



May – June 2023

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Quotable Quotes

'Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God.' Corrie Ten Boom

'Do ordinary things with extraordinary love.' Mother Teresa

When life is sweet, say thank you and celebrate.

And when life is bitter, say thank you and grow.' Shauna Niequist

'God's love is not based on me. It is simply placed on me.

And it is the place from which I should live loved.' Lysa TerKeurst

'I did my best and God did the rest.' Hattie McDaniel

'Faith does not eliminate questions,
but faith knows where to take them.' Elisabeth Elliot



Introduction

This series is linked to developing our 2023 teaching of: **‘Equip and encourage in renewal as disciples of Jesus: in prayer, devotion and discipleship.’** We have already spent some time immersing ourselves in the journey through the Lord’s Prayer at the beginning of this year, to explore and renew our **prayer-lives** more widely. To build upon our individual relationships with Him.

As we go on to think more deeply about our **devotion** and worship before God, and our **discipleship** following alongside Him, there are many biblical texts of course that enrich us and teach us these truths. Some of these profound truths have been re-visited and revealed to us, in our recent series on **1 John**. 1 John being an epistle written from an eyewitness account by John with a plea to follow Jesus, who is the light of the world, love personified and the bringer of eternal life. This wisdom was written down by a man who spent much time with Jesus as he walked beside Him on the earth.

Many other men and women have of course also witnessed the work and wonders of Jesus’ ministry on earth too. This series here takes particular notice of the accounts of some of the women who were involved in Jesus’ life. Women who walked with Jesus, worked with Jesus and worshipped Jesus. These women teach us a great deal about who Jesus was and what Jesus did through His years lived amongst the people.

God has manifested himself in all his image-bearers. Some attributes are more pronounced in men, others in women. The body of Christ today is a community deliberately nurturing the next generation, and women play a pivotal role in that sacred trust. Women in the NT church also played an important role in ministry in various capacities, as shown by characters such as Phoebe, Lydia and Priscilla. By continuing to identify and celebrate everyone, our churches will be enriched because the image of God will shine brightly through all His children.

Many women are recorded by name in the New Testament which was very unusual in Jewish writings of the time. Both Jesus and his apostles valued their priceless contribution to the work of the gospel which was counter-cultural. Leadership was shared between men and women according to their talents. Paul’s words to the Galatians ‘there is neither male or female, for we are all one in Christ’ was in defiance of the prevailing culture of the first century. As we look at **Devotion and Discipleship** in this present series, we hope to make a deeper study in these following areas:

1. Worship Him not ourselves - intimacy
2. His plan not ours - will
3. Be still not rushed - patience
4. Connect not disengage - compassion
5. Unite not divide - love
6. Understanding not ignorance - wisdom
7. Flexible not fixed - courage
8. Faithfulness - witness

NT women have much to teach us about these ‘themes and characteristics’ from their bible stories, action and lives.

Week 1: Intimacy

Worship Him not ourselves



Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38-42)
Anna (Luke 2:36-38)

Mary and Martha

³⁸ As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. ³⁹ She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. ⁴⁰ But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" ⁴¹ "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, ⁴² but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

Anna

³⁶ There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, ³⁷ and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. ³⁸ Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

Intimacy requires the greatest amount of trust in our relationships. It is only when we feel truly safe with somebody that we become willing to share the deepest core of who we are. It is up close and personal. These women in scripture (above), showed great devotion and trust towards Jesus. For example, **Mary** (Luke 10:39) wanted only to be close to Jesus, she didn't care about any of the jobs to be done but just wanted to be in His presence. Jesus affirmed her good choice of action (Luke 10:42), much to her sister's annoyance.

Reflections and Questions:

1. Read the chosen bible passage in at least two versions. What stands out for you?
2. Intimacy requires a deep trust – do you trust Jesus completely?
3. What about your trust for family members or friends – is that the same?
4. In the story of Mary and Martha do you relate more to Mary's or Martha's personality? Do you understand the other character and why they act like that?
5. Growing up who was the most spiritually influential person in your life?
6. Where are you and what are you doing when you feel closest to God?
7. What would you change or add in to church life for us to grow in spiritual intimacy?
8. What do you think heaven is going to be like?

