

Significant Women In Scripture **Women of the Old Testament:**

We are going to begin our exploration of the scriptures with significant women of the Old Testament, and then in the next segment we will look at the New Testament. I selected these women, specifically, because I felt they lent themselves to the women in our churches and community today. We are like them, we can see ourselves in them, and God used them in significant ways. We are serving these women. Or, we are serving in women's ministry because we were once just like them.

When we look at the creation of man amongst the creation story, we see that God had created for him a perfect environment, everything he needed was provided for him. But God saw that it was not good for man to be alone, caused him to fall asleep, and took a rib from man. From this rib, God created woman and breathed life into her. The man was Adam, the woman was Eve. They were given instructions to go forth and multiply, filling the ends of the earth. In Genesis 3:15 God declares that the offspring of Eve would crush the serpent, who manipulated them into eating the forbidden fruit.

In the very beginning of the scriptures God establishes the significance of woman, that through her offspring, Christ would be born & overcome sin. Despite Eve's decision to listen to the serpent, and to sin against God's command... God still valued her, and used her for his glory. Our churches are full of fallen women, who have given into temptation of one sort or another. And, God has a plan for these women, where they are redeemed to glorify Him.

As we jump forward in the scriptures, we encounter Pharaoh's daughter. She was bathing in the Nile, when a basket caught her attention. She had no way of knowing what was in that basket, but she was drawn to it. Inside she would find a baby, a Hebrew baby boy that according to her father's decree should be dead. God softened her heart & she raised the baby as her own. She had no way of knowing the significance of this baby, but she followed her heart. In that decision, she became an instrument of God without even realizing it.

Women are relational beings, we like community and spending time with one another. In doing so, we also begin to influence each other in positive or negative ways. We have a "ripple effect" like stones tossed into a lake. In ministry, we become the stone that is tossed into a sea of women. The effects of our ministry will ripple outward toward other women in the church, the community and to the ends of the earth.

In Judges 4, we learn of Deborah the wise judge who God called up to lead Israel. So much of the scriptures centers around male leadership, that we can't afford to overlook the moment when God called a woman into a job that was predominantly led by men. There was something special about Deborah, a gift that God had entrusted her with for His purposes.

There is a strong parallel to Deborah in several women who are leading and teaching in the church today. This is not to say that God has changed the headship structures outlined in the scriptures. It merely points out that these are God's guidelines and He can adjust them at His will to meet His need, which He still does to this day. There are women today that God is equipping and calling into leadership, but we must be discerning between the calling of God and human want or desire.

As we move into the Book of Ruth, we are engaged by a beautiful story of the relationship between Naomi and her daughter in law, Ruth. Their bond was so tight, that even when Ruth could have been released to return to her own people (after the death of her husband), she opted to stay with her mother

in law. Ruth trusted Naomi, Naomi had a good reputation amongst her people as being wise. By following the advice of Naomi, Ruth would find herself remarried to a good man, who would provide for her and Naomi.

Naomi and Ruth are great examples of women in a mentoring relationship, where the younger and inexperienced is leaning on the older and wiser woman. When you look into the faces of the women at your church, you are seeing either a Ruth or a Naomi. Women's Ministry can help bring these women together.

In the book of Esther we learn a lot about how Esther would save her people, through her bravery and faith in God. But, a name we may pass by too quickly is her predecessor... Queen Vashti. The book of Esther tells of King Xerxes' big dinner, that he threw for his officials and officers. Many days into the celebration, and after a lot of wine, King Xerxes called Queen Vashti to come to the party. He wanted to show her off, because she was beautiful. But she denied the king, he was angry at this, and so she was banished.

You could question why Queen Vashti would dare refuse the King, but when you look at the circumstances surrounding it... the King wanted to show her off, like a prize. Vashti's refusal was protecting her dignity. There are many women in the church who may be divorced or who have had to walk away from family members or friends, because it was a toxic environment. Or, perhaps they stood up for Christ and it cost them, banishment from friends or family, or fired from their job. In our churches they find new friends and family.

In the book of Hosea, we meet Gomer... a woman known for her sexual promiscuity, who marries a godly man, who then leaves him for another man. And then that godly man, Hosea, brings her back and redeems their marriage. God was calling out the dysfunction in the relationship between Israel & Himself. Yet, we can still see a scenario like this play out in not just the world today, but in our churches too.

We have women who have some sort of a past in our church, a past kept in secret or in other cases pretty well known. But God's love for Gomer extends to the women in our churches today, the broken women, the women who are still trying to figure it out.

Many people will tell you that the scriptures are full of redeemed liars, cheats, murders, drunkards, and many other crude characters. You may hear about the heroes, who overcome giants with a sling and a stone, who lead the rebuilding of the holy city, men who were after God's own heart, loyal and faithful. There are also many stories about women.

Whether it's the unexpected hero of Pharaoh's daughter, the haughty villain of Potiphar's wife, or the in the right time for the right moment Queen, Esther.. women have had a very significant role in the Old Testament in advancing God's redemptive plan toward the New Testament. Their stories were included in God's story because He wanted it to be so. He is active in the hearts of man and woman alike. He uses the sin, redemption and faith of women repeatedly, because He loves us. We are worth more than rubies and pearls, greater value than the sparrows, women who fear the Lord and are worthy of praise.

These women of the past are no different than the women today, and we will see that exemplified more in the next segment on the significant women of the New Testament.