



Tamar



Rahab



Ruth



Bathsheba



Mary

FIVE CHRISTMAS MAIDENS

New 5-Week Bible Study

In Jesus' genealogy, five women stand out in a male-dominated lineage. Their stories challenge traditional views of holiness and reveal God's grace. Discover the surprising significance of Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba, and Mary—the 5 Christmas Maidens.

**Scan the QR code to the right
to listen to the lessons
and for additional free resources:**



Introduction

In Jesus' genealogy, recorded in Matthew 1:1-16, there are 40 men listed—a typical feature of genealogies from a male-dominated society. However, five women are also mentioned, which is both significant and surprising. These women are not included because they were perfect or revered for their holiness. In fact, their stories challenge traditional ideas of righteousness and reveal God's incredible grace working through unlikely individuals.

This 5-week study will explore the stories of Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba, and Mary. Each faced unique struggles and challenges, yet they played crucial roles in God's redemptive plan for humanity. Their inclusion in Jesus' lineage highlights how God often uses people and circumstances the world may overlook or judge. These stories are not just about the past; they have profound lessons for us today about faith, redemption, and the unexpected ways God works in our lives.

Week 1: Tamar – Genesis 38 – Tamar's story is filled with brokenness and betrayal. She was a Canaanite woman who used cunning and courage to secure justice in a world where she was wronged by Judah and his sons. Her inclusion in Jesus' genealogy reminds us that God sees and redeems those who have been used, abused, or forgotten.

Week 2: Rahab – Joshua 2 – Rahab was a prostitute in Jericho who acted in faith to help Israel's spies and became a part of God's people. Despite her past, Rahab's faith and courage saved her and her family, showing that God's grace can reach even the most unlikely individuals.

Week 3: Ruth – Ruth 1-4 – Ruth, a Moabite widow, left her homeland and embraced the God of Israel. Her loyalty to her mother-in-law, Naomi, and her eventual marriage to Boaz led to her becoming the great-grandmother of King David. Ruth's story teaches us about loyalty, redemption, and God's provision.

Week 4: Bathsheba – 2 Samuel 11 – Bathsheba's story is marked by scandal and heartbreak. She was taken by King David, lost her first child, and later became the mother of Solomon. Bathsheba's inclusion in Jesus' genealogy reminds us that even in our darkest moments, God's purposes are still unfolding.

Week 5: Mary – Matthew 1:16-25 – Mary, the mother of Jesus, stands as a figure of faith and obedience. Though she was an ordinary young woman, her willingness to accept God's plan made her the vessel through which the Savior of the world was born. Mary's story encourages us to trust God's plan, even when it leads us into unknown and challenging territory.

Through this study, we will see how these women—despite their imperfect lives—were part of God's grand plan of redemption. Their stories show us that holiness is not about perfection, but about faith, courage, and being open to God's transformative work. Join us as we explore the lives of the 5 Christmas Maidens and discover the power of God's grace in the most unexpected places.

Suggested Format for this Study

The following format is a suggestion that has worked well for me, but feel free to adapt it to your teaching style and the resources available. Each lesson can easily be adjusted to last between one hour and an hour and a half.

Pre-Study Preparation

I recommend providing participants with a schedule, which can be created using the “Schedule Template” document. This helps keep everyone informed of the material to be covered in each session. Additionally, you might consider starting with an “Orientation” session. This will give you a chance to introduce yourself, get to know the participants, distribute study materials, explain the study format, and answer any questions they may have.

It can also foster community to offer light refreshments at the beginning of each session. Participants can sign up to take turns providing simple snacks, such as coffee and cookies. This not only helps set a relaxed tone but also gives participants a sense of ownership in the study. They can sign up for refreshments in the "notes" section of the “Schedule Template.”

Weekly Materials

Each week, participants will receive a sermon to read in preparation for the following session. I suggest distributing one sermon at a time to help participants stay focused and not read ahead. However, feel free to provide all the sermons at once if that works better for your group.

General Session Format

Below is a general format for each small group session:

1. Welcome and Opening Prayer (5-10 minutes)

- Begin by welcoming participants and offering an opening prayer.

2. Optional Introductory Video (5-10 minutes)

- For some sessions, there may be a video available to help introduce or explore the theme of the session. You may find a short video clip you think is helpful on your own.
 - For session 1, you may choose to use the music video “Matthew's Begats” by Andrew Peterson found on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vKo1wv2LXkQ>
 - For Session 2, you might use the video “Dawn Knighton: From prostitute to pastor” to explore the problem of prostitution found on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-tfRjxtwsrQ>

3. Group Discussion (20-30 minutes)

- After the introduction, guide the group through a discussion based on the questions in the “Leader’s Guide” at the end of each sermon.

- Your role as the facilitator is not to have all the answers but to guide and encourage meaningful conversation. The provided questions are a starting point—feel free to adapt or ask follow-up questions based on the group's thoughts and interests.
- While some discussions may naturally stray from the topic, it's important to discern whether these tangents are worth exploring or if it's time to steer the group back to the main topic.

4. Intercessory Prayer (5-10 minutes)

- End each session with a time of prayer. Allow participants to share any praises or concerns, and then pray over them as a group.
- It can be helpful to keep a list of these requests to follow up on them in future sessions.

Tamar

Rahab

Ruth

Bathsheba

Mary

FIVE CHRISTMAS MAIDENS

Bible Study: There are 40 *men* listed in Jesus' genealogy and only 5 *women*. But the fact there *are* 5 women listed in a genealogy written in a male dominated society *is huge!* Why did the men who kept track of all this stuff care about these 5 *women—the 5 Christmas maidens?* Are they super-holy women who really deserved recognition? They are special, but maybe not in the way you think. Their stories may challenge your preconceived notions of holiness. Come learn about the 5 Christmas Maidens.

Date	Topic	Notes
	Introduction and Orientation	
	The Tale of Tamar – Genesis 38	
	Rahab the Prostitute – Joshua 2 and 6	
	Ruth the Redeemed Refugee – Ruth 1-4	
	Beautiful Bathsheba – 2 Samuel 11	
	Mary, the Mother of Jesus – Matthew 1:16-25	

The Tale of Tamar – Genesis 38



Introduction

2 Timothy 3:16 says, “All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right.”

All Scripture is inspired by God. Even the parts we tend to skip like the genealogies or the weird and disturbing stories in the Old Testament. In this blog,

I'm going to focus on a couple of those passages people tend to skip. I'm not going to skip these passages, because they are inspired by God *and* they have much to teach us if we listen closely.

Matthew 1:1-16

¹ This is a record of the ancestors of Jesus the Messiah, a descendant of David and of Abraham:

² Abraham was the father of Isaac.

Isaac was the father of Jacob.

Jacob was the father of Judah and his brothers.

³ Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah (whose mother was Tamar).

Perez was the father of Hezron.

Hezron was the father of Ram.

⁴ Ram was the father of Amminadab.

Amminadab was the father of Nahshon.

Nahshon was the father of Salmon.

⁵ Salmon was the father of Boaz (whose mother was Rahab).

Boaz was the father of Obed (whose mother was Ruth).

Obed was the father of Jesse.

⁶ Jesse was the father of King David.

David was the father of Solomon (whose mother was Bathsheba, the widow of Uriah).

⁷ Solomon was the father of Rehoboam.

Rehoboam was the father of Abijah.

Abijah was the father of Asa.

⁸ Asa was the father of Jehoshaphat.

Jehoshaphat was the father of Jehoram.

Jehoram was the father[e] of Uzziah.

