



Women of the Word

THE FAMILY TREE OF JESUS

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*They will be called oaks of righteousness,
a planting of the Lord
for the display of his splendor.
-Isaiah 61:3d*

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Introduction

For thirty-three years Jesus walked the earth as a sinless man who was the living Word of God. The women in his family tree, however, were anything but perfect. From their stories, we see the roots of our own struggles and recognize that we are all sinners in need of a Savior. The lives of Eve, Sarah, Rebekah, Leah, Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba, and Mary reveal messy and complicated circumstances. And yet, through the women in Jesus' family tree, we see God's redemptive hand at work. With each new branch, he prepared the way for Jesus, the Messiah, who would ultimately die on a cross to graft all people into his family tree.

"In the time of prophets and kings, the time of Mary and Joseph, it wasn't your line of credit, line of work, or line of accomplishments that explained who you were. It was your family line...Family gives you context...and the family tree of Christ always gives you hope."¹

Studying the lives of these women will challenge and encourage you. You'll see connections between the Old and New Testaments that will bring a deeper appreciation for both. At the same time, you'll discover inspiring opportunities for spiritual growth and personal application as you learn about God, his character, and how he uses unlikely women to accomplish his plans.

Getting the Most Out of This Study

Women of the Word: The Family Tree of Jesus has blessed a variety of people desiring to grow deeper in their knowledge of the Bible and relationships with God. It has ignited spiritual growth for people at different ages and stages in their faith journeys, from individuals studying alone to small groups of 10-12 to church based groups of over 100 people.

At first glance, the questions at the beginning of each lesson may seem a bit simplistic. These are designed to ensure you fully comprehend the material and to encourage you to read for detail. Many of the Scriptures you'll be reading are stories that you need to understand well before you can move on to the next phase of study.

The next type of questions you'll find are interpretation questions. These will help you delve a bit deeper into the stories to understand what they mean. Interpretation questions will ask you to synthesize details you've gathered and to figure out how they fit into the bigger picture.

Lastly, you'll discover application questions toward the end of each lesson. These are meant to take what you've learned from the text and to figure out how it applies to you personally. The questions will help you to discover what you can learn about God and his character as well as your own faith and character. They will also help you figure out ways to respond to the things you're studying. Many times you'll be asked to connect concepts between the Old and New Testaments during this phase of each lesson.

At the end of each lesson you'll see an essay that relates to and enhances the preceding week's study. Rather than reiterating topics already covered, the essays are designed to extend your understanding and application of the study. Most of the essays end with a few questions to consider individually or with a small group. You might want to mark quotes that stand out to you so you will be prepared to discuss them with others.

You will get the most out of this study if you take time to complete each lesson and read the essay on your own before meeting with a group to discuss them.

For Small Groups

Ideally, group members should complete the weekly lessons in advance. Discussion will be most effective when led by a consistent small group facilitator or leader. For comprehension questions at the beginning of each lesson, the facilitator may opt to have a few group members summarize the main points rather than methodically going through each question.

Depending on how much time you have, facilitators should choose the questions that will clarify the story and draw out a rich discussion focused on interpretation and personal application. Be sure to leave time to discuss the essays at the end of each lesson.

Always begin and end your small group time with prayer. Facilitators may want to open in prayer and then close by encouraging a group member to read one of the suggested prayers at the end of each day's study.

For Larger Groups

Divide your meeting time between small group discussions of about one hour and large group teaching times of 30-40 minutes. Additionally, be sure to include time for worship through music, transitions between segments, and fellowship. Consider inviting a few speakers to expand on the characters and lessons during teaching sessions that include all of the participants either before or after small group discussions.

Enhance Your Meetings with Inspiring Songs

Group leaders and facilitators can enhance the study time by playing Christian songs with themes relevant to the week's lesson. This is a great way to kick off the meeting and help the group transition into the discussion. Refer to the playlists at the end of each lesson. You'll also find the complete playlist for all of the songs at the back of the book.



Week One

EVE

Women of the Word: The Family Tree of Jesus

Week 1: Eve

Day 1

Eve: God's Image Bearer

The Bible begins in Genesis 1 by describing the creation of the world. Once God created the earth, sky, water, plants and animals he turned his attention to creating living beings that would bear his image.

1) Give an example of an "image bearer" from popular culture. Can you think of a person who is the "face of" a particular brand, team, company, era in history, political party, etc.?

2) What makes being an "image bearer" such a significant responsibility?