Week 2: His Will

His plan not ours



Mary Jesus' Mother (Luke 1:45-55)

⁴⁵“You are blessed because you believed that the Lord would do what He said.”⁴⁶ And Mary said: “My soul glorifies the Lord ⁴⁷and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,⁴⁸ for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed,⁴⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name.⁵⁰ His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation.⁵¹ He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. ⁵²He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble.⁵³ He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty.⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful ⁵⁵to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors.”

God's Will is about the advancement of His kingdom, His glorification, and the salvation and sanctification of His children through His son Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:9). When **Mary** was given the news of her upcoming pregnancy of the divine child Jesus, she was shocked and surprised and didn't understand it. But the angel Gabriel reassured her that this was God's wish for her and so she said, 'I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true.' (Luke 1:38). She knew that this was God's will for her life. **Mary** teaches us here how to abandon ourselves to God's mercy.

Reflections and Questions:

1. Read the chosen bible passage in at least two versions. What stands out?
2. Mary knew God's will for her – how do we discern God's will for our lives?
3. What do you think gave Mary the strong belief that the Lord would do what He said He would do?
4. When we pray do we believe that God will give us what we ask for?
5. As long as what I decide to do is morally right, is that enough?
6. What do the results of our actions have to do with discerning God's will? And do my own abilities play a role in knowing God's will?
7. What is the primary source to find out and know God's will?

Week 3: Patience

Be still not rushed



Elizabeth, Mother of John the Baptist (Luke 1:5-17)

¹¹ Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. ¹² When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. ¹³ But the angel said to him: “Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. ¹⁴ He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, ¹⁵ for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born. ¹⁶ He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. ¹⁷ And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

Patience is about having the capacity to tolerate delay, problems or suffering without becoming annoyed or anxious about them. **Elizabeth** truly showed that she was patient over the years as she prayed for a baby. Her and her husband Zechariah (a priest) were both righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord’s commands and decrees blamelessly. But they were childless because Elizabeth was not able to conceive, and they both became very old. Elizabeth’s prayers were answered when she became pregnant with John (the Baptist).

Reflections and Questions:

1. Read the chosen bible passage in at least two versions. What stands out for you?
2. Elizabeth showed patience in her disappointment in not being able to conceive a child – how do you think she coped and managed this over the years?
3. Do you think that patience comes naturally, (ie you are born with it), or is it something we learn as we grow older?
4. Does today’s society and way of living encourage us to be patient? Why is that?
5. We all lose our patience from time to time – what causes you to get rocked or frustrated?
6. In the bible, perseverance is often mentioned in the same verse as patience (Matthew 24:13, Romans 5:3-4). Why do these traits sit together, and what is different about them?
7. Maybe memorise a favourite bible verse on patience and quote it whenever needed!

Week 4: Compassion

Connect not disengage



Tabitha (Acts 9:36-42)
Phoebe (Romans 16:1-2)
Salome (Mark 15:40-41)

Tabitha ³⁶ In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (in Greek her name is Dorcas); she was always doing good and helping the poor.

Phoebe ¹ I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Cenchreae. ² I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of his people and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been the benefactor of many people, including me.

Salome ⁴⁰ Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary (the mother of James the younger and of Joseph), and Salome. ⁴¹ In Galilee these women had followed him and cared for his needs. Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there.

Compassion is the sympathetic concern for the sufferings or misfortunes of others, together with a desire to alleviate it. These faithful women **Tabitha, Phoebe and Salome** each in their own way cared for the needs of others and showed great compassion. One of these women, **Tabitha (Dorcas)**, teaches us that we can love others by using our gifts for God's glory in the service of those around us. We may or may not be able to make clothes, but God has given us unique gifts that will bless others if we step out in faithfulness.