⁹ Uzziah was the father of Jotham.

Jotham was the father of Ahaz.

Ahaz was the father of Hezekiah.

¹⁰ Hezekiah was the father of Manasseh.

Manasseh was the father of Amon.

Amon was the father of Josiah.

¹¹ Josiah was the father of Jehoiachin and his brothers (born at the time of the exile to Babylon).

¹² After the Babylonian exile:
Jehoiachin was the father of Shealtiel.
Shealtiel was the father of Zerubbabel.
¹³ Zerubbabel was the father of Abiud.
Abiud was the father of Eliakim.
Eliakim was the father of Azor.
¹⁴ Azor was the father of Zadok.
Zadok was the father of Akim.
Akim was the father of Eliud.
¹⁵ Eliud was the father of Eleazar.
Eleazar was the father of Matthan.
Matthan was the father of Jacob.
¹⁶ Jacob was the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary.
Mary gave birth to Jesus, who is called the Messiah.

Five Christmas Maidens

Do you keep up with your own genealogy? Some people are fascinated by their own ancestry. There are even shows on television now where experts trace the ancestry of famous celebrities. We tend to skip over the genealogy of Christ, though, the most famous person who ever lived. And if you skip over Christ's inspired genealogy, you will miss some important facts.

Like this: There are 40 *men* listed in Jesus' genealogy, which makes sense because Jewish genealogies from the first century listed lineage through the *male* ancestors. The people the Bible records were mostly male and lived in a patriarchal culture. You don't have to like it. God didn't, but it is the reality. You must understand the role of patriarchy in the biblical text or you might miss some very important clues, like this: There are 40 *men* listed in Jesus' genealogy and only 5 *women*.

But the fact that there *are* 5 women listed in a genealogy written in a male dominated, patriarchal society *is huge!* Why did the men who kept track of all this stuff and write it down even care about these 5 *women—the 5 Christmas maidens?* You might think they are some pretty special women who really deserved the recognition. They are special, but maybe not in the way you think. Their stories may challenge your preconceived notions of holiness.

Apparently, God inspired the writer of Matthew 1:1-16 to record the names of these 5 women, without whom Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Lord and Savior of all would not have been born into the world that first Christmas day. So, between now and Christmas, we are going to hear the stories of each of these 5 Christmas maidens between now and Christmas.



Tamar

The first Christmas maiden is Tamar and her tale comes from Genesis 38. Tamar was a Canaanite woman. The Canaanites—as a whole—were evil according to the Bible. They were evil because they had twisted religion so much that it had nothing to do with the One True God who made them anymore. Canaanite religion was a way to make God into their own image through idolatry. They worshiped through sexual

orgies in order to arouse their gods so they would do favors for them. They even hired temple prostitutes to have sex with the worshipers. (I'm not making this stuff up. This was the Canaanite religion.) Furthermore, the Canaanites even sacrificed their own children as part of their wicked religious ceremonies. God rejected the Canaanites' wicked religion and determined to drive them out of Canaan and give their land to Abraham's descendants. Tamar (the great, great—many generations separated—grandmother of Jesus) was a despised Canaanite. (If you ever feel like there's no hope for you, remember Tamar.)

The name Tamar means date palm. The date palm is a tree in Israel that produces a most amazing fruit called a date that is dried to make something like a raisin, but a raisin the size of your thumb! You can buy dates at Kroger, but they don't even come close to the amazing Medjool dates you get in Israel, their native land. I have been to Israel and enjoyed the dates their near Jericho and they are to die for. Tamar means *date*. And apparently, Tamar was to die for too. Her story is found in Genesis 38.

Genesis 38:6-10

⁶In the course of time, Judah arranged for his firstborn son, Er, to marry a young woman named Tamar. ⁷But Er was a wicked man in the LORD's sight, so the LORD took his life. ⁸Then Judah said to Er's brother Onan, "Go and marry Tamar, as our law requires of the brother of a man who has died. You must produce an heir for your brother."

⁹But Onan was not willing to have a child who would not be his own heir. So whenever he had intercourse with his brother's wife, he spilled the semen on the ground. This prevented her from having a child who would belong to his brother. ¹⁰But the LORD considered it evil for Onan to deny a child to his dead brother. So the LORD took Onan's life, too.

Levirate Marriage and Wickedness

Now here is a weird passage (and a bit gross and explicit). It's no wonder you don't hear this story that much in church. Still, it is part of the God's inspired story of the redemption of all humanity so we're not going to skip it today. What's going on here?

The ancient Israelites had a custom called *Levirate marriage*. It seems strange to us, but it had an important purpose for them. The people of the Old Testament lived in a *patriarchal society*. *Men dominated everything*. Women had very little status and no way to provide for or protect themselves without the men in their lives. I don't think that's the way God intended life

to be, but sin was part of the world and that's the way people lived. Thankfully, we have grown to a place in the 21st century in America, where women are finally getting the respect they deserve because women are equal with men and should be treated fairly. But 4,000 years ago when Tamar lived in the middle east, women were not treated equally. When they were young, their father protected and cared for them. When they were married, their husband protected and cared for them. When they were old, their grown male children protected and cared for them. So it was devastating if a wife's husband died and she had no grown male children to care for her. Levirate marriage provided for widows. When Tamar's husband died, she became their dead brother's responsibility to protect and care for her.

Levirate marriage addressed another pressing problem for the Bible's patriarchal society. The greatest curse for ancient Israelites was for your family name to die out. Therefore, if a wife's husband died before he was able to produce a male child to continue the family name, the dead husband's brother was obligated to produce a male child with his wife for him. I know that seems really weird to us today, but that was very important to the ancient Israelites like Judah's family. And it may not be as far-fetched as you think. Today, if a husband and wife can't conceive a child, they might go to a fertility clinic and pursue artificial insemination. Levirate marriage was the way the ancients solved the problem long before fertility clinics were available.

Unfortunately, Judah and his sons were wicked. Judah's first son, Er, married Tamar, "But Er was a wicked man in the Lord's sight, so the Lord took his life." We don't know why Er was wicked; the passage doesn't say. You might infer one reason though. This is reading into the text a bit, but maybe Er was more interested in the "tasty date" Tamar than he was in the Lord's plan for the Israelites. You see, the Israelites were the people God chose to represent God to the whole world. As such, they were to reject all other gods and false religions, like that of the Canaanites. But Er seems to be more interested in tasty Tamar than the religion of the One True God. Whatever the reason, Er was so wicked to God that he died.

So, levirate marriage kicks in. Er's brother, Onan, is supposed to take Tamar as his own wife, protect her, care for her, and it was Onan's absolute obligation to make sure Tamar got pregnant and produced an heir to carry on his dead brother's name. Now Onan, being a man, was perfectly willing to enjoy "pleasure" with Tamar, but he refused to produce children. Sexual pleasure is great, but children are a costly responsibility Onan didn't want (even though it was the law of his own people). Verse 10 says, "the Lord considered it evil for Onan to deny a child to his dead brother. So the Lord took Onan's life, too."

Genesis 38:11

¹¹ Then Judah said to Tamar, his daughter-in-law, "Go back to your parents' home and remain a widow until my son Shelah is old enough to marry you." (But Judah didn't really intend to do this because he was afraid Shelah would also die, like his two brothers.) So Tamar went back to live in her father's home.

