths and set him free," Jesus said.

Many of the people who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, put their faith in him.

Touch The Women's Hearts:

1. What were the names of the sisters and their brother? Who was the older sister?
2. Who do the women identify with more: with Martha in her hard work, or with Mary in sitting at the feet of Jesus listening to his words?
3. When Jesus heard about Lazarus' illness what did he say? (*It will not end in death. It is for God's glory.*)
4. Did Jesus go immediately to see Lazarus? (*No, he waited two days.*)
5. When Jesus arrived and Martha went out to meet him what did she say? (*Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.*)
6. Did Martha have faith that Jesus could help her brother? (*Yes.*)
7. What assurance did Jesus give Martha? (*Your brother will rise again.*)
8. Who did Jesus say he was? (*I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.*)
9. What do you think Jesus meant by saying he was the resurrection and the life? (*He has power over death to resurrect the dead and power over life to give it and sustain it.*)
10. Did Martha believe Jesus? (*Yes. She said, 'I believe you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.'*)
11. When the people saw Jesus weeping what did some of them say? (*'See how much he loved Lazarus.' Others mocked Jesus saying, 'Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept Lazarus from dying?'*)
12. Why did Jesus pray aloud before the people? (*For their benefit to let them know that God*

sent him. And he thanked God for always hearing him when he prayed.)

13. When Jesus spoke Lazarus' name what happened? (*Lazarus came back to life and came out of the tomb.*)
14. When the people saw what happened what was their attitude toward Jesus? (*They put their faith in him.*)
15. Do you think Mary and Martha had faith in Jesus?
16. If you had been there to see what Jesus did, would you have faith in Jesus?
17. What would it take today for you to have faith in Jesus?

A Verse For The ♥Heart: "Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life, He who believes in me will live, even though he dies.'" Jhn 11:25



Heaven Is For Women

YOU MUST BE BORN AGAIN OF THE SPIRIT

18

Bible Background: Job 33:4; John 3:1-21

For The Storyer:

This is not a story about a woman but it does mention something that women know far more about than men—giving birth. The time of birth is usually a time of travail and pain for the one giving birth. But joy quickly follows with the emergence of the new life. There may be a time of travail when one enters into the kingdom of God, too, as one realizes their sin, is sorry for it and confesses it. Through the physical birth of water one is born into this world into a human and limited life. Through being born of the Spirit one enters into the kingdom of God into an eternal life.

Open The Women's Minds:

1. How many of the women in the group have given birth to babies?
2. Have they thought about this being the way in which we enter this world to live?
3. After this life, when this body dies, how do we enter the place of eternal blessing?
4. Are there several ways that babies are born, or one just one way through the mother?
5. Could it be that there is just one way that we might be born into the kingdom of God?
6. This is the story about a very religious and righteous man who thought he knew how to enter the kingdom of God. He was in for a surprise. You may be surprised, too.

Read These Verses: Jhn 3:5-6

Tell The Story:

YOU MUST BE BORN AGAIN OF THE SPIRIT OF GOD

One of the religious leaders was a man named Nicodemus. One night he came to see Jesus and said, "We know you are a teacher who has come from God. No one could perform the miracles you are doing if God were not with him."

Jesus replied to Nicodemus, "I tell you the truth, unless a person is born again, they cannot see the kingdom of God."

"How can someone be born when they are already old?" Nicodemus asked, "Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!"

Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, unless a person is born of water and the Holy Spirit of God, they cannot enter the kingdom of God. For flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit of God gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.'"

"How can this be?" Nicodemus asked. "I don't understand."

"You are a teacher of the people," said Jesus, "and you do not understand these things? I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and give testimony of what we have seen.. but still you people do not accept our testimony. I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe. How then can I speak to you of heavenly things? No one has ever gone into

heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man.

A long time ago during the days of Moses God asked Moses to raise up a sign in the desert so the people would be healed and not die. In the same way the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have everlasting life. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life. God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned by God, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

Touch The Women's Hearts:

1. Who did Nicodemus think Jesus was? (*A Teacher who has come from God.*)
2. Why do you think Nicodemus said that? (*He had seen or heard about the miracles that Jesus performed and knew that God was helping him.*)
3. Do you think Jesus knew what was really in Nicodemus' heart? (*Yes. So Jesus immediately spoke about the kingdom of God.*)
4. How did Jesus say one entered the kingdom of God? (*By being born again of the Spirit.*)
5. What do the women think this means? (*Let them talk about it and share their opinions.*)
6. Whose Spirit do they think it is talking about? (*God's Spirit*)
7. If there is only one way to be born into the world, and Jesus used this as a picture of what he was talking about, do the women think that there is only one way to be born into the kingdom of God?
8. Read Mat 18:3-4. What do the women think it means to become like little children in order to enter the kingdom of heaven? (*A little child trusts their parents and looks to them for all their needs. They do not try to "earn" their way into the family.*)
9. Now read Jhn 1:12-13. What does this tell us? Do the women know who this is talking about—the one we are to receive? (*It's Jesus. If we receive him and believe in his name, he gives us the right to become children of God—to be born into God's kingdom.*)
10. Finally, read 2Co 6:16b beginning with "As God has said: I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people." Then read verse 18: "I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."
11. Now read 1Jh 3:1. (*God has expressed his great love for each of us so that we might be called the children of God. We often talk about God's mercy. God is merciful because He is a loving God who loves each one of us. He has prepared a place for us in his family. Wouldn't you like to be a member of God's family?*)

A Verse For The ♥ Heart: "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Messiah is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well." 1Jh 5:1



Heaven Is For Women

LIVING WATER FOR A THIRSTY WOMAN

19

Bible Background: Psa 42:1-2; Isa 44:3; 55:1a; Jhn 4:4-42; 7:38; 1Co 10:3

For The Storyer:

The story is interesting for all the details both said and unsaid. Jesus seemed to know he had a divine appointment in Samaria. The woman was coming alone some distance out of the town to draw water at a time when other women were feeding their families. The woman came to the well to get water to quench her physical thirst and found water to quench her spiritual thirst. She knew about the coming Messiah and expected him to answer her questions about God and proper worship.

Jacob's well still exists today. At one time it was cleaned out and found to be more than 30 metres deep. At the bottom is a flowing spring of water. It is said the people of that day preferred flowing or "alive" water as it satisfied thirst better. A flowing spring was therefore "alive" or "living water".

Many Muslims have a desire to drink from the well of Zamzam during their haj. Their tradition has it that this is the source of water provided for Hagar and Ishmael. The well is located near their holy place they go to march around while on pilgrimage.

Open The Women's Minds:

1. What is it like to be really thirsty? Has anyone gone without water for several days?
2. What if the water provided to drink is very limited so that even after drinking one is still thirsty?
3. What if water is available but the well is deep and there is no way to draw the water?
4. What if someone offered you some water that would satisfy so that you would never be thirsty again? Would you accept it?
5. In your place do the women have to go out to get water? Do they go alone or with someone? Why would someone want to go alone? Here is a story about a woman who did go alone to get water, and she met someone who offered to give her living water.

Read These Verses: Jhn 4:10-14

Tell The Story:

LIVING WATER FOR A THIRSTY WOMAN

A time came when Jesus decided to pass through the land of Samaria. When he came to a certain town Jesus sat down by a well to rest. It was about midday and Jesus was tired and thirsty from his journey.

Soon a woman of Samaria came from the town to get water from the well. Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" The Samaritan woman was surprised and said to Jesus, "You Jewish people don't have anything to do with us Samaritans. How can you ask me for a drink?"

Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is who asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

“Sir,” the woman said, “you have nothing to draw water from the well and it is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our ancestor who dug this well and drank from it himself?”

Jesus answered the woman, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again. But whoever drinks the water I give will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give will become in them a spring of water bubbling up to eternal life.”

So the woman said to him, “Sir, give me some of this water so that I won’t get thirsty and have to keep coming here to get more water.”

Jesus told her, “Go call your husband and come back.”

“I have no husband,” she said.

Jesus then said to the woman, “You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have said is quite true.”

“Sir,” the woman replied, “I can see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but your people claim that the worship place is in Jerusalem.”

Jesus declared, “Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know, we worship what we do know, for salvation is from Abraham’s descendants. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. This is the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.”

The woman said, “I know that the Messiah is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.” Then leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, “Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could he be the Christ?”

Many of the Samaritans from the town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony. They urged Jesus to stay with them and he stayed two days. And because of his words many became believers. So they said to the woman, “We no longer believe just because of what you said. Now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world.”

Touch The Women’s Hearts:

1. Can anyone guess why the woman was surprised when Jesus asked her for a drink? (*The Samaritans were a mixed people because foreigners came and intermarried with the people in the land. So they were considered as mixed or “impure” or low caste.*)
2. What do the women think about Jesus’ reply to the woman: “If you asked me I would have given you living water.”
3. Can anyone guess what the “living water” refers to? (*It is picture of the Holy Spirit which gives everlasting life to the believer. See Jhn 7:37-39*)
4. Did the woman want some of this “living water”? (*Yes. But she thought of it as saving her some work to get more water each time she was thirsty.*)
5. Why would this Samaritan woman bring up the subject of worship and the disagreement of where was the right place to worship? (*Maybe she was still a bit defensive and wanted Jesus to know that she had her own religion handed down from her ancestors.*)
6. Jesus told the woman that salvation was of the Jews who were descendants of Abraham. Long ago God promised Abraham that one day a descendant of Abraham would bless all people. The prophets said this person would rule on David’s throne, that is, he would be a descendant of David. And he would suffer for the sins of the people and be put to death and raised to life again. The punishment for the people’s sins would be upon him.
7. What did the Samaritan woman say about the coming of the Messiah? (*He would explain all these things when he came.*)
8. Who did Jesus say he was? (*The Messiah.*)

9. Did the Samaritan woman believe him? (*Yes*) What evidence did she give that she believed Jesus? (*Left her water jar and hurried back to tell the people in the town that Jesus was the Messiah.*)
10. Did the people in the town believe the woman's words? (*Yes*) What did they do? (*Invited Jesus to stay and teach them.*)
11. Did more people believe in Jesus? (*Yes*) What did they have to say about Jesus? (*This man really is the Savior of the world.*)
12. The Samaritan woman actually talked face-to-face with Jesus. She believed that he was telling the truth. The Samaritan people in the town heard Jesus' words with their own ears and they believed he was telling the truth. That he really was the Savior (Messiah) that God had promised through the prophets.
13. What do you think after hearing this story? Is he really the Messiah Savior of the world?
14. He was the Savior for this woman. Could he be you Savior, too?

A Verse For The ♥Heart: “For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God; to him God gives the Spirit without limit.Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him.” Jhn 3:34, 36

Note: *These lessons will continue to have a focus on accepting or believing that Jesus is who he says he is. If you the storyer feel the focus is too sharp for your women or is pressing too hard too soon, then keep the discussion more factual about what happened in the story and continue to let the stories make their own point in presenting Christ.*



Heaven Is For Women

JESUS TAUGHT ABOUT THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

20

Bible Background: Mat 5:3, 10; 13:45; 18:1-5; 19:13-15; Luk 20:27-36; 23:42-43; Jhn 14:1-3

For The Storyer:

Jesus actually had more to say about hell than heaven. Jesus speaks more of a kingdom which is a relationship and of an ingathering like the parables of the marriage feasts. Jesus taught about those who would be qualified to enter the kingdom of heaven. Many were seeking to find their own way through their righteousness. One time when parents were bringing their children to Jesus for a blessing, the disciples forbid them. But Jesus said let the children come to him. Later he said that to enter the kingdom of heaven one must become humble like a little child. And to the thief on the cross, "Today you will be with me in paradise." Many of Jesus' parables in Matthew were about the kingdom of heaven.

Open The Women's Minds:

1. Have any in the group thought about where they will spend the next life beyond this life? After one dies where do they go? Is it the place of endless blessing or the place of endless torment?
2. We've been talking about how to get there? What does the Bible have to say about heaven? What did Jesus have to say about heaven? Is it a place like you think it is?
3. Jesus was the only one who had come from heaven and who could speak with authority about heaven and the presence of God the Father.

Read These Verses: Mat 19:13-14

Tell The Story:

JESUS TAUGHT ABOUT HEAVEN

One day when Jesus was teaching the people he said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." And again he said, "Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven."

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Jesus told the people this parable, "The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it."

Another time some religious leaders came to test Jesus with this story: "Moses told us that if a man dies without having children, his brother must marry the widow and have

children for him. Now there were seven brothers among us. The first one married and died, and since he had no children, he left his wife to his brother. The same thing happened to the second and third brother, right on down to the seventh. Finally, the woman died. Now then, at the resurrection, whose wife will she be of the seven, since all of them were married to her?" Jesus replied, "At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven."

One day when Jesus was teaching the people some parents brought their little children to Jesus so he could lay his hands on them and pray for them. But Jesus' disciples rebuked the parents thinking the children were bothering Jesus. He said to the disciples, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." Then Jesus placed his hands on the children.

Another time Jesus called a little child to him and had the child stand among the people. Then he said, "I tell you truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles themselves like this child is greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

On the night before Jesus was crucified he said to his disciples, "In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you may be with me where I am."

One of the two thieves who was being crucified along with Jesus said to him, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."