Read Genesis 1:26-31

3) What did God create? What was their appearance intended to show? (Verses 26-27)

Although mainstream religion typically assigns God the male gender, this passage makes it clear that God transcends the human limitations and understanding of male and female. Because both men and women were created in his image, they each embody parts of him. Only when we view males and females together do we get a deeper understanding of God. Also, note the use of the plural pronouns God uses in 1:26: "Let **us** make man in **our** image, in **our** likeness." (Bold print added for emphasis.) This is one of the first references to the Trinity (the-three-in-one Godhead comprised of Father, Son and Holy Spirit).

New Testament Connection

Just as Adam and Eve were the image bearers for God, the New Testament church is meant to be the image bearer as the Body of Christ on earth. "For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink." (1 Corinthians 12:13)

Read Galatians 5:22-25

4) Keeping “in step with the Spirit” is a way that Christians are God’s image-bearers. As you read the list of qualities that comprise the fruit of the spirit, which ones show prominently in your life? Which ones do you need to invite God to increase in you?

Personal Reflection:

5) Thinking back to the opening question in this lesson, in what ways are Christians called to be “the face of Christ”? Where are you doing well in this? Where do you need to invite God to help you grow more?

6) If you have accepted Christ, then God has given you spiritual gifts. Are you aware of the spiritual gifts he gave you? If so, how are you using them to build up the Body of Christ? If not, are you open to learning about them and allowing God to use them to bless others? (If you need to familiarize yourself with spiritual gifts see **1 Corinthians 12:7-11 and Romans 12:3-8**)

Closing Prayer: “God, help me to be sensitive to your Spirit. Show me how I can be an image bearer that reflects the love of Christ to bless others and honor you.”

Day 2

Eve: The Mandate to Multiply

Read Genesis 1:28 and 2:15

1) For what purpose were Adam and Eve created?

God gave Adam and Eve a mandate to multiply physically by producing children, but also to “subdue” and “rule” or “have dominion” over the earth. This cultural mandate was “profoundly spiritual and theological—the call to reproduce spiritually by multiplying worshipers of the living God and to extend God’s gracious rule over every inch of this planet. This staggering enterprise encompasses all dimensions of life...God’s creation design for Eve applies to *every* woman all the time, from the cradle to the grave.”¹

2) How does the preceding paragraph enhance your understanding of God's call for Adam and Eve to subdue and to rule (or have dominion) over the earth?

New Testament Connection

Jesus also taught about the importance of multiplying and extending God's kingdom on earth.

Read Matthew 6:9-13

3) The Lord's Prayer says "your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." What part do Christians play in bringing God's kingdom to earth? Can you give an example (large or small) of where you see this happening?

Read Matthew 28:16-20

4) This passage is known as The Great Commission. What is Jesus commanding his disciples to do here?

5) How much have you thought about the role you play in spreading God's kingdom on earth? Is this challenging or does it come naturally to you?

6) What reassurance does Jesus give his disciples in verse 20? How does this encourage you?

Read Matthew 9:35-38

In this passage Jesus uses a field that is ready for harvest to illustrate the many people who are ready to receive the good news of the gospel. He urges his followers to pray for more people to share the hope of Christ. God prepares the hearts of people to hear his word, Christians need to be ready to share it, just as 1 Peter 3:15 says: "But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect."

7) Sometimes Christians are hesitant to share their faith because they fear opposition or rejection. How does Matthew 9:37 counter this idea?

8) Jesus says in verse 37 that the workers are few. What does he tell us to ask the Lord in verse 38?

Personal Reflection

As you take a broader perspective on the Great Commission, consider how you can apply it to your life.

9) Are you willing and prepared to share the good news of Jesus with others? Is there somewhere you sense God calling you to spread his kingdom? Will you commit to praying and letting God use you more to accomplish his purposes?

10) What emotions does this topic raise for you? Will you commit to praying about any doubts or fears about this subject?

Closing Prayer: "God, help me to recognize the places where you have prepared people to hear your gospel. Use me to multiply your kingdom on earth. Show me where I could be more mindful about doing this in my daily life. Help me relinquish my fears to you. I invite your Spirit to guide me in this."

Day 3

Eve: A Strong Helper

Read Genesis 2:18-25

1) What is your reaction to the idea of Eve being created as a "helper" for Adam?

The word "helper" used in verse 18 is translated as "ezer" (pronounced with a long "a" sound, like "razor"). This word is used nineteen times in the Old Testament, with sixteen of them referring to God as Israel's helper in times of trouble.² "The *ezer* is a warrior, and this has far-reaching implications for women, not only in marriage, but in *every* relationship, season, and walk of life."³

God created Eve to work with Adam to fulfill the commandment to be fruitful, multiply, rule and subdue the earth. They had dominion over the earth and worked to advance God's kingdom in their hearts and in the world God had made.