Used, Abused, and Forgotten

Tamar has now been used, abused, and forgotten. Have you ever felt used, abused, and forgotten? Judah has a responsibility. As the patriarch of the family, it is *his* responsibility to take care of everyone in his household; and this includes Tamar. If his third son is too young to

marry, then it is Judah's duty to take care of his daughter-in-law himself until his youngest son is grown enough to do it. Judah has no intention of doing the right thing. His first two sons died because they were both wicked, but all Judah can think is it was Tamar's fault. Instead of seeing his son's wickedness, he sends Tamar away.

God holds each of us accountable for our own sins. It isn't your lineage that makes you righteous or gains you favor in God's eyes. It is those who *repent* of their sins and turn to God through Jesus Christ His Son who enjoy the Lord's favor. In Tamar's story, we see that Tamar hasn't done anything wrong even though she is a Canaanite. It is Judah and his sons—who are supposed to be God's chosen people—who are doing all the evil!

Genesis 38:12-19

¹² Some years later Judah's wife died. After the time of mourning was over, Judah and his friend Hirah the Adullamite went up to Timnah to supervise the shearing of his sheep. ¹³ Someone told Tamar, "Look, your father-in-law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep."

¹⁴ Tamar was aware that Shelah had grown up, but no arrangements had been made for her to come and marry him. *[Judah has no intentions of doing the right thing for Tamar.]*

So she changed out of her widow's clothing and covered herself with a veil to disguise herself. Then she sat beside the road at the entrance to the village of Enaim, which is on the road to Timnah. ¹⁵ Judah noticed her and thought she was a prostitute, since she had covered her face.

*[Now notice, it doesn't say Tamar dressed up like a prostitute. It says Judah **thought** she was a prostitute. What does that tell you was on Judah's mind? It seems to me, Judah is not acting or thinking the way God wants His chosen people to act.]*

¹⁶ So he stopped and propositioned her. "Let me have sex with you," he said, not realizing that she was his own daughter-in-law.

"How much will you pay to have sex with me?" Tamar asked.

[Tamar is a smart woman. She plays along to see where it might get her. Tamar recognizes God's purposes in Judah's family. Even though Judah's family was not living the way they should, they were still the family God chose for His great plan to save the world. Somehow, Tamar sensed God's hand at work in Judah's people--despite their wickedness--and she was determined to be part of it. Are you determined to be part of God's family even if His children—the people you see in church on Sunday—don't always live the way they should? Can you recognize that God has a plan for everyone, and that God is saving the whole world, even though a broken church?]

¹⁷ "I'll send you a young goat from my flock," Judah promised.

"But what will you give me to guarantee that you will send the goat?" she asked.

¹⁸ "What kind of guarantee do you want?" he replied.

She answered, "Leave me your identification seal and its cord and the walking stick you are carrying." So Judah gave them to her. Then he had intercourse with her, and she became pregnant. ¹⁹ Afterward she went back home, took off her veil, and put on her widow's clothing as usual.

Genesis 38:24-26

²⁴ About three months later, Judah was told, “Tamar, your daughter-in-law, has acted like a prostitute. And now, because of this, she’s pregnant.”

“Bring her out, and let her be burned!” Judah demanded.

[This was the typical punishment. It's definitely a double standard. Men were obviously getting away with all kinds of sexual promiscuity and sleeping with prostitutes, but the women were being burned when they were unfaithful. I don't think God was happy about it, but that's the broken world Tamar and Judah lived in.]

²⁵ But as they were taking her out to kill her, she sent this message to her father-in-law: “The man who owns these things made me pregnant. Look closely. Whose seal and cord and walking stick are these?” *[Busted!]*

²⁶ Judah recognized them immediately and said, “She is more righteous than I am, because I didn’t arrange for her to marry my son Shelah.” And Judah never slept with Tamar again.

Closing Points

Tamar's story (and others like it) are one of the major reasons I believe the Bible is a reliable account of God's salvation work throughout history. If I were going to make up a fictional story of God's people, I definitely would not include all this dirty laundry. Would you? The Bible doesn't try to sugar coat anything. The story of how God saved humanity includes a lot of ugly, embarrassing stuff. It's just too messy to be made up! Do you have any skeletons in your family closet? So does Jesus.

None of the people in Jesus family tree were there because they deserved it. They were *only* there because of God's grace and their faith to be a part of God's great plan—a plan that they didn’t even fully understand. They just knew if it was God’s plan, it must be worth more than anything else in the whole world! God is looking for people like Tamar--people who have the faith to see that God is at work even when His people are not doing the right thing. People who are willing to give up everything to be part of God's great Kingdom plan. Are you willing to give up *everything* to be part of God’s Kingdom? Do you have the faith to see it is worth it?

Next week, we will hear the story of Rahab the prostitute.

Session 1 Leader's Guide

Greeting – Welcome participants, make announcements, and handout material for the next class.

Opening Prayer – Thank God for the chance to study together and pray for wisdom.

Video – Show “Matthew Begats” music video -
<https://youtu.be/vKo1wv2LXkQ?si=RPb39-1kiFbqHVRZ>

Opening Question

Do you get bored at high school graduation ceremonies? Why don't they just have everyone in the class stand up at once and say “You graduate”?

The genealogies and other long, boring lists in the Bible are akin to graduation ceremonies. They are often boring to us and we wonder why they need to do these tedious namings. For the same reason we wouldn't want high school graduations truncated. Every name is important to somebody.

Read and Discuss Genesis 38

1. What is Levirate Marriage and what was it's purpose?
Levirate marriage provided for widows and orphans. It was the social safety net. It guarded against families going extinct.
2. Tamar was used, abused, and forgotten by Judah and his sons. Have you ever felt used, abused, or forgotten?
3. Tamar sensed God was at work through Judah's family even though Judah's family often acted wickedly. Do you think God can work through the broken people who go to church, despite their sins? Why or why not?
4. Why do you think God wanted Tamar's story in the Bible and her name included in Jesus' lineage? Why wouldn't this just be swept under the rug?
5. Are you willing to give up *everything* to be part of God's Kingdom?

Close with Intercessory Prayer

Allow the class to share any praises or concerns they have. Make a prayer list to keep track of them. Close the class by praying over the praises and concerns the class named.

Rahab the Prostitute – Joshua 2



Matthew 1:4-5a

Ram was the father of Amminadab. Amminadab was the father of Nahshon. Nahshon was the father of Salmon. Salmon was the father of Boaz (whose mother was Rahab).

Introduction

Matthew 1 lists the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Savior of the world. There are some very "interesting" characters there. None of them deserved the honor of inclusion

in Christ's royal lineage. Thankfully, God doesn't reward people with what they deserve. He is gracious and loves people who put their whole faith in Him.

There are only five women listed among the 40 male ancestors of Christ. Who were these five Christmas maidens and why were they remembered in a society usually overlooked women?

Last week, we heard the tale of Tamar who was *mistaken* for a prostitute by her father-in-law. Today, we will learn about Rahab who *was* a prostitute.

For four hundred years after Tamar, the Israelites lived in Egypt and became slaves. But God remembered His promise to give the Israelites a home in the land of Canaan as His holy people. They would be God's representatives to the whole world. So, God raised up Moses to lead the Israelites out of slavery. And after wandering in the desert for forty years, God chose a leader named Joshua to finally lead the Israelites to conquer Canaan. To take possession of the Promise Land, Joshua and the Israelites would have to destroy the Canaanites fortress city, Jericho. God promised He would do the fighting for the Israelites and prove to everyone that their God was the one true Lord of all.

Joshua 2:1

Then Joshua secretly sent out two spies from the Israelite camp at Acacia Grove. He instructed them, "Scout out the land on the other side of the Jordan River, especially around Jericho." So the two men set out and came to the house of a prostitute named Rahab and stayed there that night.