Touch The Women's Hearts:

1. In the stories did the women hear some of the qualities one must have to enter the kingdom of heaven? (*poor in spirit, humble like little children, faith like the thief*)
2. Why do the women think Jesus said what he did about being humble? What can we say about people who are trying to earn a place in heaven by their own righteousness? (*Are they proud, self-righteous, looking down on others they consider to be "sinful"?*)
3. Did the people in Jesus time on earth have wrong ideas about what heaven was like? (*Yes. They thought it was just like earth where earthly relationships like marriage would continue.*)
4. Are the women surprised to hear Jesus' words about the blessing for those persecuted for his sake? Later we will hear more about persecution for Jesus' sake.
5. Ask the women how we might store up treasures in heaven where moth and rust do not corrupt and thieves break in and steal? Look at Mat 25:34-40 and talk about what Jesus meant when he said these things. (*Remember that we don't want to give the idea that heaven may be earned by our works. Our right to heaven is a gift of faith. Our works merely store up treasures there.*)
6. Do the words of Jesus about preparing a place for us in his Father's house give us hope? What other promise did Jesus give his disciples? (*To come back for them.*) Do the women think this promise applies to them as well? (*Jesus will come back for all believers who trust in him and whose sins are forgiven.*)
7. What was the good news for the thief on the cross who asked Jesus to remember him when Jesus came into his kingdom? (*The thief would be with Jesus in paradise.*)
8. If one believes on Jesus as God's Son sent to suffer and die for our sins, do the women think Jesus will remember them? Would they be willing to ask Jesus to remember them in his kingdom—heaven?

A Verse For The ♥ Heart: "...Rejoice that your names are written in heaven." Luk 10:20b



Heaven Is For Women

WHAT OTHER PROPHETS TAUGHT ABOUT HEAVEN

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Bible Background: Isa 65:17-25; Act 7:55-56; 1Co 15:49, 51; 2Co 4:14; Eph 2:7; 1Th 4:16; Rev 7:9-10, 13-14, 16-17; 21:3-4; 22:17

For The Storyer:

The first pictures of heaven are given in Isaiah in the description of the new heavens and new earth. Paul spoke of the resurrection and glorified body when Jesus returns. John spoke in Revelation of the presence of the Lamb on the throne—Jesus and the faithful believers from all nations gathered around dressed in white robes. The river of flowing water clear as crystal is there along with the tree of life. Sorrowing and sighing have been banished. There is life without end in the presence of Jesus and faithful believers whose sins have been forgiven. Following is a collection of teachings about heaven presented in narrative form.

Open The Women's Minds:

1. How do the women see heaven? It is like a beautiful green earthly garden? Is it a city? What do the people do in heaven? Let them talk about these things.
2. Where is heaven? Is it up in the sky? Is it some place far away?
3. Have the women thought about what it might be like to be in the presence of God the Father and the presence of Jesus.

Read These Verses: Rev 21:3-4

Tell The Story:

WHAT OTHER PROPHETS TAUGHT ABOUT HEAVEN

The prophet Isaiah who told about the birth and suffering of Jesus also told about the new heavens and new earth. God would create the new heavens and earth. It will be a place of plenty with no more famine or drought. And it will be a place of peace where even the wolf and lamb will feed together.

After Jesus returned to heaven there was a man named Stephen who was a devoted follower of Jesus and a righteous person. But some men became jealous of Stephen and had him accused of blasphemy which was punished by stoning a person to death. As Stephen was being stoned to death because of his faith he looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

One of the men present at Stephen's death was named Paul. In those days he persecuted the followers of Jesus and had them imprisoned and put to death. But one day Jesus spoke to Paul from heaven and he, too, became a follower of Jesus. Paul had a vision of heaven and taught many things he learned from Jesus. He said "God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show us the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus."

One day Jesus would return from heaven and the graves would be opened. Our earthly body will be raised from the grave and made into a glorious body, like the body of Jesus after

his resurrection from the grave. For the Bible says: “We know that, when Christ appears, we shall be like him, and we will see him just as he is.”

Then one of Jesus’ disciples named John had a vision of heaven and wrote: “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away...And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Now the dwelling of God is with us, and he will live among us, and be our God. He will wipe away every tear from our eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying in pain.’” The one seated on the throne said, “To anyone who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life.” For there was the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse, sickness or death. Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.” Then John looked in his vision and saw before him a great multitude of people, so great that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands and crying out in a loud voice: “Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.” One of the elders standing before the throne asked who were the people in white robes. They were the ones who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

Touch The Women’s Hearts:

1. What have the women learned about heaven from this story? Have them list the things they have learned.
2. One of the characteristics of God is that He is righteous and all His work is good. So if He creates new heavens and a new earth, what can we say about his work? (*It will be good with all the things present that make it good and wholesome.*)
3. Who did Stephen say he saw in heaven with God? (*Jesus, standing at his right hand.*)
4. What will happen to us when Jesus returns? (*The dead and buried will be raised to life again.*) What will we be like in that day? (*Like Jesus in his resurrected body.*)
5. What did John have to say about God’s place of dwelling? (*It will be with us. God is doing all this so those whose sins are forgiven will be with him and He will live among them.*)
6. Who do the women think the Lamb in heaven is? If necessary refer to the story of the Passover in Exodus 12 and to John the Baptist’s declaration in Jhn 1:29.
7. What were some of things that would never be in heaven? (*No more sorrow or tears, pain, curse, sickness, mourning or death.*)
8. Do the women remember the tree of life from the Garden of Eden? In that day God would not let Adam and Eve eat from it after they disobeyed him and fell into sin. In heaven the tree of life is there growing by the river of crystal clear water.
9. Jesus told a parable about a wedding feast. One those who came was not dressed in proper clothes and so was thrown out. Notice that the multitude in heaven are dressed in white indicating purity from sin. They are the ones whose robes have been washed in the blood of the Lamb and made white.
10. God has prepared all this for those who believe in Jesus who is the way to heaven. Jesus has gone ahead to prepare places for all believers. We have seen these pictures of heaven from the prophets. Now we must decide if we want to go there to live.

A Verse For The ♥Heart: “Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city.” Rev 22:14



Heaven Is For Women

JESUS TAUGHT ABOUT THE PLACE OF TORMENT

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Bible Background: Mat 22:13; 25:31-34, 41, 46; Mrk 9:47-48; Luk 16:19-31;

For The Storyer: The Bible tells us that hell was prepared for the devil and his angels. It is an awful place of burning, unending torment, darkness, weeping and gnashing of teeth. It was a place to be avoided at all costs. It was compared with the rubbish heap outside the walls of Jerusalem where the fires burned continuously and the worms plied the rotting garbage. This was the Valley of Hinnom (or Gehenna) where in former times child sacrifice used to take place. So the very thought of the comparison was loathsome. God is patient, not wanting anyone to perish (end up in hell for eternity), but everyone to come to repentance.

Open The Women's Minds:

1. How many of the women have lost loved ones to death? Perhaps parents or their children. Because of death they are separated from the presence of their loved ones.
2. In the story of Adam and Eve we heard that God warned Adam that the day he ate from the tree of knowing good and evil he would die. Yet when Eve and then her husband ate the fruit from the tree they did not die? Or did they? Their bodies were still alive for afterward they had children and perhaps lived a long time. But notice in that story that they were put out of the garden, the place where God came to walk and talk with them. As sinners who had disobeyed God they were now separated from his fellowship.
3. Then when their son Cain killed his brother Abel he was driven from that land where he shed his brother's blood and went out from the presence of the Lord and lived in another land. Cain was separated from his family and from the presence of God by his sin.
4. In this story we are going to see the most terrible separation of all—eternal separation from God. And it happens because of a choice we make or what we fail to do.

Read These Verses: Mat 25:41, 46

Tell The Story:

JESUS TAUGHT ABOUT THE PLACE OF TORMENT

Outside the walls of ancient Jerusalem was a valley that in former times was the place where people who worshiped false gods would sacrifice their own children. In the days of Jesus that place was where all the refuse from the city was thrown. There were flies and worms in the refuse as well as fires that always were burning. It was a terrible place. This was the place that Jesus used to give a picture of what the place of torment would be like.

Again and again Jesus warned listeners about that awful place where the worm did not die and the fires were not quenched. Jesus told this parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat. When the wheat sprouted and bore grain, the weeds also appeared. The man's servants asked if they should go and pull up the weeds. 'No,' the owner said, 'let both grow until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First go and collect the weeds, tie them in bundles to be burned. Then gather the wheat into my

barn’.” Later Jesus explained the parable like this: The enemy who sowed the weeds is the devil. The harvest is the end of this age and the harvesters are the angels. As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Another story Jesus told was about a rich man and a beggar named Lazarus. Both died and the angels carried Lazarus to the bosom of Abraham. The rich man was buried and found himself in the flames of torment. He cried out, “Father Abraham, send Lazarus over to dip his finger in water to cool my tongue because I am in great agony in this place.” But Abraham said, “We can’t come to you and you can’t come to us.” Then the rich man begged Abraham, “Send Lazarus to warn my five brothers so they don’t come to this place of torment.” But Abraham said, “Your brothers have Moses and the Prophets, let your brothers listen to them.”

In the story of the king’s wedding feast a man was found inside not wearing wedding clothes. The king said, “How did you get in here without wedding clothes?” Then the king told his servants, “Tie the man hand and foot and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Finally, Jesus said at another time, “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, take your inheritance.’ Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’ Then they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

Touch The Women’s Hearts:

1. What did Jesus say the place of torment was like? (*fire, worms, weeping, gnashing of teeth.*)
2. In the story of the wheat and the weeds, what did Jesus say would happen after the wheat had ripened? (*The harvesters would gather the weeds first, tie them and burn them.*)
3. Who would harvest the crop? (*angels*) Who are the wheat in this story? Who are the weeds? Is this a true picture of the world we live in today where evil grows alongside the righteous?
4. In the story of the rich man and the beggar Lazarus what happened when they each died? (*The beggar was taken to be with Abraham, a place of comfort. The rich man found himself already in the flames of torment.*)
5. Why did this happen to the rich man? (*He had paid no attention to the words of Moses and the Prophets.*)
6. Now what was the concern of the rich man? (*That his brothers be warned about the place of torment.*)
7. In the story of the wedding feast and the man who was found not wearing wedding clothes, what do the women think this represents? (*It is a picture of a person clothed in their own righteousness and not that fitting for the wedding, that is eternal life with the King in heaven. The proper garment would have been wedding clothes, righteousness provided by the king or his son. So the man was cast out—separated from the king and the others in the feast, and punished for his lack of preparation.*)
8. In the last story there is the picture of the return of Jesus. What happened in this story? What two groups are the people divided into? Who are the sheep and who are the goats?

9. What will happen to the sheep?
10. What will happen to the goats?
11. The prophet Isaiah said these words: “Your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so he will not hear.” (Isa 59:2) We saw in the story of Adam and Eve that their sin separated them from the presence of God.
12. The last book in the Bible is called Revelation. John the beloved disciple of Jesus had a vision of the end times and of heaven. He described what will happen to the devil and all the evil spirits. “The devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.” (Rev 20:10) But John has more to say:
13. “I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and the grave gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what they had done. Then death and the grave were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, they were thrown into the lake of fire.” (Rev 20:12-15)
The second death is eternal separation from the presence of God. It is a place of torment unending, a place of weeping, a place of darkness, and a place of gnashing of teeth in great agony.
14. Sin separates us from the presence of God. But for those who believe on Jesus as the Son who came from God, who suffered and died for our sins, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus. (Heb 10:10) God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2Co 5:21)
15. As believers we wear the righteousness of Jesus and will never be thrown out into the place of torment. (See Gal 3:27) But for those who do not believe, the place of torment is waiting for them. And there will be no escape. It is heaven or torment. God prepared heaven for those declared righteous through the blood of Jesus. God prepared the place of torment for those who refuse to listen, refuse to believe, and refuse to ask God to forgive their sin.

A Verse For The ♥ Heart: “Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me.” Psa 51:11



Heaven Is For Women

THE GUESTS WHO REFUSED THE FEAST INVITATION

24

Bible Background: Isa 61:10; Jer 6:10; 7:13, 25b-26a; Mat 22:1-14; Luk 13:28-30; 14:16-24

For The Storyer:

The two parables of the Wedding Banquet and the Great Feast talk about the danger of refusing the invitation when it is given. At best your place will be given to another. At worst those who refuse will be cast away into the place of darkness, weeping and gnashing of teeth—intense suffering, and will never taste the banquet. The feast was prepared and the invitations sent out for those invited to come and take their place. Culturally speaking men only ate with men and women with women. But God does not make distinction—all are invited and a place is prepared. There is neither male or female, for all are one in Christ Jesus. (Gal 3:28) The guest who was not properly clothed in wedding garments was cast out and punished.

Open The Women's Minds:

1. Has anyone ever had the experience of preparing delicious food for their family, and when it was ready then had no one interested to come and eat?
2. Or has anyone prepared food for a feast and invited the neighbors and others in their town or village, but no one came?
3. What does it say to the host (the one cooking the food or inviting the guests) when their invitation is turned down?
4. If this happened, what would you do? Invite others?
5. What clothing would you expect invited guests to wear? What if they did not?

Read These Verses: Mat 22:1-3, 8-10

Tell The Story:

THE GUESTS WHO REFUSED THE FEAST INVITATION

One of God's prophets said, "I called but you did not answer. I sent my prophets but you did not listen." One day When Jesus was teaching he told this parable about the kingdom of heaven:

The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. The king sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, the banquet was prepared, but the invited guests refused to come.