Reflections and Questions:

1. Read the chosen bible passage in at least two versions. What stands out in it for you?
2. How did Tabitha (above) give of herself to help the poor?
3. Being compassionate is giving out of ourselves with nothing expected in return. When is this easy to do? When is it difficult? Why?
4. The Jews of the day despised Samaritans. But there are several stories in the bible in which Jesus makes the Samaritan the hero, or heroine. Why do you think He does this?
5. There are many bible stories in which Jesus shows His compassion for others, such as the sick, hungry and the needy – which ones can you recall?
6. What do we learn about Phoebe from the passage. It is thought that she was entrusted to deliver Paul's epistle to the church at Rome. Why did Paul give special instructions to the church about her?
7. What practical organisations are around today that show compassion and help to others?
8. Think of some people that you know who are in need. Why are we compassionate to some of them but not to others?

Week 5: Love

Unite not divide



Mary Magdalene (John 20:1-2 and 11-18)

20 ¹¹ Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb ¹² and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. ¹³ They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" "They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." ¹⁴ At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. ¹⁵ He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him." ¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (means "Teacher"). ¹⁷ Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" ¹⁸ Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her

Love is an intense feeling of deep affection for someone or something. **Mary Magdalene** showed her deep affection and devotion for Jesus as she cried out in anguish when she thought that someone had taken her Lord away from the tomb, and she didn't know where they had put Him! She was a woman of strong faith and is mentioned several times in the gospels as a devoted follower of Jesus who was present at His crucifixion and burial.

Reflections and Questions:

1. Read the chosen bible passage in at least two versions. What stands out for you?
2. In the story (above) where Mary Magdalene goes to the burial tomb what demonstrates her devotion to Jesus?
3. Why did Jesus say to Mary, 'Do not cling to me because I have not yet ascended to my Father, and your Father, to my God and your God' (John 20:17)?
4. Christ preached 'love' in 1 John (the series we studied before this one). In chapter two we are told that a person 'truly has the perfect love of God in them' if they ... what?
5. And in 1 John 4:18 John tells us that perfect love casts out all fear. Is that easy to do when a situation is fearful? Can we just love and trust more when we are fearful?
6. Love is a major theme in scripture. How many times does the word 'love' appear in the bible do you think? ... 63, 227, 551 or 1024 times?
7. We love because ... ? (John 4:19) How might you better live this out?

Week 6: Wisdom

Understanding not ignorance



Junia (Romans 16:7)
Lady Wisdom (Proverbs 8)

Junia

⁷ Greet Andronicus and Junia, my fellow Jews who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was.

Lady Wisdom Does not wisdom call out? Does not understanding raise her voice? ² At the highest point along the way, where the paths meet, she takes her stand; ³ beside the gate leading into the city, at the entrance, she cries aloud: ⁴ “To you, O people, I call out; I raise my voice to all mankind. ⁵ You who are simple, gain prudence; you who are foolish, set your hearts on it.

⁶ Listen, for I have trustworthy things to say; I open my lips to speak what is right. ⁷ My mouth speaks what is true, for my lips detest wickedness. ⁸ All the words of my mouth are just; none of them is crooked or perverse. ⁹ To the discerning all of them are right; they are upright to those who have found knowledge. ¹⁰ Choose my instruction instead of silver, knowledge rather than choice gold, ¹¹ for wisdom is more precious than rubies, and nothing you desire can compare with her.

Wisdom is the quality of having experience, knowledge and good judgement. The often ‘hidden’ apostle **Junia** is only spoken about for one short verse at the end of the book of Romans but we learn from this verse of God’s intention for ministry partnership between women and men, about suffering for the sake of the gospel and about how women have always been faithful leaders in the fulfilment of God’s mission. And **Lady Wisdom** is a literary personification of God’s own wisdom.