Rahab

And so, we are introduced to the *heroine* of our story—Rahab *the prostitute*. Prostitution has never been an honorable profession, but it is *the oldest profession*. In a male dominated society like we find in the Old Testament, prostitution was one of the only ways a woman could make it on her own. Little girls don't dream of growing up to be prostitutes. They usually sell their bodies for sex because it's the only way they can survive.

Brenda Myers-Powell was a prostitute for 25 years on the West Side of Chicago. Her mother died when Brenda was only 6 months old. She was raised by her grandmother, an alcoholic. Brenda was molested regularly by her grandmother's male companions from the time she was only 4 years old. Brenda had 2 babies by the time she was 14. One day when the baby was hungry and crying, Brenda's grandmother told her to get a job because they had nothing to eat. Brenda, not knowing what else to do, joined the prostitutes who stood on the street corner in front of her house. In her own words: since men had been taking her panties off all her life, she figured she might as well get paid for it.

Most church people have strong opinions about prostitutes and prostitution. But how many of us have ever talked to a prostitute to get to know their story? Jesus did. It was one of the reasons his adversaries hated him so much. In Mark 2:16, the religious leaders complained, "Why does he eat with such scum?" Jesus ate with prostitutes and other notorious sinners because God cares about them just as much as He cares about me and you. Jesus, as God, sees the heart and knows the whole story of why people do what they do. And He loves. And He forgives. And He redeems.

We don't know why Rahab was a prostitute. The Bible doesn't give the details. We could stand in self-righteousness judgment of her (like everyone else probably did) or we could realize that most women who become prostitutes do it because it's the only way they know how to survive.



They Had One Job!

On the other hand, we could ask some nagging questions about the spies in Joshua 2:1. What were the spies doing at a prostitute's house? These spies are members of God's chosen people. They're supposed to be holy. They're supposed to be on a mission from God. You mean to say the first thing they do when they cross enemy lines is go to a brothel? Who am I to judge? Maybe they had their reasons. Maybe God sent them to Rahab's house. We don't know and the Bible doesn't

say.

I have another question. Why was Joshua sending spies in the first place? God promised He would conquer Jericho and all the Promised Land and give it to the Israelites. The battle would be The Lord's, not the Israelites. Why was Joshua sending spies? Was he worried about how they were going to defeat the enemy? Didn't he trust God? If you read the whole story, you'll see the Israelites didn't do any real fighting. They marched around the city a bunch of times and blew trumpets. This was all symbolic. The Lord did the fighting. The Lord caused the city walls to collapse and the city fell. There was no need to send spies. It's a hint that maybe Joshua didn't fully trust God's Word. Most people read Joshua 2:1 to mean Joshua sent some spies to secretly find out about Jericho. Another way to read it is Joshua sent them in secret (as in he didn't want his own people to know he sent the spies.) One thing I don't see anywhere in the passage where it says God told Joshua to send spies. The last time spies were sent into the Promised Land was when Moses sent 12 spies to check out the land. And of the 12, only 2 had faith God could defeat the Canaanites. God was so disgusted with the people's lack of faith the Israelites had to wait 40 more years before they could go into the Promised Land—an entire generation had to pass away!

At any rate, Joshua's spies are the worst spies in the history of spies. The first thing they do is go to a prostitute's house and in verse 2 their cover is immediately blown. The enemy knows they're in town and the enemy is hunting for them!

Joshua 2:2-7

But someone told the king of Jericho, "Some Israelites have come here tonight to spy out the land." So the king of Jericho sent orders to Rahab: "Bring out the men who have come into your house, for they have come here to spy out the whole land." Rahab had hidden the two men, but she replied, "Yes, the men were here earlier, but I didn't know where they were from. They left the town at dusk, as the gates were about to close. I don't know where they went. If you hurry, you can probably catch up with them." (Actually, she had taken them up to the roof and hidden them beneath bundles of flax she had laid out.) So, the king's men went looking for the spies along the road leading to the shallow crossings of the Jordan River. And as soon as the king's men had left, the gate of Jericho was shut.

Why did Rahab protect the Israelites? Rahab tells us herself.

Joshua 2:8-11

Before the spies went to sleep that night, Rahab went up on the roof to talk with them. "I know the Lord has given you this land," she told them. "We are all afraid of you. Everyone in the land is living in terror. For we have heard how the Lord made a dry path for you through the Red Sea when you left Egypt. And we know what you did to Sihon and Og, the two Amorite kings east of the Jordan River, whose people you completely destroyed. No wonder our hearts have melted in fear! No one has the courage to fight after hearing such things. For the Lord your God is the supreme God of the heavens above and the earth below.



A Profession of Faith

I wish we had a little more back story about Rahab. I'd like to know how she ended up a prostitute. I'd like to know if she cried out to God for help. I wonder why she turned her back on her own people.

We don't know much about Rahab before she met the spies. What we do have in the story is Rahab's profession of faith. A profession of faith is a statement where a person says they believe in God

and promise to follow Him. I pastor a Methodist church and we like to make it easy for people to profess their faith. So, we list our standard profession of faith in the front of our hymnal on page 34. The pastor asks the person wanting to become a Christian: *Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Savior, put your whole trust in his grace, and promise to serve him as your Lord, in union with the Church which Christ has opened to people of all ages, nations, and races?* And if the person agrees, they respond, "**I do.**" It is a simple and effective way for a person to affirm that they believe in Jesus Christ and trust Him to save them.

Romans 10:9 says, "If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Usually, a person who wants to make a commitment to follow Jesus Christ professes their faith--usually in a church service or a revival. Maybe they pray the "sinners' prayer" to declare their faith in Christ, repent of their sins, and ask Jesus to save

them. However, when God saves someone, it doesn't always look like it does in church or at a Billy Graham crusade. It could look like Rahab's story. Rahab exhibits all three elements of a person who truly turns their life over to God and is saved: Faith, a Profession of Faith, and Action.



Salvation: Faith, Profession, Action

First of all, Rahab shows faith. Of all the people in the story, Rahab had the most faith. While Joshua was sending spies when he should have just trusted God's promise, Rahab had *great faith*. Rahab trusted spies she didn't know who could have betrayed her. That was risky! (Spies aren't best known for being trustworthy!) Furthermore, Rahab puts all her hopes in a God she didn't know very well and trusted He would save her. Rahab, a Canaanite, turned her back on the

wicked Canaanite way of life and turned to the One True God of the Israelites, a foreign people. It took tremendous faith for Rahab to take these risks. God is willing to accept the faith of *anyone* who trusts Him that way and turns to Him for forgiveness and salvation. Do you have faith to turn your back on everything that is not of God and turn to Him instead?

Second, Rahab makes a profession of faith. Rahab states her faith in God. She said, "For the Lord your God is the supreme God of the heavens above and the earth below." (Joshua 2:11). Have you ever made a profession of faith—have you said out loud that you know God is the supreme Lord of all? Do you continue to tell people this Truth whenever you get the chance?

There is also action. It's one thing to talk a big talk. It's another thing to walk the walk. Rahab walked the walk; she acted on her faith. She defied the king of Jericho and his soldiers. She put her own life on the line for the sake of God's people. She hid the Israelite spies and sent the soldiers on a wild goose chase and helped the spies escape. Do you put your beliefs about God into action? Do you do what He asks you to do? Do you serve the Lord with all your heart?

Joshua 2:12-21

"Now swear to me by the Lord that you will be kind to me and my family since I have helped you. Give me some guarantee that when Jericho is conquered, you will let me live, along with my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all their families."