Then the king sent some more servants and said, "Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet." (With Hindua, just say, 'The meal is prepared.')

But those the king had invited paid no attention and went off—one to their field, another to their business. The rest seized the king's servants, mistreated them and even killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his army and severely punished those murderers and destroyed their city.

Then the king said to his servants, ‘The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.’ So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, until the wedding hall was filled with guests.

But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed someone there who was not wearing wedding clothes. ‘Friend,’ the king asked, ‘how did you get in here without wedding clothes?’ The person was speechless.

Then the king told the attendants, ‘Tie that person hand and foot, throw them outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ For many are invited, but few are chosen.

The prophet Isaiah said: “For I delight greatly in the Lord, my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me in garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.” Those the Lord has clothed in garments of salvation will enter in, and those dressed in their own righteousness will be thrown out.

Touch The Women’s Hearts:

1. Does anyone remember the story of Adam and Eve? After they disobeyed God they tried to cover their nakedness with clothing made of leaves which they had made by their own hand. Was this acceptable to God? (*No. God clothed them with skins of animals—a more lasting garment.*)
2. In the story of the Wedding Banquet what happened when the food was prepared and the banquet ready for the guests? (*They refused to come and gave excuses.*)
3. What did the king do then? (*He sent out his servants to invite others to come.*)
4. Talk about the person who was present but not in wedding clothes? What does this tell us about that person? (*They did not honor those who were married.*)
5. What does the story describe? (*The kingdom of heaven.*)
6. Have we been issued an invitation? (*Yes. If not before, the invitation is given now.*)
7. Would any of us refuse such an invitation? If so, why? Why not?
8. How do the words of the prophet Isaiah about being clothed in garments of salvation apply to this story? (*God must be the one to clothe us so we will be properly dressed. This is a picture of salvation or being prepared for the kingdom of heaven.*)
9. Who do the women think the wedding feast parable is about? It is about the descendants of Abraham who refused to accept God’s invitation to accept Jesus as their Savior. So the invitation went out to others (Gentiles) until God is satisfied that everyone has had an opportunity to hear the invitation. (Rom 11:25)
10. Read Rom 13:14a “Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ.” What do the women this means?

A Verse For The ♥Heart: I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.”
Isa 61:10



Heaven Is For Women

JESUS IS THE GOOD SHEPHERD

25

Bible Background: Psa 23; Jer 23:1, 4; 50:6; Eze 34:1-24; Luk 15:1-7; Jhn 10:1-16

For The Storyer:

Jesus had a shepherd's heart. He saw the people of Jerusalem as sheep without a shepherd. (Mrk 6:34) The prophet Isaiah had said: "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all... He was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth." The shepherd became one like his sheep so that he might take away their sin.

Open The Women's Minds:

1. Do any of the women have sheep or know someone who keeps sheep? What is the work of the shepherd? What happens if there is no shepherd? What happens if the shepherd does not take good care of their sheep?
2. What kind of a relationship does the shepherd have with their sheep? Does the shepherd know each animal in their care? Do the sheep of the flock recognize their shepherd?
3. What would be the characteristics of a good shepherd?

Read These Verses: Read entire 23rd Psalm

Tell The Story:

JESUS THE GOOD SHEPHERD

One day when Jesus had been with his disciples looking for a place to rest, the people recognized Jesus and many followed him and gathered to hear him teach. Jesus had compassion on the people, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things and later he fed them bread and fish.

Back during the days of the kings who ruled over Abraham's descendants there came a time when the kings as well as the religious leaders and some false prophets took advantage of the people and led them into sin. The word of the Lord came to the prophet Ezekiel and said: "Woe to the shepherds who only take care of themselves. Should not they care for the flock? They eat the curds, clothe themselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but do not care for the flock." The Lord said, "You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. So the sheep were scattered because there was no shepherd; and when they were scattered they became food for the wild animals" So the Sovereign Lord said that he would hold the shepherds accountable for his sheep. And he would remove them from tending the flock. Then the Lord said, "I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so I will look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they are scattered."

The Lord also warned that he would judge between the sheep and punish those which take advantage of the weaker ones. I will place my shepherd over them and I will be their God."

Tax collectors and those who the religious leaders considered as sinners were gathered around Jesus to hear him. The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and even eats with them" So Jesus told this parable:

Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go search for the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.'

Then Jesus compared himself with a good shepherd. The good shepherd is the one who enters by the gate. The sheep listen for his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. He goes on ahead of the sheep and they follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice.

The people did not understand what Jesus was telling them so he said, "I am the gate for the sheep; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and destroy; I have come that they may have life. I am the good shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep. I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for my sheep.

When John the Baptizer saw Jesus passing by he declared: "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. The good shepherd had become like his sheep so he could take away their sin and save them.

Touch The Women's Hearts:

1. David wrote the psalm that says: "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall lack nothing." David was a shepherd as a young man. David said, "Your servant has been keeping his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, I went after it, struck it, and rescued the sheep from its mouth."
2. What could be worse than having no shepherd at all? (*Perhaps having a bad shepherd.*)
3. Who is the bad shepherd more concerned about, the sheep or himself? What would happen to the flock if the shepherd were not a good shepherd? (*It would be scattered and possible eaten by wild animals with no one to protect the sheep.*)
4. Jesus said he was the good shepherd. What are some things a good shepherd does?
5. Jesus said that the sheep know the voice of their shepherd. After Jesus was put to death and then raised from the grave one of the women who had followed him was Mary Magdalene. She was standing outside the empty tomb weeping, thinking someone had stolen Jesus' body. Her eyes were dimmed with tears but when Jesus spoke to her saying, "Mary!", she immediately recognized his voice and cried out, "Teacher!" and fell at Jesus' feet. The sheep know their shepherd.
6. If you believe in Jesus as your shepherd do you think he knows your name? The shepherd knows his sheep each by name.
7. Would you recognize the voice of Jesus when he calls you? If he were your shepherd, would you be willing to follow him?
8. Do you believe the shepherd has the ability to care for his sheep?
9. Could you guess who the wild animals that come to tear the sheep and scatter the flock might be? It is Satan. Peter said: "Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." (1Pe 5:8) Every sheep needs a good shepherd.

A Verse For The ♥Heart: "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." Jhn 10:11



Heaven Is For Women

JESUS OPENED THEIR MINDS AND HEARTS

26

Bible Background: Job 21:14; Isa 6:9-10; Mat 13:10-17; Mrk 4:2, 11-12; 33-34; Luk 24:13-32; Jhn 1:10-12; 16:12-15; 2Co 4:4;

For The Storyer:

This lesson has to do with spiritual deafness and blindness of stubborn people, and the openness of those who gladly received the Word and believed. Job said: “They say to God, ‘Leave us alone! We have no desire to know your ways.’” (Job 21:14) Isaiah said this: “They know nothing, they understand nothing; their eyes are plastered over so they cannot see, and their minds closed so they cannot understand.” (Isa 44:18) In contrast Paul said: “I keep asking that God may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.” He also prayed that the Ephesians’ hearts may be enlightened so they will know the hope, the riches of his glorious inheritance, and the incomparably great power of Christ. (Eph 1:17-19)

Open The Women’s Minds:

1. Is any woman in the group deaf or blind? Can they imagine what it would be like to be able to hear and see and yet not understand? Some people have good ears and eyes but hard hearts that are not open to what they hear and see.
2. The one named Paul said that people have no excuse because what may be known about God has been made plain to them, but their foolish hearts were darkened. (Rom 1:19, 21) Have the women talk about what this means.
3. The religious leaders had gathered around Jesus and said: “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.” Jesus answered, “I did tell you but you did not believe.” Ask the women to talk about why these religious didn’t believe.

Read These Verses: Luk 24:45

Tell The Story:

JESUS OPENED THEIR MINDS AND HEARTS

When Jesus started his earthly work he soon began to teach the people many things by parables. He taught them as much as they could understand. The disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Why do you speak to the people in parables?” Jesus recalled the words of the prophet Isaiah who said: “You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be seeing but never perceiving. For this people’s heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and have closed their eyes.” “But, Jesus said, “blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart.”

There were women who heard Jesus and who understood who he was. Their minds and hearts were opened. One was the woman of Samaria that Jesus met at the well. She did not understand everything that Jesus was saying in the beginning. But she said, “I know that the

Messiah is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.” When Jesus said that he was the Messiah the woman then understood and went to tell others, “Come see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could he be the Messiah?” Another was Martha the sister of Mary and Lazarus. When her brother Lazarus had died and Jesus came she said to Jesus, “I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.” Then she said, “I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.”

On the day that Jesus was resurrected from the tomb he joined two of his disciples who were walking from Jerusalem to their village. He asked what they were talking about. They said, “About Jesus of Nazareth. He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God. Our religious leaders and rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him. This is the third day since this took place. Some of our women amazed us, they went to the tomb early this morning and didn’t find his body.”

Then Jesus said to them, “How slow of heart to believe all the prophets have spoken!” and beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, Jesus explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures about himself. When they arrived at the village the disciples asked Jesus to stay the night with them. When they sat down to eat their eyes were opened and they recognized Jesus who then disappeared from their sight. “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked to us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?” they asked each other.

Later Jesus met with all the disciples and said, “Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.” Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.

Touch The Women’s Hearts:

1. Ask the women: How are your ears and eyes? Are they able to hear and see who Jesus is?
2. What are some things that would cause one not to hear and see who Jesus is?
3. Are there some things that hinder their hearing and sight? Can they talk about them? What would it take for them to understand, to have their minds and hearts opened?
4. One day some of the religious leaders said to Jesus, “Who are you?” They did not understand what he was telling them about his Father. Even as Jesus spoke, many understood and put their faith in him. To the others Jesus said, “He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God.” (Jhn 8:25, 27, 30, 47) Talk about the difference in these two groups of people. Why would some understand and believe and others not?
5. When Jesus went to heal a boy with an evil spirit, the father said to him, “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!” (Mrk 9:24)
6. Paul said to the people in Corinth, “The God of this age (Satan) has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” (2Co 4:4)
7. Pray with the women that they may overcome any unbelief and that their minds and hearts may be opened to the truth about Jesus.

A Verse For The ♥ Heart: “Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.” Jhn 17:3



Heaven Is For Women

JESUS PROMISED TO SEND THE HOLY SPIRIT

27

Bible Background: Jhn 3:5-8; 14: 16-18, 25-26; 16:7-15; Act 2:1-4, 17, 21; Rom 8:16, 26; 1Co 6:19; Eph 2:18

For The Storyer:

We will not introduce or use the term “Trinity” for the women. We’ve been talking about relationships in the stories and lessons. The indwelling Spirit of God is surely one of the most intimate relationships possible, though a mystery. Jesus said to Nicodemus that one must be born of the Spirit to enter the kingdom of heaven. Jesus asked the Father to send the Spirit, which he did. He is the Counselor telling us what to say, the Spirit of Truth and Understanding, the One who had sealed our redemption. (See 2Co 5:5)

Open The Women’s Minds:

1. Have the women ever made a promise they could not keep? Wouldn’t it wonderful always to fulfil our promises to others, and for them to fulfil their promises to us?
2. God does fulfil His promises. And Jesus fulfils his promises. In this story we will hear a promise that Jesus made to his disciples. And he kept his promise, doing what he said.
3. What is the feeling we have when a loved one leaves us, going away for a long time? Wouldn’t it be wonderful to have their presence linger with us even though they are far away? This is what God provided for us. Here is the story.

Read These Verses: Jhn 14:16-17

Tell The Story:

A PROMISE TO SEND THE HOLY SPIRIT

Do you remember in the story about Mary of Nazareth, the mother of Jesus? The angel Gabriel came to tell her the news that she would give birth to the holy one of God. Though Mary was a virgin, God would cause this to happen by His Holy Spirit. God created life in Mary that did not inherit the sinful nature of Mary’s husband Joseph, but the sinless nature of God. Jesus was born of the Spirit of God.

On the night before Jesus was crucified he talked with his disciples. He told them that he must go away, but he would ask the Father, and he will send the Spirit of Truth. Jesus said the Spirit would live in the disciples and be with them. The Spirit would teach them all things and remind them of everything Jesus had said. The Spirit’s work would also be to convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness. The Spirit would speak only what he heard, taking from what belongs to Jesus and making it known to believers.

After Jesus was crucified and had risen from the grave as he returned to heaven he told his followers to remain in Jerusalem. For he said in a few days they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit and they would receive power. On a certain day when the followers of Jesus were gathered together in one place, there was suddenly the sound of a violent wind blowing from heaven, and it filled the whole room. Each person saw what appeared to be tongues of fire that came to rest upon each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and

began to speak in many different languages as the Spirit helped them. There were many people in Jerusalem at that time from many nations. They, too, heard the sound of the wind and then the followers of Jesus speaking in all the different languages. The people said, “We hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own languages!” Those who heard this happen were amazed and asked one another, “What does this mean?” Others made fun of the believers and accused them of being drunk on wine.

It was the Apostle Paul who taught much about the Holy Spirit. He reminded the believers in the city of Corinth, “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, the Spirit you have received from God?” To another group of believers Paul warned them, “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.” The Holy Spirit testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. And if we are his children, then we are heirs of God. We have access to the Father by the Holy Spirit who helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray, but the Holy Spirit himself intercedes for believers with groans that words cannot express. Jesus kept his promise to send the Holy Spirit. And that Spirit reminds of the presence of Jesus with us, living in us, guiding us, strengthening us, comforting us, making us holy in God’s sight.