2) How does this information enhance your understanding of Eve's role and the ultimate part all women play in God's plan?

3) God designed men and women to be allies, not competitors. Where have you seen this alliance work well? Where has competition between the sexes caused problems?

New Testament Connection

Jesus valued women and was much more inclusive of them than was typical for the culture in the time period he lived. Two great stories show how women played a role as his "strong helpers" furthering his gospel message.

Read John 4:1-30

4) There were several reasons that Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman was unique. Look at verses 9 & 18 to find two things about this woman that would have made it unacceptable for a typical rabbi to speak with her.

5) According to verses 25-26, what important fact did Jesus choose to reveal to the woman?

6) What was the woman's response to Jesus' claim? (Verses 28-30) How did this woman show that she was Jesus' ally by her response?

Read John 4:39-42

7) How did the woman advance God's kingdom and Jesus' purpose for coming to earth? (See verses 39-42)

Read John 20:1-18

8) Who was the first person to realize Jesus' tomb was empty? (Verse 1)

9) Who was the first person Jesus appeared to after his resurrection? (Verses 14-16)

10) What did Jesus instruct her to do? (Verse 17)

11) What message did she take to the disciples? (Verse 18)

Jesus' first claim that he was the Messiah was made to the woman at the well in John chapter 4. His first appearance after his resurrection was to a woman. He began and ended his ministry with women co-laboring beside him. As his "ezers" they courageously shared the good news that he was the Messiah and Risen Lord.

Personal Reflection

12) Has anything about your understanding of women as "strong helpers" changed as a result of what you learned here? Write one thing you want to remember.

Closing Prayer: "God, help me to embrace my role as an 'ezer' advancing your kingdom on earth. Help me to be a strong helper, no matter what stage of life I'm in."

Day 4

Eve: A Sinner

Eve is probably best known for being the first person to disobey God. Together Eve and Adam chose to use their free will to turn their backs on God, causing sin to taint creation and to bring lasting consequences for every generation to follow.

Read Genesis 3:1-24 to understand the events in context.

Genesis 3:1-7

1) Why do you think God planted the tree in the garden and allowed Adam and Eve to decide whether or not they wanted to obey him?

2) How did Satan, in the form of the serpent, prompt Eve to doubt God's goodness?

3) What attracted Eve to the fruit? (Verse 6)

4) What happened after she and Adam ate it? (Verse 7)

"The real problem was in rejecting and disobeying God's Word... instead of relying on the truth, she gave way. God's voice became one of many instead of the one voice against whom all others should be measured. She was completely taken in, tempted, and seduced by the serpent's words...Eve and Adam turned their backs on God by choosing to become like God *without him*—without the long road of faith and obedience and doing the hard work of forging a relationship with him. It was a short cut that could never deliver what the serpent promised."⁴

5) Eve saw an opportunity to have power and control on her own, without God. How do you see this same issue still plaguing people today? Can you relate personally?

Genesis 3:8-13

6) What was Adam and Eve's first reaction to God after they sinned? (Verse 8)

7) God asked three questions in verses 9 & 11 even though he is omniscient and knew the answers. Why do you think he asked them? How does this relate to the free will he gave to Adam and Eve?

8) Did they accept responsibility for their actions? Explain how you reached this conclusion.

Genesis 3:14-24

9) What were the consequences of sin for Eve? (Verse 16)

“After Eve and Adam ate the forbidden fruit, relationships between men and women collapsed from unity into tension and conflict. Instead of being valued as the man’s strongest ally and spiritual resource, the *ezer* became an object to possess and control. The noble calling to rule and subdue the earth in God’s name was perverted, as male and female tried to rule and subdue each other. The vast shared global vision God gave them at creation constricted into narrowly defined roles, and male and female divided life into separate spheres.”⁵

10) What examples come to mind that illustrate the conflict between men and women at different points in history? How has this tension thwarted efforts to further God’s kingdom on earth?

11) What were the consequences for Adam? (Verse 18-19)

12) What provision did God make for Adam and Eve? (Verse 21)

God’s provision here was the first animal sacrifice in the Bible. He did it to provide skins to cover Adam and Eve’s shame over being naked. God provided for them what they could not provide for themselves. We see this theme repeated throughout Scripture, in God’s covenant with Abraham (Genesis 12), in the Passover (Exodus 12), in animal sacrifices for atonement of sins throughout the Old Testament and ultimately, in Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross.

13) Why did God banish Adam and Eve from the garden? (Verse 22-24)

New Testament Connection

Adam and Eve did not die immediately after eating the fruit, but the result of their sin was ultimate death. The apostle Paul explains this consequence in the New Testament: “For the wages of sin is death.” (Romans 6:23a)

14) How do you see the impact of Eve and Adam's decision reflected in Romans 6:23?