[Rahab's faith was going to save her whole family from destruction. Do you realize what you do affects more than just you? Your choices about God could bring life or death to people you care about.]

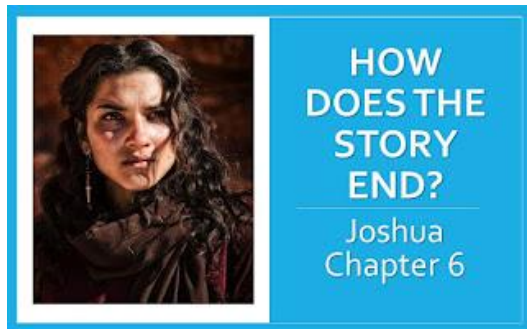
"We offer our own lives as a guarantee for your safety," the men agreed. "If you don't betray us, we will keep our promise and be kind to you when the Lord gives us the land."

Then, since Rahab's house was built into the town wall, she let them down by a rope through the window. "Escape to the hill country," she told them. "Hide there for three days from the men searching for you. Then, when they have returned, you can go on your way."

Before they left, the men told her, "We will be bound by the oath we have taken only if you follow these instructions. When we come into the land, you must leave this scarlet rope hanging from the

window through which you let us down. And all your family members—your father, mother, brothers, and all your relatives—must be here inside the house. If they go out into the street and are killed, it will not be our fault. But if anyone lays a hand on people inside this house, we will accept the responsibility for their death. If you betray us, however, we are not bound by this oath in any way.”

“I accept your terms,” she replied. And she sent them on their way, leaving the scarlet rope hanging from the window.



How Does the Story End?

Well, how does the story end? We find the answer to Rahab’s fate in Joshua chapter 6.

The Israelites surround the fortress of Jericho. All the villagers outside the fortress walls have fled. Those left inside the walls are mostly soldiers and others determined to fight to the bitter end.

But God said He would do the fighting for Israel. So, for six days the Israelites march around Jericho. On the seventh day, they march around the city seven times. Then, the Israelite priests blow their ram’s horns and all the people shout. And the walls of Jericho came tumbling down—everywhere except for the part of the wall that housed Rahab’s home. The Israelites swarmed over the rubble to mop up any remaining defenders not killed by the collapse. It wasn’t much a fight after the fortresses collapsed; most of the enemy were probably already dead.

Joshua 6:22-23 & 25

Meanwhile, Joshua said to the two spies, “Keep your promise. Go to the prostitute’s house and bring her out, along with all her family.” The men who had been spies went in and brought out Rahab, her father, mother, brothers, and all the other relatives who were with her. They moved her whole family to a safe place near the camp of Israel.... So, Joshua spared Rahab the prostitute and her relatives who were with her in the house, because she had hidden the spies Joshua sent to Jericho. And she lives among the Israelites to this day.

And then we fast forward through the Bible about a thousand years and look in Matthew chapter 1 and we see Jesus’ genealogy and what do we find? Rahab is one of the great, great, great... grandmothers of Jesus.

What’s Your Story?

Well, that’s Rahab’s story. What’s your story? I want to tell you that God knows what you’re going through. He is the God who sees. He didn’t overlook Rahab the prostitute and He won’t overlook you. Are you facing a situation you just cannot overcome? God wants to help you. Do you realize God is your only hope? God will redeem your situation, but He’ll also save your soul. Do you *trust* God to save you? Are you willing to *profess* your faith in God and turn your back on everything that is not of Him? Are you willing to *act* on your faith by putting it all on the line for Him? Perhaps you should pray about it.

Next week, we will examine the story of the third woman in Jesus’ genealogy--Ruth the Refugee.

Session 2 Leader's Guide

Greeting – Welcome participants, make announcements, and handout material for the next class.

Opening Prayer – Thank God for the chance to study together and pray for wisdom.

Review – The genealogies and other long, boring lists in the Bible are akin to graduation ceremonies. They are often boring to us and we wonder why they need to do these tedious namings. For the same reason we wouldn't want high school graduations truncated. Every name is important to somebody. What is particularly notable is 5 women are listed in the Jesus' genealogy recorded in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 1.

Read and Discuss Joshua 2

Questions

1. Have you ever known or encountered a prostitute?
2. Why did Rahab protect the Israelites? (see Joshua 2:11)
3. What is the hardest part about putting your faith in God?
4. Have you ever made a public “profession of faith” (said out loud in a public setting that God is the supreme Lord of all)? How have you told people this Truth in smaller ways in everyday life?
5. What are some ways you put your beliefs about God into action?
6. How has your faith affected your family, your friends, and your community?

Close with Intercessory Prayer

Allow the class to share any praises or concerns they have. Make a prayer list to keep track of them. Close the class by praying over the praises and concerns the class named.

Ruth the Redeemed Refugee – Ruth 1-4



Introduction

Matthew 1 list 40 generations of Jesus’ male descendants, but only names 5 women— Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba, and Mary. Today, we will hear the story of Ruth the redeemed refugee.

Ruth is a short book. It only takes 15 minutes to read it. I encourage you to read the whole thing. I’m going to share much of it today as I can and make some comments as we go

through the story. However, I encourage you to read the whole book.

Ruth 1

¹ In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land. So, a man from Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab. ² The man’s name was Elimelek, his wife’s name was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Kilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to Moab and lived there.

[I just want to point out that the famine was so bad in Israel that this family left their homeland in search of food. How bad would life have to be for you to move your family out of America in search of food?]

³ Now Elimelek, Naomi’s husband, died, and she was left with her two sons. ⁴ They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth. After they had lived there about ten years, ⁵ both Mahlon and Kilion also died, and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband.

[Remember, this is a patriarchal (male dominated) society. Women have no way to make it on their own. With out a husband or sons, Naomi and her daughters-in-law are destitute.]



⁶ When Naomi heard in Moab that the Lord had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them, she and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there. ⁷ With her two daughters-in-law she left the place where she had been living and set out on the road that would take them back to the land of Judah.

⁸ Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, “Go back, each of you, to your mother’s

home. May the Lord show you kindness, as you have shown kindness to your dead husbands and to me. ⁹ May the Lord grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband.”

Then she kissed them goodbye and they wept aloud ¹⁰ and said to her, “We will go back with you to your people.”

¹¹ But Naomi said, “Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your husbands? ¹² Return home, my daughters; I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me—even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons—¹³ would you wait until they grew up? Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the Lord’s hand has turned against me!”

[Now, that's the way Naomi thinks. She assumes the Lord is against her, but that isn't necessarily true. However, it's easy to fall into this negative thinking when life is hard for a long time.]

¹⁴ At this they wept aloud again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth clung to her.

¹⁵ “Look,” said Naomi, “your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her.”

¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me.” ¹⁸ When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her.



Ruth

What we see here is amazing and I don’t want you to miss it. What we have here is a decision by Ruth to follow God. Both Orpah and Ruth were Moabites. Moabites did not worship the God of the Bible. Moabites worshiped idols and false gods. But Ruth and Orpah both saw something special in Naomi’s family. Naomi’s family worshiped the God of the Bible—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And Orpah and Ruth must

have seen something special in this family. There is always something special about people who worship the One True God of the Bible. And it was so special that both Orpah and Ruth wanted to leave their own people’s ways behind in Moab and convert to Naomi’s people and religion in Israel.