Touch The Women’s Hearts:

1. How did the angel Gabriel say Jesus would be conceived? (*Through God’s Holy Spirit.*)
2. Who did Jesus promise to send when he went away? (*The Holy Spirit*)
3. What are some things Jesus said the Holy Spirit would do for believers? (*Be a Spirit of Truth, teach believers all things and remind them of what Jesus said.*)
4. What would be the Holy Spirit’s work in the world? (*To convict the world of sin and righteousness.*)
5. Did Jesus keep his promise to send the Holy Spirit? (*Yes*)
6. What did Jesus tell his followers to do when he returned to heaven? (*Stay in Jerusalem and wait for the Holy Spirit.*)
7. How did the Holy Spirit come upon the believers? (*Like a violent wind from heaven.*)
8. What did Paul teach about the Holy Spirit? (*He lives within us. Our body is a temple of the Spirit. He testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. And he helps us in our weakness and when we pray.*)
9. What did Paul warn believers not to do? (*Do not grieve the Holy Spirit.*)
10. Paul said those controlled by their sinful nature cannot please God. But to believers he said, “You are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ...And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.” (Rom 8:8-9, 11)
11. The Holy Spirit was sent from the Father in Heaven. Jesus called him “my Spirit”. If he is the Spirit of Jesus, and he lives within us, then Jesus is with us. He told his disciples, “I will never leave you.” Do you believe that Jesus is still with us? He is, if you believe on him as Savior and as Lord of your life. It’s your choice.

A Verse For The ♥Heart: “Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.” 1Jn 3:24



Heaven Is For Women

JESUS IS OUR HIGH PRIEST

28

Bible Background: Psa 110:4; Mal 1:6; 2:8-9; Heb 2:17; 4:14-15 7:26; 7:1-3; 8:1-2; 9:11-12, 14, 24-28

For The Storyer:

It is a very cultural thing in Asia to have an mediator whenever there is a broken relationship between two parties. The mediator must be someone known to both, trusted by both, and qualified to represent both parties. Since our relationship with a righteous God is broken by sin, we need such a mediator, a priest to stand for us to intercede for us when we sin. In the Old Testament the priest first had to intercede and seek atonement for his own sin. Then he was qualified to intercede for worshipers. What was needed was a better high priest who was righteous without sin who made atonement for others by his own blood.

Open The Women's Minds:

1. In the culture of the women is it a common practice to have a mediator to mend broken relationships between two parties?
2. What are the qualifications for such a mediator? Can anyone be a mediator?
3. In the past when the women worshiped did they seek a mediator like an imam, or priest?
4. If God is righteous and we are sinful, do we need a mediator when we worship?

Read These Verses: Heb 8:1-2; 9:11-12, 15a

Tell The Story:

JESUS IS OUR HIGH PRIEST

In the days of the prophet Moses God set apart Moses' brother Aaron and his descendants to be priests to intercede for the people and to lead in worship whenever sacrifices were offered. The priest has to first offer a sacrifice for his own sin before he could go before God to intercede for the people. As the years passed many priests became corrupt and took advantage of the people, or even turned the people away from God to worship false gods. God spoke through a prophet named Malachi and said, "a son honors his father, and a servant his master. If I am a father, where is the honor due me? If I am a master, where is the respect due me?" says the Lord Almighty. "It is you, O priests, who despise my name...you have turned from the way and by your teaching have caused many to stumble...So I have caused you to be despised and humiliated before all the people." What was needed was a new and better high priest. The priest had to be without sin to stand before God. Who could qualify?

One of the prophets said that the Messiah would be priest as well as a king. In the story of Abraham a mysterious priest of Most High God appeared who blessed Abraham. Another prophecy said the Messiah would be like that high priest, a priest forever.

The work of the priest was to sacrifice the animals and sprinkle their blood on the altar for the forgiveness of sin. Each time a person sinned they had to bring a blood sacrifice. What was needed was a better sacrifice and a true and faithful high priest. The animal for the sacrifice had to be without defect, perfect. The sinless animal had to die for the sinner as a

substitute.

When Christ came as high priest he went through the heavenly tabernacle, he did not enter with the blood of animals. Instead, he entered into the Most Holy Place once for all by his own sinless blood and sprinkled it upon the altar for our redemption. For this reason Christ is the mediator of the new covenant between God and man.

On the night before Jesus was crucified he ate the Passover meal with his disciples. After the meal was finished Jesus took bread and blessed it and broke it and gave it to his disciples. "This is my body," he said, "which is broken and given for you." Then he took the cup of drink and blessed it and said, "This is my blood which is poured out for the forgiveness of sin. It is the blood of the new covenant."

And so we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. Because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy. And where these sins have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin.

Because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. When Jesus returned to heaven he took his place at the right hand of the Father and daily makes intercession for all believers. Jesus is our High Priest.

Touch The Women's Hearts:

1. In the days of Moses what was the work of a priest? (*To offer the sacrifices for sin.*)
2. What happened as the years passed? (*Priests failed to honor God and became disqualified to serve God.*)
3. How was Christ different from the first priests? Talk about the differences. He was faithful and honored God. The first priests offered animals as a sacrifice. Christ offered himself as a sacrifice. The animal sacrifices had to be repeated again and again. Jesus offered himself once for all sin, a sufficient sacrifice never to be repeated.
4. After Jesus returned to heaven what work did he continue to do? (*He continued to intercede daily before the Father for believers.*)
5. Do we need to offer animal sacrifices for sin today? (*No. Jesus' sacrifice was for all sin.*)
6. Do we need a priest on earth to intercede for us? (*No. Jesus is our high priest and our intercessor. He will help us when we pray and ask forgiveness for our sins.*)

A Verse For The ♥ Heart: "Therefore since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess."

Heb 4:14



Heaven Is For Women

JESUS PROMISED TO RETURN FOR BELIEVERS

29

Bible Background: Mat 24:27, 36-42, 44; 25:31; 26:64; Mrk 8:38; Luk 12:40; Jhn 14:1-6; Act 1:9-11; Heb 9:28; 1Jn 2:28; Rev 1:7; 3:11

For The Storyer:

An important aspect of assurance for the new believer is that they have made the right decision. This means that follow-through to the decision looking to the outcome should be affirming. We have tried to keep the relationship with the God the Father and Jesus as Savior in a perspective. A promise to return for the individual believer is a personal affirmation.

Open The Women's Minds:

1. Whenever a member of our families leave us, what is our first thought about them—
When will we see them again?
2. Do our family members promise to return when they leave us? Do the women also make such a promise when they go away?
3. What assurances do we give that we will keep our promise to return?
4. Are we able to say when our return will be?
5. What if we returned suddenly without warning and our family were not prepared to receive us? Has anyone ever returned suddenly that you were not prepared to receive?

Read These Verses: Jhn 14:1-3

Tell The Story:

A PROMISE TO RETURN FOR BELIEVERS

During the time of Jesus' teaching and healing he told his followers that one day he must suffer and be put to death, but he would be raised up to life again on the third day. His followers did not understand this teaching even though he told them many times. Then on the night before his arrest, trial and crucifixion, Jesus told his disciples that he must go away. But he said, "If I go I will come back and take you to be with me, that you may be where I am." During Jesus' trial before the religious leaders the high priest asked Jesus, "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." "Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied, "But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."

After Jesus' resurrection from the tomb and many appearances to his followers it was time for him to return to his Father in heaven. He led his followers to a hillside near Jerusalem, told them to be his witnesses wherever they went, and then Jesus was taken up into heaven until a cloud hid him from his followers' eyes. They were standing there looking intently into the sky as Jesus was going. Suddenly two angels who appeared like men dressed in white stood beside the followers. "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go."

When Jesus taught about his return from heaven he said "No one knows the day or the

hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, only the Father.” Then he said the coming of the Son of Man will be like in the days of Noah. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, right up to the day Noah entered the ark; and the people knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be.”

Again Jesus said, “it will be like two men in the field working; one will be taken and one left. Or two women grinding grain with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left. Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will return.” Then Jesus told a story about ten virgins who were wedding attendants. “There were ten virgins who went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any extra oil with them. The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep. At midnight, the cry rang out: ‘Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!’ Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.’ ‘No,’ the wise virgins replied, ‘there may not be enough oil for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.’ But while the foolish ones were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut. Later the foolish virgins arrived and cried, ‘Sir! Sir! Open the door for us!’ But the one inside said to them, ‘I tell you the truth, I don’t know you.’ Therefore,” Jesus said, “keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.”

Jesus said, “If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels.”

To John in his vision of heaven Jesus said, “Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps their clothes ready, so that they not go naked and be shamefully exposed.” And, “Look! He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be!”

Jesus said he would return one day. The angels said he would return in great glory one day. The prophets said he would return one day. Are you ready for Jesus’ return? Will he find you ready to meet him?

Touch The Women’s Hearts:

1. What did Jesus promise his disciples if he went away? (*To return for them so they might be where he was.*)
2. What did Jesus tell the high priest after his arrest? (*You will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds.*)
3. What did the angels say to Jesus’ followers after Jesus was taken up into heaven? (*This same Jesus will return in the same way you have seen him go.*)
4. Who is the only one who knows the day and hour of Jesus return? (*God the Father*)
5. What can we learn from the story of the ten virgins waiting for the bridegroom? (*We need to be prepared when Jesus returns.*)
6. What does it mean “to be prepared”? Have the women talk about this. Guide them to the conclusion that it means to be a believer in Jesus and to be expecting his return.
7. Do the women think Jesus will return for them if they believe in him? Are they included in his promise? What do they need to do to get ready for Jesus’ return?
- 8.

A Verse For The ♥ Heart: “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you may be where I am.” John 14:3



Heaven Is For Women

JESUS PROMISED BELIEVERS WOULD LIVE AGAIN

30

Bible Background: Luk 7:11-15; 8:49-55; Jhn 3:15-16; 11:23-26; 14:6; Rom 5:12, 19, 21 ; 1Co 15:22-26, 45-57

For The Storyer:

We are trying to look at salvation, eternal life and heaven from many different directions. And we are trying to keep it related to Jesus, his teaching and promises. We want the women listeners to have hope that they, too, can have this eternal life. And that Jesus has included everyone who believes his words and trusts in him.

Open The Women's Minds:

1. Do the women know anyone who has never died? Death comes to all sooner or later.
2. Talk about what happens when we die. What happens to the body? What happens to the spirit of the person? (Remember these questions are just to stir up thinking.)
3. Do the women believe that we live beyond the grave? As a spirit? Or will be reunited with our bodies?

Read These Verses: Jhn 11:25-26

Tell The Story:

A PROMISE WE WOULD LIVE AGAIN

Only three stories have been included in the Gospels about Jesus' raising a dead person to life again. One was a young girl who had died. Jesus told her father, "Don't be afraid, just believe, and she will be healed." Another was a young man, the only son of a widow. He had died and his body was being carried to the burial ground. Jesus stopped the procession and said, "Young man, I say to you, get up." And he gave the man back to his mother.

But there was another who had died four days earlier and his body had been in the grave since then. He was Lazarus, the brother of Martha and Mary. The sisters called for Jesus to come to heal their brother, but when Jesus arrived their brother had already died. Martha sorrowfully said to Jesus, "If you had been here, my brother would not have died." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Then Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die." At the tomb Jesus commanded, "Lazarus, come out!" And Lazarus came to life and walked out of the tomb.

The man named Nicodemus came to visit Jesus one night. As they talked Jesus said, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

Remember when Jesus was talking to the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well? Jesus told her that he had living water that would become in her a spring of water bubbling up to eternal life.

In the Garden of Eden God told Adam, the first man, that if he ate from the tree of

knowledge of good and evil he would surely die. After Adam ate from the tree of knowledge of good and evil God judged his disobedience and told him what would happen one day. God said, "By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken...to the dust you will return. Adam lived a long time and then he died, just as God said. After Paul became a believer in Jesus he taught many things about eternal life. He explained to the believers who lived in Rome that sin came into the world by one man, Adam, and through sin death followed. So because of Adam we have all become sinners because we inherit his sinful nature as our ancestor. But Paul said there is hope, "For just as through the disobedience of one man many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man, that is, Jesus, many will be made righteous." To some other believers Paul added, "Just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven. Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. We will all be changed in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. The dead will be raised to life without corruption or decay. We will be changed from perishable to imperishable. Thanks be to God! He gives us victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Peter said in his gospel: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." (1Pe 1:3) And Paul said: "For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the great angel and the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first." And Jesus promised, "For my father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day." (Jhn 6:40)

Touch The Women's Hearts:

1. What did we see in the stories about Jesus' raising the dead to life again. (*That he had power over death because he could restore life in the dead.*)
2. To Martha, who did Jesus say he was? (*I am the resurrection and the life.*)
3. What did Jesus mean when he said that a person who believed in him would never die? Does that mean a person would never die and be buried in a grave? (*No. Our bodies die because of sin. But if we believe in Jesus he would raise us up again to live with him.*)
4. Did Jesus promise eternal life to the Samaritan woman? (*Yes. His living water would bubble up to eternal life in the believer.*)
5. As a result of Adam's disobedience what came into the world? (*Sin and through sin, death.*) Did death come only to Adam? (*No. It came to all as a result of his sin. We have inherited Adam's sinful nature.*)
6. What came through Jesus' obedience? (*Life, victory over sin and death.*)
7. Just as we have the likeness of the man and woman that God created in the beginning, who will we be like in the resurrection? (*Like the second man—Jesus*)
8. God's Word tells us that our bodies die because of sin. A time is coming when Jesus returns and the dead will be called from the graves. The prophet Daniel said, "Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt." (Dan 12:2)
9. Jesus promised that believers would live again, our bodies raised without decay to a new and glorious body and rejoined with our spirits to live with him forever.
10. Would you like to have a life of blessing without end? Believe on Jesus as your Savior.