Personal Reflection

Satan still deceives people today. The best defense against him is to know God's standards. Studying the Bible enables us to learn God's truth and to trust that he has our best interests at the heart of his plan.

15) Can you think of a time when you or someone you know failed to see God's goodness and chose to believe he was withholding something good?

Today's lesson ends on a hard note. Take some time to feel the weight of the consequences of sin. Reflect on how we are powerless to save ourselves. This will prepare you to experience deep joy and gratitude as you move to Day 5. Thankfully God had a plan for redemption. Be sure to make time for tomorrow's lesson—you won't want to miss this important message.

Closing Prayer: "God, help me to understand the weight of my sin so that I can have deeper gratitude for your grace."

Day 5

Eve: The First Woman of the Word

Adam and Eve used their free will to follow their own path instead of trusting God's plan for them. Their choice to eat from the forbidden tree tainted God's perfect world with the stench of sin. Because God is holy, he will not tolerate sin. His pure, just, and righteous holiness destroys anything in his presence that is not holy, much like a fire consumes anything flammable. The direction God's image-bearers had chosen would lead them on a deadly path away from his presence for eternity. Despite Adam and Eve's decision to sin, God continued to love them. Amazingly, he knew what choice they would make before they ate the forbidden fruit and already had a plan to redeem the world from sin.

Read Genesis 3:14-15

1) How did God curse the serpent for deceiving Adam and Eve? (Verse 14)

2) What would take place between the woman's offspring/seed and the serpent? (Verse 15)

This prophecy proclaims the ongoing struggle between humankind and Satan throughout the generations. “The seed of the serpent refers to natural humanity whom he has led into rebellion against God. Humanity is now divided into two communities: the elect, who love God, and the reprobate, who love self.”⁶

New Testament Connection

The devil nips at our heels, but we have been assured that Eve’s offspring will ultimately crush his head.

Read Romans 16:20 and write the verse below.

Although we still await Satan’s final demise, God has already given us the solution to Adam and Eve’s choice to sin. The ultimate offspring described in Genesis was Jesus. He came through Eve’s third child, Seth (Luke 3:38). As the mother of Seth, this makes Eve the first “Woman of the Word.”

The “Word” with a capital “W” refers to Jesus, who was with God from the day the world was created. He became the living Word of God in order to save the world from sin.

Read John 1:1-3 and John 1:14

3) What did the Word become? Where did he dwell?

“Because [Jesus] was not only finite man but also infinite God, he had the infinite capacity to take on himself the sins of the world. When Jesus was executed on the cross more than two thousand years ago, God accepted his death as a substitute for ours. The just and righteous nature of God was satisfied. Justice was done; a penalty was paid. So at that point God’s love nature was set free from the constrictions of justice, and he could accept us again and offer us what we had lost in Eden—that original relationship in which we could experience his love and glory.”⁷

Read Romans 5:8-9

4) How did God demonstrate his love?

5) From what are we saved as a result?

Not only did Jesus die for the sins of humankind, he also demonstrated his victory over sin, death and Satan by rising from death.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:3-7

6) According to the apostle Paul, there were many witnesses to confirm that Jesus rose from death. List them below.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:20-22 and Romans 5:18-19

7) How did Jesus make right what Adam and Eve made wrong?

Jesus died for all of mankind, but each of us must personally decide if we want to enter into a relationship with God through him. In John 14:6 Jesus says, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." God reached toward us by sending Jesus to earth, it is our decision whether or not we want to reach back toward him. Jesus made it clear that he was the only way for the sinful world to be reconciled to God.

Read Romans 10:9 (NIV) and fill in the blanks: If you _____ with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and _____ in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

Read 1 John 1:9

8) What must we do to be purified from our sin (called "unrighteousness" in this passage)?

Read Ephesians 2:8-9 (NIV) and fill in the blanks: By _____ you have been saved, through _____.

9) Is it possible for us to save ourselves by being "good" people?

Personal Reflection

Grace is God's free gift to us, despite the fact that we are totally undeserving. It is not something we earn, but something we receive through accepting Christ as the one who paid the penalty for our sins. He is the fulfillment of the prophecy from Genesis: the One who would crush the serpent's head.

10) Is there anything in this lesson that has enhanced your understanding of God's grace on a personal level?

11) What does the study of Eve teach you about God's character? Record what you learn on the summary page at the end of this book.

12) In the space below, write one thing you learned this week that you want to remember.