Very often, a person's decision to follow God is closely linked to the people of God they know. Most people don't care that much about whether Christians can quote the Bible or explain the theology and doctrines of Christianity. What they do care about is how you live. Does your life embody the Christian faith so that people want to join with you in following God? Is your life a witness for Christ? If Ruth were your daughter-in-law, would she see God in you so strongly she would want to leave behind her former way of life apart from God and follow your people instead?

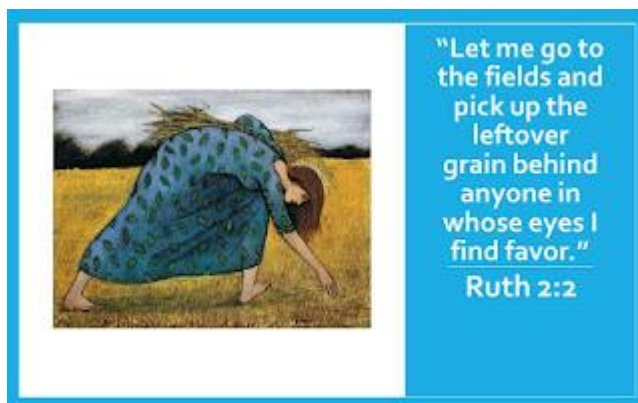
But Naomi explains how hard it will be to follow her home to Israel. Living as God's people is not necessarily easy. Jesus even taught that you should count the cost before you decide to follow him. To one man who wanted to follow him, Jesus said, "Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." (Matthew 8:20) In other words, Jesus and his followers often must lead a hard life not even knowing where they will sleep at night.

Orpah decides the cost is too high and decides to go back to Moab. However, Ruth is determined. She has found in Naomi's family a life that is better than her former life in Moab. She would rather face hardship with God's people than remain in Moab apart from the One True God.

¹⁹ So the two women [*Ruth and Naomi*] went on until they came to Bethlehem. When they arrived in Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them, and the women exclaimed, "Can this be Naomi?"

²⁰ "Don't call me Naomi," she told them. "Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. ²¹ I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The Lord has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me."

²² So Naomi returned from Moab accompanied by Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, arriving in Bethlehem as the barley harvest was beginning.



Ruth 2

¹ Now Naomi had a relative on her husband's side, a man of standing from the clan of Elimelek, whose name was Boaz.

² And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, "Let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favor."

Naomi said to her, "Go ahead, my daughter." ³ So she went out, entered a field and began to glean behind the harvesters. As it turned out, she was working in a field belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelek.

[The ancient Israelites had a form of social welfare. When farmers harvested their fields, they would leave the corners and edges of the field unharvested. Then, the poor, the widows, and orphans could come harvest what was left. It wasn't much, but it might be enough they wouldn't starve. Of course, the poor, widows, and orphans were vulnerable and often mistreated (just like

they are today; people often treat them scornfully and they have very little recourse). So, Ruth is going to go try and glean enough from the leftover harvest to keep herself and her mother-in-law alive. Can you imagine being in her situation?]

⁴ Just then Boaz arrived from Bethlehem and greeted the harvesters, “The Lord be with you!”

“The Lord bless you!” they answered.

⁵ Boaz asked the overseer of his harvesters, “Who does that young woman belong to?”

⁶ The overseer replied, “She is the Moabite who came back from Moab with Naomi. ⁷ She said, ‘Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the harvesters.’ She came into the field and has remained here from morning till now, except for a short rest in the shelter.”

⁸ So Boaz said to Ruth, “My daughter, listen to me. Don’t go and glean in another field and don’t go away from here. Stay here with the women who work for me. ⁹ Watch the field where the men are harvesting, and follow along after the women. I have told the men not to lay a hand on you. And whenever you are thirsty, go and get a drink from the water jars the men have filled.”

¹⁰ At this, she bowed down with her face to the ground. She asked him, “Why have I found such favor in your eyes that you notice me—a foreigner?”

¹¹ Boaz replied, “I’ve been told all about what you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband—how you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to live with a people you did not know before. ¹² May the Lord repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.”

¹³ “May I continue to find favor in your eyes, my lord,” she said. “You have put me at ease by speaking kindly to your servant—though I do not have the standing of one of your servants.”

¹⁴ At mealtime Boaz said to her, “Come over here. Have some bread and dip it in the wine vinegar.”

When she sat down with the harvesters, he offered her some roasted grain. She ate all she wanted and had some left over. ¹⁵ As she got up to glean, Boaz gave orders to his men, “Let her gather among the sheaves and don’t reprimand her. ¹⁶ Even pull out some stalks for her from the bundles and leave them for her to pick up, and don’t rebuke her.”

¹⁷ So Ruth gleaned in the field until evening. Then she threshed the barley she had gathered, and it amounted to about an ephah. [An ephah is about 30 pounds.] ¹⁸ She carried it back to town, and her mother-in-law saw how much she had gathered. Ruth also brought out and gave her what she had left over after she had eaten enough.

¹⁹ Her mother-in-law asked her, “Where did you glean today? Where did you work? Blessed be the man who took notice of you!”

Then Ruth told her mother-in-law about the one at whose place she had been working. “The name of the man I worked with today is Boaz,” she said.

²⁰ “The Lord bless him!” Naomi said to her daughter-in-law. “He has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead.” She added, “That man is our close relative; he is one of our guardian-redeemers.”

²¹ Then Ruth the Moabite said, “He even said to me, ‘Stay with my workers until they finish harvesting all my grain.’”

²² Naomi said to Ruth her daughter-in-law, “It will be good for you, my daughter, to go with the women who work for him, because in someone else’s field you might be harmed.”

²³ So Ruth stayed close to the women of Boaz to glean until the barley and wheat harvests were finished. And she lived with her mother-in-law.



Ruth 3

One day Ruth’s mother-in-law Naomi said to her, “My daughter, I must find a home for you, where you will be well provided for. ² Now Boaz, with whose women you have worked, is a relative of ours. Tonight he will be winnowing barley on the threshing floor. ³ Wash, put on perfume, and get dressed in your best clothes. Then go down to the threshing floor, but don’t let him know you are there until he has finished eating and

drinking. ⁴ When he lies down, note the place where he is lying. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down. He will tell you what to do.”

⁵ “I will do whatever you say,” Ruth answered. ⁶ So she went down to the threshing floor and did everything her mother-in-law told her to do.

⁷ When Boaz had finished eating and drinking and was in good spirits, he went over to lie down at the far end of the grain pile. Ruth approached quietly, uncovered his feet and lay down. ⁸ In the middle of the night something startled the man; he turned—and there was a woman lying at his feet!

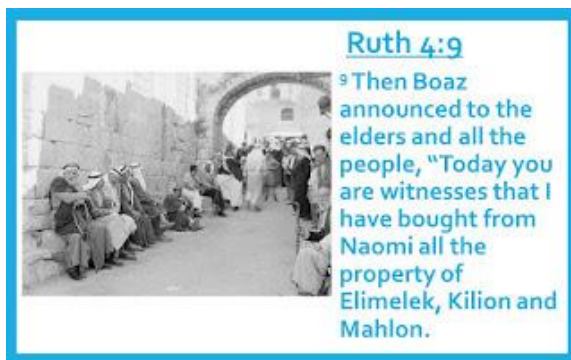
⁹ “Who are you?” he asked.

“I am your servant Ruth,” she said. “Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a guardian-redeemer of our family.”

Boaz was Naomi and Ruth's guardian-redeemer (or family redeemer). That meant, it was his responsibility to make sure the family line of Naomi's dead husbands and sons did not perish from the earth. It was his duty to care for, protect, and provide family heirs for his dead kin's surviving family.