A Verse For The ♥ Heart: "...Because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence."

2Co 4:14



Heaven Is For Women

WE MUST CONFESS OUR FAITH IN JESUS IN THIS LIFE

31

Bible Background: Luk 15:1-2; 16:14, 19-31; Jhn 5:45-47; Rom 3:19

For The Storyer:

The story of the Rich Man and Lazarus reminds us that we must decide in this life whether to believe what God has told us through the prophets. Failing to do so means that at the time of our death our fate is fixed with unbelievers going to the place of torment. This story illustrates concretely the beginning afterlife of the unbeliever and believer at a time prior to the death of Jesus for believers' sins. Today, unbelievers still go to the place of torment to await judgment for their sins and eternal punishment. Believers go to be with the Lord to await the day of resurrection of their bodies and eternal blessing in the presence of their Lord and Savior. We take it that Lazarus was a believer for Lazarus is from "Eliezer" which means "one that God helps" or "God is my helper".

Open The Women's Minds:

1. Does anyone know the day they will die?
2. Do the women know someone who is very wealthy and who trusts in their wealth to provide all the needs of life?
3. Do the women know someone who is very poor and perhaps sickly and hungry?
4. Which person do they suppose would go to a place of blessing after death, and which one to a place of torment? Which place do the women think they will go to?

Read These Verses: Luk 16:22-25

Tell The Story:

WE MUST BELIEVE AND CONFESS OUR FAITH IN THIS LIFE

Tax collectors and others who were considered to be "sinners" were all gathering around Jesus to hear him. The Pharisees and religious teachers were muttering, "This man welcomes sinners and even eats with them." The Pharisees, who loved money, were hearing the words of Jesus and were sneering at Jesus. So Jesus began to tell this story:

There was a certain rich man who was dressed in the most expensive cloth to be bought in his day. He lived in great luxury every day with abundant food and every need satisfied. At the rich man's gate each day was laid a beggar named Lazarus who was covered with sores. He longed to eat even the crumbs and scraps of food that fell from the rich man's table. In his misery the dogs came each day and licked his sores.

The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was already in torment, the rich man looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. So the rich man cried out, "Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in great agony in this fire."

But Abraham replied, "Son, remember that you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things. Now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this,

between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that we can't come to you and you can't come to us.

Then the rich man answered, "Then I beg you, father Abraham, send Lazarus to my father's house for I have five brothers. Let Lazarus go and warn them, so they will not also come to this place of torment."

Abraham replied, "Your brothers have Moses and the Prophets, your brothers should listen to what they have to say."

"No, father Abraham," the rich man pleaded, "but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent from their sins."

But Abraham said, "If your brothers do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead."

Later Jesus told those listening to him, "There are some who are confident of their own righteousness and who look down upon everybody else. (Luk 17:9) And to others Jesus said, "Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set. If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me." (Jhn 5:45b-46)

Touch The Women's Hearts:

1. Who was Jesus speaking to when he told this story of the Rich Man and Lazarus? (*Some Pharisees who considered themselves righteous, and those who loved money.*)
2. What kind of life did the rich man live? (*Very luxurious, lacking nothing for his comfort and desire.*)
3. What kind of life did Lazarus live? (*A miserable poor life, sickly, covered with sores and hungry for whatever food he could get.*)
4. Why do you think the two men went to different places after their death? (*This is an open question that will be answered later. Let the women express their opinions.*)
5. What was the condition of the rich man now? (*He was now in great agony and thirsty.*)
6. Does anyone remember the story about Jesus and the Samaritan woman? Remember, Jesus told her that if she drank his "living water" she would never thirst again. Does this mean the rich man did not drink any of the "living water" offered by Jesus???
7. What was the condition of Lazarus now? (*He was comforted at the side of Father Abraham. God considered Abraham a righteous person because he believed God and trusted God. Could this mean that Lazarus also was righteous because he believed God and trusted God to help him? His name means "God is my helper".*)
8. Now who was the rich man concerned about? (*He wanted someone to go warn his brothers so they would repent—turn from their sins—before it was too late.*)
9. Could Lazarus go to warn the rich man's brothers? (*No. The brothers already had the words of Moses who wrote the Taurat and the words of the Prophets who told about the coming of Jesus to suffer for our sins.*)
10. Would the brothers be convinced and repent if someone went from the dead to warn them? (*No. If they won't listen to Moses and the Prophets then they won't listen to someone coming from the dead to warn them.*)
11. Do the women know what the words of Moses and the Prophets have to say? Would they like to hear some of the things that Moses and the Prophets had to say?

Moses wrote:

One day a son born of a woman would crush the head of the serpent (Satan). Gen 3:15
God would bless all nations through a descendant of Abraham—through his seed.

Gen 22:18/Gal 3:16

God would bless all peoples on earth through Isaac and his offspring. Gen 26:4

God would bless all peoples through Jacob and his offspring. Gen 28:14

God would raise up a prophet like Moses from among the descendants of Jacob. The

people should listen to what he had to say. Deu 18:15

The Prophets said:

He would inherit the throne of David—be a descendant of David and rule over David’s people. Isa 9:7

He would be born in Bethlehem the home of David. Mic 5:2

He would be born of a virgin. Isa 7:14

He would be a light for the Gentiles that he may bring salvation to the ends of the earth. Isa 48:6

He would be a priest forever—one who intercedes for sinners. Psa 110:4

He would be rejected by his own people. Isa 53:3

He would be betrayed by a friend. Psa 41:9 Being sold for 30 pieces of silver. Zec 11:12

False witnesses would accuse him. Psa 27:12

He would be struck and spit upon. Isa 50:6

His hands and feet would be pierced. Psa 22:16

He would be crucified—put to death between sinners. Isa 53:9, 12

His side would be pierced. Zec 12:10

His clothing would be removed and others would gamble for it. Psa 22:18

He would be buried among the rich. Isa 53:9

God would not abandon him to the grave—he would live again. Psa 16:10

He would return to God and dwell with Him. Psa 68:18

The prophet Isaiah also said that the Promised One (the Messiah) would be anointed of God for God’s Spirit would rest and remain on him, he would suffer for the sins of many and carry their infirmities and sorrows. (Isa 11:2; 42:1; 53:4, 12)

The prophet Isaiah also said that the Promised One (Messiah), because God anointed him, he would preach good news to the poor, he was sent to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives, release for the prisoners, and to proclaim the year of God’s favor. (Isa 61:1-2) Jesus said to a group of people, “Today these words are fulfilled in your hearing.” (Luk 4:18-19, 21)

There were many other things that Moses and the Prophets said. And all of them were about Jesus. These are the words the rich man had heard and the words that the rich man had failed to believe and turn from his sin, believing in the One sent from God.

What about you? What do you believe? Do you believe the words of Moses and the Prophets? There is still time for you while you live in this life. Don’t put it off.

A Verse For The ♥ Heart: “And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he (Jesus) explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself...Did not the Messiah (Christ) have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?” Luk 24:27, 26)



Heaven Is For Women

NO OTHER WAY—ITS YOUR INVITATION

32

Bible Background: Num 14; Jer 7:13; 35:15; Jon 3:4-6; Mat 7:14; Jhn 10:9; 14:6; Act 2:14-41; Heb 2:3; 4:2, 7; 12:25; Rev 22:17

For The Storyer:

One of the tragic stories of the Old Testament was Israel's refusal to trust God and enter the Promised Land. The people listened to bad advice and made their decision with tragic consequences for a generation. During the days of the Prophet Jeremiah God said, "I called, but you did not answer." Again God said, "I sent my servants the prophets to warn the people. But they did not listen or pay attention; they did not turn from their wickedness." Jesus used two pictures: One was the narrow way that few found; the other was the picture of the sheep gate, Jesus said, "I am the gate, whoever enters through me will be saved."

Open The Women's Minds:

1. Some time back we had a story about the people who refused the king's invitation to attend his banquet and so others were invited to take their place. And we talked about what it means to refuse an invitation.
2. What does it say about us when we refuse to accept something of great value? What excuses would we give? Would we be afraid? Would we want to put off receiving a valuable gift?
3. In your culture how many times must you ask a person and be refused before an invitation is accepted or rejected. In some countries one must ask three times.

Read These Verses: Act 2:37-39

Tell The Story:

NO OTHER WAY

It happened during the days of Moses. God sent Moses as a prophet and savior to bring God's people out of slavery in Egypt to a land God said was flowing with milk and honey—a good land that God had promised to give Abraham and his descendants. But when the people came near the land and heard a bad report about the people living in the land, they rebelled against God and planned to choose a new leader to take them back to Egypt and slavery. God was not pleased with that generation. He did not destroy them but waited until all that generation had died before bringing the people into the land of promise.

Many years later during the days of the kings, God's people had fallen into great sin by worshipping false gods and living lives not pleasing to God. So God sent the prophet Jeremiah to warn the people. But they did not listen to Jeremiah and so rejected God's words. God said to them "I called, but you did not answer."

During the days of the prophet Jonah God called him to go to the city of Nineveh which was a very wicked place, and preach against it: Unless the people repented of their sin in forty days, God would destroy their city. When the people heard Jonah's message they believed God and immediately repented of their sin and put on sackcloth and fasted to show

their repentance. Because the people listened and harkened to his words, God did not destroy Nineveh at that time.

After Jesus rose from the grave and returned to heaven God sent his Holy Spirit upon the followers of Jesus. The people who saw what happened were amazed and began to ask each other, “What does this mean?” Then Peter stood up and began to speak to the crowd. He reminded them of the words of the prophet Joel who said: “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” Then Peter began to tell the people about Jesus, how he was accredited by God by many miracles and wonders. Then with the help of wicked people he was put to death by nailing him to a cross. But God raised him from the dead. Then Peter reminded the people about David who was also a prophet. David spoke of the resurrection of Christ when God did not abandon him to the grave, nor did his body see decay. God raised Christ to life and then exalted him to the right hand of God in heaven where he received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit which had just been poured out on the followers.

Then Peter said, “God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” When the people heard these words they were cut to the heart and said to Peter, “What shall we do?” Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.” Many accepted Peter’s message and invitation to believe on Jesus and about three thousand were baptized and added to the followers that day.

Jesus had warned the people: “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.” Again Jesus said, “I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved.” And on the night before he was crucified Jesus said: “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” In the closing words of the Bible it says: “The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come! Whoever is thirsty, let them come; let them take the free gift of the water of life.’”

Touch The Women’s Hearts:

1. There are many stories in the Bible of invitations that were refused and others that were accepted. What do these stories today tell us about the people in each story?
2. If an invitation is given and no one accepts it, what does this say to the person giving the invitation? Is it a way of rejecting them and their message? What does this do to the one rejecting the invitation? During the days of Moses the king of Egypt rejected God’s words again and again until at last his heart was hardened against God’s words.
3. In the letter to the Hebrews it says: “How shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation?” What does the Bible say about the way to God? One way or many ways?
4. The message in Hebrews also says: “For we also have the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard it did not combine it with faith.” (Heb 4:2) It means that it is not enough simply to know about something. We must act in faith upon what we know to be true.
5. The Bible message closes with an invitation to Come and drink, whoever is thirsty, come and take the free gift of the water of life. The water of life is salvation leading to everlasting life in heaven in the presence of God the Father and Jesus the Son. The invitation is to you. The gift of salvation is yours for the asking. Will you receive it?

A Verse For The ♥ Heart: “He (Jesus) came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become the children of God.” Jhn 1:11-12



Heaven Is For Women

VICTORY FOR THOSE WHO PERSEVERE TO THE END

33

Bible Background: Jhn 12:42, 43; Gal 6:9; 2Ti 3:12; Heb 12:1

For The Storyer:

Paul said in his second letter to Timothy: "Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." (2Ti 3:12) Peter said in his second letter: "Make every effort to add to your faith...perseverance" (2Pe 1:5-6) And: "If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you...So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good...And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away." (1Pe 4:14, 19; 5:4) The danger for many of these women is that they will be pressured by family and society to renounce their faith in Christ. Those who persevere will very likely suffer for their faith.

Open The Women's Minds:

1. What do the women think Jesus meant when he said: "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of heaven." (Luk 9:62)
2. What do the women think might happen if they turn away from Christ back to the old way of life? (Read Eph 4:22-23; 1Pe 1:18-19; 2Pe 1:9)
3. If we turn back what does this say about our faith?
4. What are some things which might cause people to turn back or fall away?

Read These Verses: Mrk 4:3-6, 16-17

Tell The Story:

VICTORY FOR THOSE WHO PERSEVERE TO THE END

One of the parables Jesus told was about a farmer who went to his field to sow seed at planting time. As he scattered the seed some of it fell on rocky places where the soil was not very deep. The seed sprouted, took root and quickly sprang up. But because the soil was shallow when the hot sun came up the plants were wilted and withered because they had no root. Later Jesus' disciples asked him to explain the parable to them. Jesus said, "Seed, like that sown on rocky soil, is like those who hear the word of God and at once receive it with joy. But because they have no root, they last only a short time. For when trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away."