Closing Prayer: If you have not personally accepted Jesus, consider praying something like this when you feel ready: "Jesus, I want to know you personally. Thank you for dying on the cross for my sins. I open the door of my life and receive you as my Savior and Lord. Thank you for forgiving my sins and giving me eternal life. Please take control of my life and make me the kind of person you want me to be. Amen."

If you already know Jesus as your Savior, pray and thank him for paying the wages for your sins and enabling you to re-establish what was lost in the Garden of Eden.

Eve Playlist:

"Strong Enough to Save" by Tenth Avenue North

"No Longer Slaves" by Bethel Music

"Scandal of Grace" by Hillsong United

"Greater is He" by Blanca

AUTHORITY LOST AND RECLAIMED

Squaring my shoulders, I tried to smile, hoping no one could see my heart thumping wildly as the teacher spoke, "Class, this is our new student teacher, Miss Callahan. She'll be taking over for the rest of the semester and I expect you to show her some respect."

One or two expressionless sophomores made eye contact with me; the rest slumped in their chairs or talked with their seatmates. No one acknowledged the teacher's announcement. As an unseasoned student teacher ready to start my first classroom assignment, the scene in front of me was hardly encouraging.

That semester of student teaching was one of the most challenging times in my life. The two classes I taught behaved in almost opposite ways: the sophomores were disengaged and disrespectful while the seniors were open and willing to learn. It wasn't that my teaching methods varied from one class to the other or even that the kids were different ages. The issue was the way the students viewed my master teachers, the ultimate authorities in the classroom. One teacher had lost the attention and respect of her students in September, so by the time I arrived in January, her authority meant nothing. I was fighting a losing battle to win their respect. The other teacher, however, was both feared and esteemed. Her authority meant something, so as her student teacher, the class took my authority seriously too.

This memory surfaced as I pondered the concept of authority reading the story of Adam and Eve in Genesis 1-3. Just after creating Adam and Eve, God blessed them and said: "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground." (Genesis 1:28)

God gave Adam and Eve authority to rule over the world. They had the free will to choose to do things his way or to follow their own path. Although everything he had given them was good, it wasn't long before Satan came in the form of a serpent and enticed Eve to doubt God. By tempting her to disobey, the crafty snake implied God might be withholding something desirable from her saying,

"God knows that when you eat from 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 it. 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. (Genesis 3:5-7)

By choosing to disobey God, Adam and Eve gave away the authority he had given them at creation. Although God remained the ultimate and sovereign authority, he allowed Adam and Eve to exercise their free will, even though it went against him. But they also had to live with the consequences of their choice. They were too naïve to understand that everything under their authority would fall when they fell. Their actions brought a curse on all of creation and gave Satan authority over all that God had given them.

This is why many years later, when Jesus was just beginning his earthly ministry, Satan could legitimately claim authority over the earth when he tempted Jesus: “The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, ‘I will give you all their authority and splendor; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. If you worship me, it will all be yours.’” (Luke 4:5-7)

Fortunately, Jesus retraced Adam and Eve’s footsteps to the point of temptation and succeeded in obedience where they had failed. Although Jesus was fully God, he set aside that part of himself so that he could function completely as a human: “[Jesus] Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!” (Philippians 2:6-8)

When God resurrected Jesus from death, Satan was defeated and stripped of his authority: “For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive... Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.” (1 Corinthians 15:21-22, 24-25)

Jesus gave us the same Holy Spirit that empowered him, making it possible for us to be obedient to God and to have an intimate relationship with him (see John 14:11-21). Jesus returned us to the original place of authority for which we were created. He said to his disciples: “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you.” (Luke 10:18-19)

Jesus, our master teacher, commands ultimate authority and respect and as his “student teachers,” we have access to that same authority over the spiritual realm. It is ours to claim, if only we will recognize this and act upon it. Knowing how to use our authority requires diligent study and application of God’s Word.

Many believers choose not to learn about spiritual warfare and spiritual authority because they find it confusing or frightening. Sadly, our lack of knowledge about the topic just emboldens the enemy. “Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.” (1 Peter 5:8) The enemy pushes boundaries, preying on weakness and taking advantage of people who don’t understand the spiritual authority they have through Christ.

Although Satan has temporary authority until Christ’s return, we have power through Jesus to overcome him every day. There is no need to fear. Ultimately, we can rest in the knowledge that God will keep the promise he made to Eve when he said her offspring would eventually crush the serpent’s head (see Genesis 3:15). The apostle Paul reminds us of this saying, “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.” (Romans 16:20a)

If you are a follower of Jesus, God has given you spiritual authority. Are you using it to combat the enemy? Learn about it and then use it to unleash God’s rule and reign in your spheres of influence.