Boaz had the power to redeem Ruth and Naomi—to save them from a life of hunger, poverty, shame, and death. He had the power to save their family name. But to do so would be costly. Caring for them meant more mouths to feed, and we've already seen in the story how famine could strike and devastate a community. Furthermore, redeeming Ruth and Naomi would draw resources from his own family.

Jesus Christ is the Great Redeemer of all humanity. He redeems us from spiritual hunger, poverty, shame, and death. His redemption assures our names remain among God's people. But our redemption comes at great cost to Christ too--much greater than Boaz's. Jesus paid for our redemption with his own blood. He suffered and died on the cross to pay the price for our sins. His redemption brings us back into the family of God, as heirs of eternal life, forgiven of sin, blessed with eternal life. His redemption adds our name to the Book of Life.

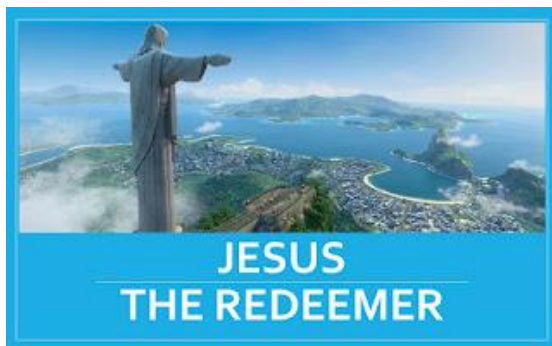


Ruth 4:13-16

¹³ So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. When he made love to her, the Lord enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son. ¹⁴ The women said to Naomi: “Praise be to the Lord, who this day has not left you without a guardian-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel! ¹⁵ He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven

sons, has given him birth.”

¹⁶ Then Naomi took the child in her arms and cared for him. ¹⁷ The women living there said, “Naomi has a son!” And they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.



Jesus the Redeemer

David was the great King of Israel—the model for the coming Messiah, The King of kings. The Messiah is Jesus Christ—the great, great, great, great... grandson of Ruth, the redeemed refugee from a foreign land. Isn't it good to know our Lord and Savior, our Redeemer was willing to pay the ultimate price to redeem us from our sin? For Jesus Christ laid down his life on the cross of Calvary to pay the price for our sin. If He was willing to do all

that, isn't He willing to redeem whatever other brokenness or shame or misfortune you face.

But do you trust Him? Will you put all your faith in Him? Will you be like Orpah and turn and go back to your false gods and unfaithfulness? Or will you be like Ruth, who counted the costs and said in Ruth 1:16, “Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God.

The choice is yours.

Session 3 Leader's Guide

Greeting – Welcome participants, make announcements, and handout material for the next class.

Opening Prayer – Thank God for the chance to study together and pray for wisdom.

Read and Discuss Ruth 1:1-2

How bad would life have to be for you to move your family out of America in search of food?

Read and Discuss Ruth 1:3-13

When you are plagued by difficulties, do you assume God is angry with you or punishing you? Why or why not?

Read and Discuss Ruth 1:14-18

If Ruth were your daughter-in-law, how might she see God in you so strongly she would want to leave behind her former way of life and be a Christian instead?

Read and Discuss Ruth 2:17-23

1. What does it mean that Boaz is a guardian-redeemer?
[The Hebrew word for *guardian-redeemer* is a legal term for one who has the obligation to redeem a relative in serious difficulty (see Lev. 25:25-55).]
2. How does it make you feel to think of Jesus as the Guardian-Redeemer who died so you can live? Does it motivate you to do anything differently? Explain.
3. Orpah left Naomi and returned to her own people in Moab, but Ruth stayed with Naomi. Ruth left her family in Moab and everything she had ever known to follow Naomi to Israel. We are also called to leave our past behind and follow Jesus when we become Christian. What would be the hardest thing for you to leave behind if Jesus asked you to?

Close with Intercessory Prayer

Allow the class to share any praises or concerns they have. Make a prayer list to keep track of them. Close the class by praying over the praises and concerns the class named.

Beautiful Bathsheba – 2 Samuel 11



“...and David the king begat Solomon *of her of Urias.*”
Matthew 1:6
(literal Greek)

**BEAUTIFUL
BATHSHEBA**

Introduction

Today, I share the story of beautiful Bathsheba, the fourth of the only five women listed in Jesus royal lineage of over forty generations. And of the five women listed, Bathsheba is not even fully named. Some translations add her name in parentheses, but the original Greek literally says, "and David the king begat Solomon *of her of Urias*". Oh Matthew! Can't you even say her name! Beautiful Bathsheba!

Bathsheba's story is incredibly complicated *and embarrassing*. It's the kind of tragic, awful affair that most people would rather not talk about and just forget it ever happened. Certainly, it is not the kind of glorious tale one praises as a proud moment in your family history! And yet, Bathsheba is right there in the genealogy of Christ our Lord. Without this woman and the terrible thing that happened, Jesus would not be the man he was, because Bathsheba is his great, great, great... grandmother. So, what happened to beautiful Bathsheba?

2 Samuel 11:1

In the spring of the year, when kings normally go out to war, David sent Joab and the Israelite army to fight the Ammonites. They destroyed the Ammonite army and laid siege to the city of Rabbah. However, David stayed behind in Jerusalem.

[Note: There is trouble here. This is the time of year kings go to war, but David is in the city. For some reason, he is not acting like a king. Is he injured? Tired? Have pneumonia? Being lazy? We don't know for sure, but David's not acting like a king.]

2 Samuel 11:2-3

Late one afternoon, after his midday rest, David got out of bed and was walking on the roof of the palace. As he looked out over the city, he noticed a woman of unusual beauty taking a bath. He sent someone to find out who she was, and he was told, “She is Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite.”

Bathsheba's father was Eliam who was the son of Ahithophel. Ahithophel was one of David's best royal advisers. A few years after David meets Bathsheba, Ahithophel will defect to David's son Absalom when Absalom leads a rebellion to overthrow David.

Rabbinic legend holds that Bathsheba's grandfather, Ahithophel, is the one who instigated Absalom to rebel against David. Though the Scripture does not say it, ancient Jewish rabbis taught that Ahithophel told Bathsheba to seduce David on purpose as part of his own plot to take over the kingdom. I think that's just wild speculation from rabbis trying to make sense of why David, normally a faithful and righteous guy, would do something so terrible. If anything, when

Ahithophel rebels, it is to pay David back for what we are about to see happen to Bathsheba. How would you feel if someone did the following to your granddaughter?

2 Samuel 11:4-6a

Then David sent messengers to get her; and when she came to the palace, he slept with her. She had just completed the purification rites after having her menstrual period. Then she returned home. Later, when Bathsheba discovered that she was pregnant, she sent David a message, saying, "I'm pregnant."

Then David sent word to Joab: "Send me Uriah the Hittite."



Uriah the Hittite

Uriah was Bathsheba's husband. He was also one of David's very best warriors (think Green Beret or Navy Seal). Uriah was listed among the 37 best warriors in David's entire army—an army of tens of thousands of fighting soldiers. And Uriah was a Hittite, not a Hebrew. People often accuse God in the Old Testament and Israelites of being racists who hated foreigners, but that just wasn't true. We've already seen that Tamar,

Rahab, and Ruth were non-Jewish foreigners God welcomed as part of His holy people, Israel. Foreigners were always welcome if they worshiped God. God told His people to look after the foreigners among them, because they were some of the most vulnerable in the community and God cared about them. God frequently reminded the Israelites they had once been foreigners in foreign land and they ought to remember that and take care of the refugees among them. It was false gods and idolatry and wicked religion that God rejected and called His people to reject. We see now that Uriah is a foreign minority living and fighting for God's people.