The man who came to Jesus one night was Nicodemus. He is the one that Jesus told that he must be born again in order to enter the kingdom of heaven. Nicodemus continued to follow Jesus and one time defended Jesus when other Pharisees were condemning him. (Jhn 7:50-51) Even after Jesus had done many miraculous signs in their presence, most of the religious leaders would not believe in him. Yet at the same time there were others among the leaders who did believe in Jesus. But because of the Pharisees who were critical of Jesus, they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the places of worship. For it said they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God. (Jhn 12:37, 43)

In one of his letters Paul spoke about one of the men who had traveled with him and helped in Paul's work. Paul called him "my fellow worker". His name was Demas. But a time came when Demas left Paul and went his own way. Paul wrote about him: "...for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me." (2Ti 4:10)

On the night before Jesus was crucified while eating with his disciples he told them: "One of you is going to betray me." That was the one named Judas for several days earlier Judas had allowed Satan to gain control of his life as he went to make arrangement to betray Jesus into the hands of his enemies. (Luk 22:3-4) And to another disciple named Peter Jesus said that he had prayed for him that his faith would not fail because Satan was asking to sift Peter like wheat. Peter boasted that he was ready to go to prison with Jesus or even to die with him. But Jesus said to Peter, "Before the rooster crows tonight you will deny me three times." Later in the garden where Jesus had gone to pray, Judas led the soldiers out to arrest Jesus. When this happened Jesus' disciples deserted him and fled away. Later that night and in the early morning hours Peter denied Jesus three times just as Jesus said.

One of the disciples named John, many years after Jesus rose from the grave and returned to heaven, had a vision and Jesus spoke to him and told him to write down what he heard and saw. Part of the vision were letters to seven churches. To the one at Ephesus Jesus warned: "I hold this against you, you have forsaken your first love...Repent and do the things you did at first...To him who overcomes I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God." (Rev 2:4-5, 7) To another Jesus said: "Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer...Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life." (Rev 2:10) And to another he said: "The one who overcomes will, like them be dressed in white. I will never erase their name from the book of life, but will acknowledge their name before my Father and his angels."

One of the women who followed Jesus was Mary Magdalene. Jesus had cast seven evil spirits out of her. When Jesus was crucified Mary was there watching. She saw where they buried Jesus in the new tomb. And she planned to return to the tomb after the Sabbath day to put sweet spices on the body of Jesus. But he was no longer in the tomb. Mary had tried to tell the disciples about the empty tomb but they did not believe her. She returned to the tomb and was standing there weeping when Jesus spoke to her. Mary fell at his feet saying, "Teacher!" Mary had faithfully followed Jesus and he had honored her by being the first person he revealed himself to after his resurrection.

Touch The Women's Hearts:

1. Is anyone in the group like the seed that was sown on rocky soil and quickly sprang up but then withered when persecution came? The Bible warns us that persecution would come if we followed Jesus. Jesus told his disciples, "The world will hate you and persecute you because it hated me and persecuted me first. (Jhn 15:18, 20)
2. Would anyone in the group fear other people and their persecution more than they trust and fear God? Would they rather have the praise of others or the praise of God?
3. What are some things in the world which could draw us away from following Jesus? What danger do they think would come from turning back?
4. People may fall away by returning to their old life of sin. Others may return to their former beliefs and religion. And others grow weary of doing good and simply give up.
5. What is the decision of the group? Pray together that all might persevere to the end.

A Verse For The ♥Heart: "Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life." (Jud 21)



Heaven Is For Women

LIVING A LIFE PLEASING TO GOD

34

Bible Background: Mat 26:6-13; Mrk 14:3-9; Jhn 12:1-8; 14:15, 21; Act 9:36-42; 18:2, 26; Rom 16:3; 1Th 2:11-12; 2Pe 1:3-8; 3:11-12a, 18

For The Storyer:

One of the most important possessions of a new believer is their testimony of what Jesus has done for them. Another very important possession is a life that is pleasing to God in every way. It grows from a desire in the heart to obey God and always to confess any sin and ask God's forgiveness so there will always be a good relationship without fear or shame. It is a choice that a believer must make as Paul reminded us: "Therefore, I urge you, brothers (and sisters!), in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices holy and pleasing to God—which is your spiritual worship." (Rom 12:1)

Open The Women's Minds:

1. Ask the women to describe a good life as one should live it. In living a good life who is the most important person to please—ourselves or God?
2. What might be some hindrances to living a life that is pleasing to God?
3. How might we know that we are doing the right thing as we live?
4. What might be the effects of not living a life pleasing to God?

Read These Verses: Jhn 12:3, 7

Tell The Story:

THEIR LIFE WAS A SWEET SMELLING SACRIFICE

It was after Jesus had been summoned to heal Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha. Lazarus was already dead when Jesus arrived at their village. But when Jesus prayed to God his prayer was answered and Lazarus was raised to life again. The sisters were filled with joy to have their brother living again. Shortly afterward someone in their village gave a dinner in Jesus' honor. As usual Martha was serving the food. Then her sister Mary came into the room carrying a jar of very expensive perfume. She opened the jar and poured it on Jesus' head and feet and wiped his feet with her hair. The whole house was filled with the sweet fragrance of the perfume.

But one of Jesus' disciples named Judas Iscariot strongly objected and said, "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages."

"Leave her alone," Jesus replied, "Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me... You will not always have me with you. She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body to prepare for my burial. Wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world this story will be told in memory of her."

After Jesus had returned to heaven it happened there was a woman named Tabitha who was always doing good and helping the poor. About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room. The people there urged Peter to come at once. When he arrived he was taken to the upstairs room. All the widows stood around him,

crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Tabitha had made for them while she was still alive.

Peter sent all of them out of the room and got down on his knees and prayed. Then he said to the dead woman, "Tabitha, get up!" She opened her eyes and sat up. Peter helped her to stand and then called all the believers and widows and presented Tabitha to them.

Another woman who lived a life pleasing to God was Priscilla who along with her husband Aquila were followers of Jesus. They had lived in Rome but had to leave when the descendants of Abraham were expelled by the Romans. They came to Greece and there met Paul and worked with him as tentmakers while Paul taught the people about Jesus. Later a man named Apollos who had a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures and himself taught about Jesus came to that place. Apollos knew about baptism for repentance of sin but did not know about the Holy Spirit. When Priscilla and Aquila heard about him, they invited Apollos to come to their home so they could explain to him about the way of God more fully. Some time later Paul wrote about Priscilla and Aquila and commended them for risking their lives for him and called them fellow workers in Christ. Priscilla was a godly woman who along with her husband faithfully served God and taught about Christ.

Touch The Women's Hearts:

1. In this story what did Martha and Mary do for Jesus? What kind of woman was Mary according to her act of kindness toward Jesus? Do you think she did a good thing?
2. What was the testimony the widows gave about Tabitha? Do the women think she lived a good life that was pleasing to God?
3. Priscilla worked with her husband both in their business to earn a living and as a teacher of God's Word. What does this say about Priscilla's life? Do you think her life was pleasing to God?
4. What can you say about each of these women's reputation? Were they characterized by their sin or wickedness, or by their lives that served and helped others? Do you think they did this out of duty, to earn a good name for themselves, or to serve God?
5. There were other women who did not do so well. In one of his letters to the believers at Philippi Paul pleaded with Euodia and Syntyche to agree with each other and stop quarreling. Paul asked someone to help them to agree in the Lord because they had been faithful workers alongside Paul during his earlier visit. (Php 4:2-3)
6. In another letter Paul asked for the people to help a woman named Phoebe who was a faithful servant in the church. Paul said she had been a great help to many people, including Paul. (Rom 16:1-2)
7. How would each of the women like to be remembered: Would they be like Euodia and Syntyche who were good women but who quarreled and so gave a bad testimony of their faith in Jesus? Or like the other women who had a good testimony?
8. Can the women think of some things which may have helped these women to live a life pleasing to God?
9. Would they also like to live a life pleasing to God? Have prayer for each of the women that they will indeed live a life which pleases God and is a good testimony of their faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord.

A Verse For The ♥ Heart: "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness."

2Pe 1:3 *also* "And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased." (Heb 13:16)



Heaven Is For Women

SHARING GOOD NEWS OF HEAVEN WITH OTHERS

35

Bible Background: 2Ki 7:3-9; Luk 15:8-10; Jhn 1:35-42; 4:28-29; Act 16:13-15; Php 1:3-6

For The Storyer:

These stories look at sharing good news with others. Though the circumstances of the story about the lepers is gruesome, it is amazing that even in their terrible condition the lepers were concerned to share their good news. The Samaritan woman was eager to share the good news about the Messiah. The woman with the lost coin wanted to rejoice with her friends upon finding that which was lost. And Lydia, along with other women, gladly received the good news from Paul and were baptized. Later we learn that a church had formed in that place, no doubt as those first believers continued to share their good news.

Open The Women's Minds:

1. What are some kinds of good news we might want to share with others? Let the women tell about some of the good news they have shared.
2. Why would anyone want to share good news with others? Would they want someone to rejoice with them? Would they want that person to benefit in some way as they have?
3. What might hold someone back from sharing good news? Fear of how that news might be taken? Fear of not being believed? Selfishness in wanting to keep the good news to oneself?

Read These Verses: Luk 15:8-10

Tell The Story:

SHARING GOOD NEWS OF HEAVEN WITH OTHERS

During the days of the prophet Elisha when he lived in Samaria an enemy had come and laid siege to the city. Because Samaria was shut up there was soon a famine which became so severe that women were even cooking and eating their own children. God had spoken through Elisha that soon the famine would be over. It happened there were four lepers who lived outside the city gate. They decided that it would be best to go over to the camp of the enemy and see if there were any food to eat. That evening when they went to the enemy camp they found it deserted for the Lord had caused the enemy to hear a sound like that of horses and a great army coming. So they fled leaving behind all their possessions and food. When the lepers entered the empty camp and found food they ate and drank their fill. Then they quickly began to go from tent to tent collecting the silver and gold and clothes and hid them. But then they said to each other, "What we are doing is not right. This is a day of good news and we are keeping it to ourselves. Let's go at once and report this to the royal palace." When the king heard the news he sent soldiers out to see if the report were true. Then the people of Samaria went out and took the food and possessions of the enemy. The famine was ended just as God had said would happen.

When Jesus was passing through Samaria and met the woman at the well and told her about living water that would bring salvation she was interested to hear more. Then she said

to Jesus, "I know the Messiah is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us." Jesus said to the woman, "I am the Messiah." The woman left her water jar at the well, and quickly returned to the town and told the people, "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could he be the Messiah?" Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in Jesus because of the woman's testimony.

Jesus told a parable about a woman who had ten silver coins and somehow lost one of them. He said, "Does the woman not light a lamp, begin to sweep the house and search carefully until at last she finds the lost coin. Then when she finds the coin, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.' In the same way," Jesus said, "there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

The man named Paul became an evangelist carrying the good news of Jesus far and wide. One Sabbath day in his travels as he visited a certain city he went outside the city gate to the river. There Paul expected to find a place of prayer. He sat down and began to speak to the women who were gathered there. One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. And she was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to Paul's message. After she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited Paul and his traveling companion to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." Later after Paul and his companion had been unjustly accused and put in prison and then released, they went to Lydia's house and met with the brothers and other believers and encouraged them. Then they left. Later Paul wrote a letter to the believers who lived in that place. Paul said, "I thank God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. Now I am confident that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."

Touch The Women's Hearts:

1. Let the women talk about what each person in the stories may have shared with others.
2. In the story of the four lepers what did they decide was best to do. (*Share the good news.*)
3. In the story of the Samaritan woman at the well, what did she decide to do? How can we know that she was excited and in a hurry to share? (*She left her water jar at the well.*)
4. Silver coins were valuable in Jesus' day. The coins may have been part of the woman's dowry and so very valuable to her. The woman was diligent and persistent in her search until she found the lost coin. Then what did she do? (*Called her friends to rejoice with her.*)
5. We don't know much about Lydia except that she may have been wealthy as a seller of purple cloth and that she worshiped God. What else did we learn about her in this story? (*She and members of her household were baptized indicating that surely Lydia shared the good news about Jesus with them. Later there was a strong church in that place as others shared the good news.*)
6. Each of the women in the group have heard the good news about Jesus' suffering and death for their sins. Now what should they do with this good news? Are they willing and able to share it with their family and friends?

A Verse For The ♥ Heart: "I pray that you will be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ." Phm 6



Heaven Is For Women

OVERCOMING TEMPTATION AND CONFESSING SIN

36

Bible Background: Num 12:1-15; Act 4:32-5:11; Jam 1:13-15; 1Jh 1:5-2:6; 3:9

For The Storyer:

Traditionally the Old Testament religions like Judaism and Islam have held the woman (Eve) responsible for bringing sin into the world. But Paul clearly points out that God held Adam responsible for sin entering the world and death through sin (Rom 5:12) The Bible is clear in saying that ALL have sinned (Rom 3:23) and the wages of sin is death (Rom 6:23). Moses' sister Miriam had sinned in her jealousy of Moses and the work God gave him to do. The Moabite women seduced the Israelites to sin (Num 25:1-2) by inviting the men to the sacrifices of their gods and sexual immorality. In reality temptation is no respecter of persons. God warned Cain that sin was crouching at his door waiting to have him, but he must master (overcome) it.