Reflections and Questions:

1. Read the chosen bible passage in at least two versions. What stands out?
2. How would you define ‘wisdom?’ How is it different from knowledge or experience?
3. Why is wisdom especially important when we are going through a trial?
4. What are some ways that you can recognise someone who is very wise?
5. If an apostle like Junia (above) was truly outstanding do you wonder why only one short verse in the bible was given to tell her story?
6. Describe God’s attitude and posture toward us when we ask Him for wisdom? If God is so willing and generous in giving to us, why are we so reluctant to ask Him?
7. How does God actually give us the wisdom we need – and what roles do the bible and the Holy Spirit play?

Week 7: Courage

Flexible not fixed



Priscilla and Aquila (Romans 16:3-4)
Samaritan Woman at Well (John 4:4-26)

Priscilla and Aquila³ Greet Priscilla^[c] and Aquila, my co-workers in Christ Jesus. ⁴ They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them.

Samaritan Woman at Well⁷ When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, “Will you give me a drink?”⁸ (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, “You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?” (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans)¹⁰ Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.”¹¹ “Sir,” the woman said, “you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water?”¹² Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?”¹³ Jesus answered, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again,¹⁴ but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”¹⁵ The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.”

Courage is the ability to do something with strength, despite the fear, pain or grief. All of the women in scripture here (above) showed great courage either by risking their lives for others or by exposing their vulnerabilities in front of others. An example of this is where the **Samaritan woman** finds the courage to talk to Jesus when she knows that Jews and Samaritans are not permitted to mix. She faces the shame of talking about being with a man that is not her husband, and she talks to Jesus and repents.

Reflections and Questions:

1. Read the chosen bible passage in at least two versions. What stands out in them?
2. In the story of the Samaritan women what makes her stay and talk do you think, rather than walking away from Jesus?
3. Priscilla and Aquila are always mentioned together. On 5 out of 7 occasions Priscilla is mentioned first against normal naming convention of the time . Do you think this is significant? What do you think Priscilla’s role was in the partnership?
4. We must possess courage to have all that God wants us to have – do you agree?
5. Our biggest regrets are typically our ‘inaction regrets.’ Have you ever found that to be true in your life?
6. Has fear played a part in keeping you from going where you really wanted to go?
7. There are many bible references to guide us as we read in God’s word, to build up our courage and lessen our fears – which ones do you recall?
8. Palms down, palms up - a prayer exercise for courage. Everyone hold their hands out with palms down (pray to release fears), then turn palms up (pray to receive courage).

Week 8: Faithful Witness

Faithfulness



Lydia - Acts 16:14-15

Lois and Eunice (2 Tim 1:5)

Lydia ¹⁴ One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. ¹⁵ When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us.

Lois and Eunice ⁵ I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.

Witness is to have the knowledge of an event because of an observation or experience. The women here (above) all have stories of great witness in the bible. **Lydia** has only a short story in the bible, but she makes a huge long-lasting impact on her family, the spread of the gospel, and its message across the world. Once Lydia gets saved, we find out that she influences her entire household to trust Christ (Acts 16:15).

Reflections and Questions:

1. Read the chosen bible passage in at least two versions. What stands out in it for you?
2. When Lydia got saved she tells her whole family about Jesus. Why do you think they all came to faith too?
3. Lydia was a prosperous business woman and one of Paul's first converts in Europe. Did she play an important role in the local church?
4. Every Christian wants to glorify God with their words and actions. The things we say and do have an impact on how others perceive the gospel. Do you worry that you mess up the story or don't get the witnessing right? Why? And can you improve this?
5. How would you best tell your faith story?
6. Are we all setting an example of how we love others? And could we improve on that?
7. Kindness to others goes a long way to witnessing God's love to others – can we challenge ourselves to three acts of kindness this week? What might yours be?
8. Having effective witness doesn't happen by accident – we need to be able to communicate what Christians believe, why we believe it, and then back it up with behaviour that confirms our message. Let's ask God (pray) to help us be effective witnesses each day.