Open The Women's Minds:

1. Talk about how we honor our parents? Try to draw out the thought of obeying them as a
2. way of honoring them. Is disobedience then a way of dishonoring our parents?
3. What happens when we disobey our parents when we are young? Do we become fearful? Do we try to hide what we have done? Do we deny what we have done? Do we attempt to blame someone else? Is our fellowship (relationship) with our parents broken by our guilt?
4. Do we have any sense of shame or guilt whenever we do what is wrong? Where do the women think that feeling comes from?
5. What keeps us from doing what is wrong? Is it fear of being caught or punished? Is it a sense of desiring to do what is right and good?
6. When we do that which is wrong, how do we make it right and obtain forgiveness?

Read These Verses: Act 5:1-2, 7-9

Tell The Story:

THE WOMAN WHO CONSPIRED IN SIN WITH HER HUSBAND

In the days after Jesus had returned to heaven, when those who believed in him met together to worship and pray, the believers were of one heart and mind. They were sharing their possessions so there was no one needy among them. From time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them and brought the money from the sales to be distributed to anyone who was in need.

A certain man named Ananias together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and gave it to the leaders. One of the leaders named Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of

doing such a thing? You have not lied to men, but to God.”

When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died. And great fear seized all who heard what had happened. Then the young men came forward, wrapped up Ananias’ body, and carried him out and buried him.

About three hours later Sapphira his wife came in, not knowing what had happened to her husband. Peter asked her, “Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?”

“Yes,” she said, “that is the price.”

Peter said to her, “How could you agree to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also.”

At that moment Sapphira fell down at Peter’s feet and died. The young men came in and, finding Sapphira dead, wrapped her body and carried her out and buried her beside her husband. Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events.

Touch The Women’s Hearts:

1. What happened in this story? What did Ananias and Sapphira conspire to do?
2. Did they think that no one would know they were lying about the money?
3. Do the women think that Ananias and Sapphira did the right thing?
4. What should Ananias and Sapphira have done with the money?
5. What should Ananias and Sapphira have said about the money if they planned to keep part of it?
6. Did Sapphira join in her husband’s lie?
7. Briefly refer to the story of Miriam in Num 12. While both Miriam and Aaron were involved, apparently the Lord held Miriam responsible for stirring up the trouble. What Miriam did was sinful in God’s sight and she was punished for it.
8. Compare that story with that of the sinful woman who anointed the feet of Jesus in Luk 7:36-38, 48, 50. Had that woman repented of her sin? Did Jesus forgive her?
9. Do we continue to sin even after we ask God to forgive our sin? (*Yes, it is our nature.*)
10. Read Rom 7:15-20. This passage sounds a bit confusing as it compares the two natures. Try to clarify that by saying that we want to do what is right and good. But the sin living in us causes us to do what is wrong and sinful.
11. Now read Rom 8:5-11. Talk about how it is the Spirit of Christ living in us that helps us not to sin.
12. If we do fall into sin what should we do? Read 1Jn 1:8-2:2, and then 1:7.
13. Lead the women to think about what they should do when they sin. Also talk about what they should do to keep from sinning. Quote for them Psa 119:11 “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.”

A Verse For The ♥ Heart: “He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy.” Pro 28:13

or

“Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness” 2Ti 2:19

or

“No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him.” 1Jn 3:6

or

“No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God’s seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God.” 1Jn 3:9



Heaven Is For Women

CONDUCTING THE STORYING SESSION

Considerations for Conducting a Storying Session—Following are some additional considerations for conducting a Bible storying session. It is not possible to legislate one way as the only right way to do it. Every group will have its own characteristics and each storyer will have some preferences in how to conduct a session. Beyond the ultimate goals of a profession of faith in Christ, beginning discipling and a viable body of believers, are the goals of holding the women’s attention without driving them away and, as much as possible, doing what the women themselves can do after the storyer is gone.

Even the teaching models and their content will vary according to worldview of the various women’s groups. However, once a suitable model is identified and adapted as needed for that particular worldview, it should be possible to use the set of stories and lessons widely among the women with only minor adjustments here and there. This trainer is aware that the Gospel does not change but the gateways to get at that Gospel do vary from group to group according to their beliefs. This model is based on that premise.

Preparing to Begin a Storying Session—There are two primary requirements for beginning a Bible storying group. One is, of course, to find a group which can be held together long enough for the story lesson strategy to be presented. The other is to get permission to teach the group. Especially among worldview groups who are traditionally or typically hostile to the Gospel, it is essential to get permission to teach. A part of that permission will likely be answering the question What are you going to teach? Here the storyer needs to be proverbially wise as a serpent and gentle as a dove. Think through very carefully what you will say, but do not lie or misrepresent what you will teach. Generally, the less information given, the better. Even among non-hostile societies it is good to inform the authorities and gain their permission if needed for a public event.

Don’t be alarmed if someone comes to check you out. And you can be sure that questions will be asked about what is being taught. We’ve had storying groups scuttled after the lessons began to really challenge the worldview of the members and word got out. And we’ve had groups that were able to continue after being investigated as they were “only telling stories.” In some cases of hostility only the stories were told with no lesson taught.

If the group does get stopped don’t give up just yet. Continue to pray for the members of the storying group and ask the Holy Spirit to make use of what the women have already heard. Look for opportunity to meet with a smaller representation of the group, realizing that what is taught in the smaller group will find its way to others who are no longer able to attend the sessions. Networking among individual women in groups can be very strong.

Initiating the Sessions—Storying groups often get started small with a few women, perhaps centered around a “woman of peace”, and then begin to grow as others are invited or learn about the group and don’t want to be left out. Some groups begin as part of a literacy or ESL session. If the group is formed to make a legitimate study of English for a professional need, honor that need first. As an adjunct group or extracurricular session conduct the Bible storying session on a voluntary basis to attend.

In the typical Muslim setting and most Hindu settings there will not be mixing of men and women in the same group. This is good as it allows for a more focused approach for the women while dealing with specific worldview issues common to them and giving them the freedom to express themselves without having to subvert to a male relative or curious

onlooker who joins himself to the group. Men will hear what is being said, either by overhearing the teaching, or from the women who attend the sessions.

Some women's groups begin as an outgrowth of a men's group begun by the husband of the storyer or some male member of the people group team. While it is good to have these two different inputs to husbands and wives, it can lead to some confusion as one group is ahead of the other and the participants share what they are hearing, and if the teaching tracks go in significantly different directions. Synchronizing the lessons if at all possible.

Among traditionally hostile peoples it is often wise to keep the lessons more story and less exposition or explanation. Sensitizing questions may still be asked to "open the pores" a bit. And factual post-story questions about the stories may not be a problem. As interest grows and as you the storyer sense a building trust relationship using the authority of God's Word then more interpretative teaching, whether explanation or thought-provoking questions may be used. Younger women are generally more curious than older men. Stir up their curiosity and use the opportunity to get in important points.

Early sessions may be quite brief with the story and little else. Later sessions should grow in length as interest builds and the women's worldview is challenged by the stories and the discussions before and after the stories. Beginning storyers often fret about filling the time with "just a story". Various possibilities exist for lengthening an early session before the interest builds up and a trust relationship forms. Games like listening task activities related to some point in the story can be used. These can be guessing games in which the women try to guess in advance about some part of the story. Role play can be used where a story is stopped and the women asked to finish the story. After several versions, then the storyer wraps up the story. Visuals (but typically not pictures of Bible characters for Muslims) may be used to provoke curiosity and give opportunity for the guessing game. Be creative. Get several members of the team together to work out some activities for building a relationship and initiating teaching.

The First Session—The first session and those approaching the last are in some ways the most crucial. The first session sets the tone for the group though it may take several sessions for the group to get into its swing of things. Don't overfill the women with too much information in the first session. Leave them a bit hungry and curious to hear more. The storyer doesn't really know the group yet so learning is going on both ways. Overly long sessions can tire the listeners. With each following session look for opportunity to increase the engagement with the women using variety to keep interest and attention level up.

It may take several "first sessions" to get going. Don't become discouraged. LaNette Thompson in her first experience with a group of women in Burkina Faso began with a small group as she told the creation story of Adam and Eve. As other women came to join that first session LaNette had to retell the story several times. Finally in exasperation she had decided that was the final repetition of the story. You can already guess what happened. Another woman arrived and was seated right at LaNette's feet. LaNette just looked at the woman wondering what to do. Finally one of the women tugged on LaNette's skirt and said, "Tell the story again. She hasn't heard it." So be prepared to be flexible, even repetitious!

Conducting the Storying Session—Every teacher has their own style. Some are very informal and others are more secure in a highly structured and controlled lesson. This trainer prefers a more informal lesson with direction and preparation to give more direction if the discussion wavers or wanders. Others prefer a more structured lesson to maintain control among those of the worldview she works with. The rationale behind the *HEAVEN IS FOR WOMEN* lessons is a resource which you the storyer can expand, adapt or select from as needed. Do not be pressured to use all the questions or to use them as stated. The questions are there as suggestions to stimulate your thinking as you prepare to teach and to suggest some helpful directions to pursue in achieving the goal of bringing the women to a relationship with God the Father through Jesus as the "doorway to heaven".

Toward the End of the Sessions—The lessons, as it gets nearer the time to draw the net, become more crucial. More crucial, in fact, than the final lessons when the net is drawn. If the preparation fails, then the harvest fails. Prayer should be intense in the beginning as you probe for openness among the women. Toward the end prayer is intense toward asking the Holy Spirit to keep the women listening and their hearts open. After the earlier series of stories to probe and challenge the women’s worldview, now the task is to prepare them for making the commitment to believe along with whatever change that involves.

For Muslim women it is a change from following a legalism of ritual prayers, memorizing their holy book and reciting it and other required sayings, fasting and feasting, offerings, dress and behavior rules to obtain God’s mercy. For those in folk Islam it will also mean a shift away from looking to magic charms and amulets and visits to traditional medicine practitioners (witch doctors or whatever they are called) and holy places to a faith in Christ alone to forgive their sins and be their gateway to the Father in prayer.

Hindu women will face a similar change away from ritual, appeasement of spirits and village gods, being a devotee of a particular major patron god, sorcerers and shamans, and other practices common to folk Hinduism.

There may be a tendency on the part of the storyer to rush into the final sessions. Don’t! Also be careful about overloading the women with more than the usual amount of new information as the end approaches. In fact, it is far wiser to be even more careful and deliberate and even to slow down to spend more time with review to be sure they are still tracking you. Look for unusual interruptions, intense spiritual disturbance, and efforts to confuse and lead the women astray. By this time you should be signaling to the women that an opportunity for commitment is coming soon. All along have been little “invitationettes” as you have dealt with spiritual life and what God expects, soon the time of making a decision is coming. Will the women be prepared to make that leap of faith?

Potential Problems to Consider—If you have a weak heart, don’t read this section! Seriously, you will more than likely have one or more of the following problems. It happens to the best of us. Since every situation and group is different the following are only suggestions for facing the problems. Network with others on your team and with other GCC’s working among your target group. Share your problems and what you have done to overcome them. Listen to their input. You will find that you are not alone!

Literacy—Low literacy, especially among rural women in the Muslim and Hindu world is most common. They can’t read so you must. It is always good to have someone to be reading selected passages to the women during the times between your storying sessions. You may want to read larger portions of the stories before telling them. Pay attention to two things: One is that in the larger passages you may need to decide how to reword or re-express certain terms which may not be well-received early on. You’ve seen this in the use of “descendants of Abraham” for “Israelites”, etc. In passages with a large number of proper names it can be confusing. In many of the stories you have noticed that instead of naming a town the story simply said “their home” or “the next town”, etc. Unless it is important for the women to know that it was the Philistines one could just say “their enemy” or a “neighboring enemy country”? The second reason is that sometimes there are elements in the longer written story in the Bible that can draw away the listeners’ attention from the main storyline. If this happens at the end of a story—like Noah’s drunkenness and his son’s seeing his nakedness, it can be the last and lingering thing the listeners remember, and not the important story of God’s mercy on Noah’s family and judgment on the sinful people.

Changing audience—This refers to the fact that newcomers will join the group. What will you do? This trainer once attended a Sunday School Class where the teacher felt enjoined to begin again every time another class member arrived. She was seldom able to finish her lesson as time ran out. To some extent you can count on the women to share much of the story that has previously been taught. In fact, the person may have already heard it and

this is why they have come to join the group. In the beginning this is not a major problem. Later on it is as you have been carefully and strategically building toward a decision point. If a significant number drift in late you may want to conduct a catch-up class just for them. Yes, it is more work! But then again, it is for the kingdom cause.

Some will drop out of the group for various reasons. It is frustrating for a teacher when group members attend on an irregular basis. Often, all is not lost as they may still be getting a synopsis of the lesson from those who did attend. One possible solution is to tape the sessions and leave the cassette behind with the women so they may review it at their leisure and allow those who could not attend to listen as well. Some will drop out because of family pressure. There is not much you can do except to pray for the person by name and keep in mind that as you teach the women they may be teaching the dropped-out person.

Group Shut-down—This happens when those in authority decide that you are interfering with or challenging their authority or disturbing their community and religious life. When this happens there may not be anything overt that you may do. Some have been able to move over to a nearby location which is still accessible and continue. Others have had to move the teaching session into a home or some “house of peace” who will accept them. This is not always good as it tends to exclude some women, especially in caste societies. Sometimes it may be possible to restart a group later when things have cooled down or leadership is changed. There are reports of prayers for a change of leadership and God answered the prayer resulting in a change for the positive.

Sometimes the cause of shutting down a group is not their fault but the storyer’s as they have conflicting assignments or expectations from their coordinators. If there are minor occasions when the storyer must be away, it may be possible to train an assistant who can at least conduct a review of previous stories to keep the group together.

Pressure to Jump Ahead—This comes again from both those in the group and possibly (horrors!) from the storyer themselves. This is more common in countries where there is some existing Christian teaching and knowledge among the people. Jumping ahead comes when they want to begin a worship service or ask why they can’t do it, or begin asking questions about Jesus, the Son of God, or the Israelites (which the Muslims have been taught not to like), or any other topic or term you haven’t prepared them for. About the best one can do is to say, “We haven’t come to that yet. When we do, we’ll talk about it.”

Another pressure to jump ahead comes from fear of people in the group dying before you get to the story of Jesus and present the gospel to them. If one of the women does have previous knowledge that is disposing her to readiness to make a profession of faith, then by all means take that person aside, test their knowledge and lead them to faith in Christ if they are ready. Ask them to keep their peace until the others are ready to make the same decision.

Chasing Rabbits and Dealing with Supposed Bible Errors—Chasing rabbits is where the women get off track and want to squander the session time dealing with something interesting to them but not of consequence to the story and lesson. Some allowance can be made for this if the issue is a cultural thing in the story that is quite different from their own culture and practice. Otherwise don’t give in just because you happen to know the answer and would enjoy talking about the issue, too. Do it after the session ends over tea if you must. In a Bible storying session initiative is typically *no more than one-third* the women’s initiative and *two-thirds* the Bible storyer’s initiative. Always remain in control to keep focus and direction or discontinue until a basis for continuing can be established.

You may on rare occasions encounter younger women who have been coached on supposed Bible errors which they may bring up in the course of a discussion. There are a number of books out now which list these supposed errors or inconsistencies. This trainer has tried at times to deal with some of them and occasionally to the satisfaction of the group. Some are difficult to explain away, even by expert theologians. If you get some from the women, don’t try to deal with them on the spot. Get help if you really must deal with them

before the group will move on.

Don't get into debates with more vocal members of the group. You are presenting stories from the Bible and that is what the Bible says. Remember, the Bible was written by forty or more inspired writers who were guided by God so there is a consistency in what the Word teaches. True, there is also a progressive revelation of some truths as God was able to lead the people into a strong faith and life pleasing to Him. Also remember that there is an integrity in the Bible story as well as the relationship between the Bible stories that does not exist in other holy books. Muslims have fragmentary references to the major stories with some major errors in them due to popular versions of the stories during Mohammed's time.

Should the Qur'an Be Used in Storying Sessions?—No, the storyer should not use it as this opens the door for debate. These sessions are Bible storying sessions in which the story kernel comes from the Bible and is taught in a manner consistent with other Bible references. Some well-trained women storyers may be able to handle using Qur'anic references to answer questions or make points. Leave it to them. Stay with the Bible, your book!

Adjusting the Session Content—If the women are consistently being overloaded, reduce the lesson content. If stories are too long for them to handle, try summarizing the stories even more. You are probably aware that some of the longer stories have been greatly summarized in this manual's lessons. Too much summary can kill a story if what is lost is dialog. Try to think: What do the women need to hear in order to understand this story?

Be prepared to adjust the story list and the lesson content as needed. One way to expand the discussion time is to do a progressive questioning beginning with obvious factual details, then moving on to what happened (who did what), who said what (if God were speaking), what was the end result, and what-if questions that make the women think about the story if something in it were changed, or if they were in the story. Then finally, what can one learn from this story? Or how does it apply to their lives?

Disturbances Due to Poor Location or Outsiders Entering the Group—The ideal location is one accessible to any woman who wants to attend. This location may also make the session available to those who could disturb it. If near a market or place where people are talking or passing there could be disturbance. Though it is not supposed to happen in an Islamic society, drunks can wander into sessions and seriously disturb them.

Outsiders entering the group may bring with them their references which they proceed to use, or may have the evil intent of disrupting the group out of jealousy or desire to end "blasphemy" by the storyer.

Seasonal Disturbances—These are due to inclement weather—monsoonal or non-seasonal rains preventing public gathering. Move inside if possible or time storying sessions to take advantage of good weather seasons.

Another is agricultural seasons during preparation of fields, planting and harvesting when their food crop takes precedence. Night sessions may still be possible if they are not too tired. Hot seasons when agriculture is idle may be generally best.

Urban areas are more likely disrupted by major festivals and political events.



Heaven Is For Women

BRINGING CLOSURE & INVITATION TO BELIEVE

Cultivation—From the very first story session the invitation is open to hear, consider, believe and decide to act by professing faith in the One who has come to show us the way to Heaven, and who has gone before us to prepare a place for us. The story sessions attempt to build systematically from where many of the women are likely to be in their beliefs and spiritual life toward where they need to be in Christ. It would be premature to offer an invitation to believe on Christ as Savior until there is understanding about the need to do so. Still, there should be a standing invitation to go further as each story session closes. Provide opportunity for continued discussion of what has been covered to the present. Try to avoid discussing what the women do not yet have a basis for understanding.

If one of the women does early indicate her desire to respond to the story, discussion or memory verse, and appears ready to make a decision, take her aside privately and examine her understanding about sin and accountability to God, and His provision for restoring her broken relationship through Jesus. If she understands this, then share with her what it means to believe on Christ as Savior and how that belief relates to one's going to Heaven. If the woman is not yet ready, then tell her she is very near and that God is giving her an understanding heart.

If the woman is ready and does indicate a readiness to profess her faith in Christ, and does so without prompting, then pray with her, lead her to confess her sinful condition and profess her faith in Christ. Give her some verses of assurance, but remind her that her sisters are not yet ready and need more time.

Confrontation—Remember that with many women you will be giving an invitation that is potentially very difficult for them to respond to overtly. Will you be asking them to do something they are fearful to do because of possible (or certain) consequences to them because of their husbands or other family members? Yet there must be some closure point at which the women must decide if what they have heard is true or not. And if it is true, how must they respond to it?

In Western culture with its individualism and relative freedom for women there is little problem for a woman to express her decision to follow Christ, to accept the gift of eternal life (Heaven) by professing her faith in Christ as Savior.

If there has been no pre-closure response (women already coming under conviction that the gospel is true and that the invitation to eternal life is for them) in which some members of the group have expressed either privately or in the group their desire to follow Christ, then the story session leader will need decide how best to present that opportunity.

The *HEAVEN IS FOR WOMEN* lessons have a suggested invitation built into them. Other favorite or proven Scripture approaches may be used. When the story session leader senses a readiness among the women (hopefully more than one or two), then move the group toward the time of invitation. Generally the women will prefer that which is more relational (even touching the emotions) than a rational propositional invitation. Don't rush into this without much prayer. Don't push the women to do that which they are not ready to do.

Your own testimony may be helpful here to show how you responded to this message about salvation, eternal life and Heaven.

Closure—This comes at the point of moving in the last story session to an open opportunity to respond to the package of stories and discussion times. Several sessions

before the final one begin to discuss the need to act upon what we know in our hearts is true. Remind the women God is merciful in that He has in many ways told us what we need to know to obtain Heaven. Then it is up to us to believe what God has said and to trust His Word as true. Remind them that Heaven (forgiveness, salvation, eternal life) is a gift that cannot be earned, only accepted. And that must be done in this life.

Considerations for Giving an Invitation to Respond—In most places the response to the invitation will need to be private, a heart decision known only to the believer and God. For some there may be enough trust in the story session leader to tell her, but not reveal the decision to the group of women. If others in the group know, word will get out about who has believed (become a Christian) and who hasn't. A public profession of faith is always an ideal because it indicates courage to take a stand, and it is a testimony to others in the group and may help to give them courage to make public their profession of faith.

There are many ways to signal that one has made a decision to believe in Jesus as Savior. Of course, the most obvious is to have each woman tell so verbally, stating that she confesses her sinfulness, acknowledges her need for forgiveness and a Savior, and that she accepts what Christ has provided for her in this life and the life to come. A show of hands or having those who believe to stand may be appropriate in some places. Standing or some other method of public signaling increases the desire of those weaker in faith to join those who do.

Where fear of reprisal and persecution is strong, the signal may need to be a private one whispered in the ear of the story session leader, written out on a piece of paper and given to the leader, or some other private means by which the leader can know but the others in the group will not know the decision. If some signal like a piece of paper is used, have everyone take a piece of paper if they can write and put their response on it—either yes or no. Treat their replies in strictest confidence and let the women be the ones to share the news with others. Use your knowledge of their decisions to pray for each one to affirm them or to encourage them to do what they need to do.

Using the Jesus Film—Some have expressed good results with showing the Jesus Film at the conclusion of the story lessons. The film recaps the stories of Jesus and contains an invitation as it revisits the events in the story. While it is more impersonal than an invitation given by the storyer, the film does present an effective invitation. Also it is a group activity and the response of each individual is often heightened by responses of others in the group as they view the film together.

Always be prepared with a personal invitation in the event the film does not bring closure. The same considerations apply as earlier about how the women might signal their response according to their culture, fear of persecution and any other factors inhibiting a public disclosure of their faith in Jesus as Savior.

One potential drawback with a public screening of the Jesus Film is that men may be present which may change the chemistry of the women's group. A video presentation in a secluded place with just women present may keep the intimacy of the group. If a public showing is planned for all to attend, then plan to press the invitation later in the intimate group of women only.

Change of Religion Versus Change of Relationship—The attempt to evangelize will be viewed by many as an attempt to get the women to change their religion to the "Christian religion". Keep the focus upon the change of relationship. In our sins we are far away and estranged from God: the relationship is broken. In Christ there is possible a new and lasting relationship with the Father, a relationship as part of God's family of forgiven believers.



Heaven Is For Women

AFFIRMING NEW BELIEVERS

Affirming New Believers—It is our nature as humans to immediately seek affirmation that we have made the right decision. Sometimes we seek this affirmation from a respected leader or teacher. Others may seek it from close friends or family. Sometimes we speak about the “spiritual glow”, the joy and peace, that comes when one has just given their heart to Jesus. This can quickly fade as the reality of a decision is opposed by hostile critics.

In the story of the temptation of Jesus we often think that Satan only came to test Jesus at that time. In truth, Satan shifted his tactics and began to attack Jesus from many directions, and he did it through his own family (see Mrk 3:20-21 & Jhn 7:5), his disciples (Mrk 8:32-33 & Luk 22:3-4), and the religious leaders and teachers of the law in their many testy trick questions. Jesus had already warned about the tactics of Satan to snatch away the word sown in those who hear it (Mrk 4:15).

In the same way it is no surprise that Satan comes to reclaim that which he has lost by sowing seeds of doubt and fear in the new believer’s heart. To guard against this happening there are three things the new believer needs immediately. One, of course, is a fellowship with Jesus through prayer. She has already prayed asking for forgiveness of her sin and to receive Jesus as her Savior. This opens the door. Now she needs to enter that door through more prayer—prayers of praise for what God had done for her, of thanksgiving for her forgiveness and salvation, and for peace and joy. She can pray for members of her family and for her friends who do not yet know Jesus as their Savior. The main thing is to get her started fellowshiping in prayer to strengthen the relationship.

Second is to give her more of the Word which she can stand on to resist Satan. Notice in Jesus’ own testing that three times he quoted from God’s Word. One of the purposes of the memory verses in the lessons is to begin building in a library of truth the new believer can recall and stand on when tested by Satan.

Third is a network of sister believers who share her faith. It is already a cultural characteristic for many of these women to have a strong network of family and friends. Unfortunately, these will likely not be believers. So the new believer needs a new network of believers for mutual support. Not all believers are created equal. There will be some who are strong in their conviction and well-founded in their understanding of what they have done. Others will be weaker and in need of immediate nurturing and encouragement. In many of these people groups an organized church is not an immediate option, but an initial fellowship of believers for mutual encouragement is. It may be a prayer group that meets to pray for one another and their families. It may be a simple Bible study or time when the women get together to encourage one another from the Word or using their memory verses.

As the Bible storyer you will want to get the women to continue with more sessions to continue the discipling. These lessons will look at some of the stories from Acts and from the Epistles with many references back to the Old Testament and Gospels. Prayer, praise and sharing will be a part of the sessions. If praise and Scripture songs have been introduced and are culturally appropriate, then provide for a time of singing. The sessions may now begin to take on a form similar to a worship service though the focus is on discipling and encouraging the believers. Intercession is one of the strongest ways to combat Satan’s discouragement.



Heaven Is For Women

BIBLE VERSES OF ASSURANCE

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so I would have told you. I am going to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.” Jhn 14:1-3

“The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: that if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. As the Scripture says, ‘Everyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame’.” Rom 10:8-9, 11

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ...In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding.” Eph 1:3, 7-8

“But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive in Christ even when we were dead in transgressions...For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.” Eph 2:5, 8

“...The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”
Php 4:5b-6

“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.” 1Pe 2:9-10

“Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well...He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.” 1Jn 5:1, 12

“...Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.” 2Ti 1:12

“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.’” Mat 25:34

“...And you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” 2Pe 1:11