Uriah's name itself means "Yahweh is my light". Yahweh is the proper name of God, the name He revealed to Moses through the burning bush when He said, "Tell my people I AM has sent you." Uriah was a convert to Judaism who worshiped the One True God and he was one of David's best, most loyal elite soldiers. And we shall now see how honorable Uriah's character was.

2 Samuel 11:6-11

Then David sent word to Joab: "Send me Uriah the Hittite." So Joab sent him to David. When Uriah arrived, David asked him how Joab and the army were getting along and how the war was progressing. Then he told Uriah, "Go on home and relax." David even sent a gift to Uriah after he had left the palace. But Uriah didn't go home. He slept that night at the palace entrance with the king's palace guard. When David heard that Uriah had not gone home, he summoned him and asked, "What's the matter? Why didn't you go home last night after being away for so long?" Uriah replied, "The Ark and the armies of Israel and Judah are living in tents, and Joab

and my master's men are camping in the open fields. How could I go home to wine and dine and sleep with my wife? I swear that I would never do such a thing.”

David figures he can cover this whole thing up if he can just get Uriah to sleep with Bathsheba, but Uriah's honor and integrity is getting in the way. Oh, the irony! David, supposedly a man after God's own heart, has lapsed in his own integrity and done a deplorable thing and he can't make it go away because his mighty man, Uriah, is too honorable!

2 Samuel 11:12-17

“Well, stay here today,” David told him, “and tomorrow you may return to the army.” So Uriah stayed in Jerusalem that day and the next. Then David invited him to dinner and got him drunk. But even then he couldn't get Uriah to go home to his wife. Again he slept at the palace entrance with the king's palace guard.

So the next morning David wrote a letter to Joab and gave it to Uriah to deliver. The letter instructed Joab, “Station Uriah on the front lines where the battle is fiercest. Then pull back so that he will be killed.” So Joab assigned Uriah to a spot close to the city wall where he knew the enemy's strongest men were fighting. And when the enemy soldiers came out of the city to fight, Uriah the Hittite was killed along with several other Israelite soldiers.

David has gone from bad to worse. Now, he has gone from adultery to lies and cover up and murder. If David were our president, the Congress would call for impeachment and the Senate would have to convict! He is guilty of high crimes against the Kingdom. He has put his own interest ahead of the Kingdom of God he swore to defend, abused his power, and murdered Uriah (and several other soldiers needlessly died in the process).

2 Samuel 11:26-27

When Uriah's wife heard that her husband was dead, she mourned for him. When the period of mourning was over, David sent for her and brought her to the palace, and she became one of his wives. Then she gave birth to a son. But the Lord was displeased with what David had done.



Bathsheba

There's a tremendous story in the next chapter of how God sends a prophet, Nathan, to rebuke and punish David. I encourage you to read it. I'm not going to include it, because it's the story about how David was held accountable and how he repented. But this morning, I'm telling the story of Bathsheba, not David.

You see, that's the problem you run into with Bathsheba. She's just treated as a side character in all this. David's the King. Uriah's a mighty warrior. Nathan's a prophet. And most of the commentary and sermons and books you find about this whole story centers on all the men. There just isn't much information about Bathsheba the woman. Well, it's a man's world (or at least it was when 2 Samuel was written).

I have so many questions about Bathsheba! Don't you? Like: Was she a willing party to this whole thing or just a victim? Now, I must make an important disclaimer. We live in an era where we are finally beginning to recognize and expose the shameful, devastating hurt that has been done to so many women through sexual harassment, assault, and rape. In this #metoo era, I recognize that I still don't understand all that women have been through over the years—even though I have a wife and two daughters; I don't know all that women go through. I have read statistics as high as 1 in 3 women are sexually harassed in their lifetime and 1 in 5 will either be raped or face attempted rape. There may be women reading this right now who have experienced sexual mistreatment. And I hope you know I have a pastor's heart (and also the heart of a father with two daughters). I care about what you've experienced. Can I have your permission to speak frankly? I don't have all the answers and I freely admit as a man I may in ignorance stick my foot in my mouth, but I speak with a sincere heart. We've got to do better. We've got to stop the mistreatment of women.

When I read Bathsheba's story, one nagging thought comes to mind. Bathsheba *could be* like Monica Lewinsky. You remember Monica Lewinsky? She was the White House intern that had a sexual affair with President Bill Clinton back in the 1990s. For many, Monica Lewinsky became the modern definition of a floozy. Which begs the question: have we treated Monica Lewinsky fairly? How about all these other women who are thrust into the public spotlight because they are victims who were sexually harassed or objectified or assaulted and suddenly their private lives are paraded out for public scrutiny and everyone's talking about them. It's like being assaulted all over again. Put yourself in their shoes for a minute. How would you feel?

Here's the thing: People rarely *ever* really know the whole story about anything, but everyone has an opinion. It's as if we cannot abide not knowing (or thinking we know) and so we're compelled to construct our own conclusions—usually based on the most spurious of clues. We look at people's incredibly traumatic experiences that are as complex as a tangled ball of yarn, with threads of mistakes, victimization, causation, outside influences, happenstance, influences from the spiritual realm (both darkness and light) and we try to distill it all down to some simplistic, neatly tied bow that we can place on top of a Christmas present and says, "This is the story." It rarely works that way in real life. And not in God's story either, because God's story in the Bible is REAL LIFE. We may never know the WHOLE story of David and Bathsheba. Only God knows the TRUTH. But we do know this, God embedded Bathsheba's memory in Jesus' royal lineage. Whatever her virtues or failings may have been, God knows and He has kept her name for all to know for all time.

What we do know about Bathsheba is this:

First of all, she couldn't really say no to David. David was the king. What the king tells you to do, you do. If he wanted to sleep with her, she couldn't say no. It didn't matter if she was married.

Second, her husband was murdered. That's terrible!

Third, Bathsheba got pregnant, gave birth, and the child died after seven days. The Bible says the child's death was punishment *for David's sin*. However, the baby's death *grieved Bathsheba*

too (See 2 Samuel 12:24). I can't imagine the horror of carrying a child in your womb for nine months (especially if it was the result of forced sex) and then holding it in your arms for seven days and then watching it die. And we don't know if Bathsheba's sex with David was consensual or forced. And how would that affect the emotions? That's messed up!

We also know that Bathsheba became David's wife after her husband's murder. (Again, she couldn't really say no, could she? What the King says, you do.) Maybe she was just making the best of her situation, like women have always had to do who lived in a male dominated world. Maybe it was Bathsheba's plan all along (like the rabbis said). The truth is, we don't know. Nevertheless, Bathsheba remained David's loyal wife. The first son died, but she had another son and named him Solomon, whom David promised would be heir to the royal throne. Even though David had at least eight wives and had eighteen sons, Bathsheba managed to secure succession to the royal throne for *her son*, Solomon—an ascension that stood against all other rivals. Furthermore, Bathsheba helped guide Solomon as he started as king. Many believe Proverbs 31—that famous passage extolling the virtues of the ideal woman—was written by Solomon as he recalled the advice of his mother, Bathsheba. There are certainly two pieces of advice toward the beginning of Proverbs 31 that seem like something Bathsheba would tell her son when he became king.

Proverbs 31:2-3

O my son, O son of my womb,
O son of my vows,
do not waste your strength on
women,
on those who ruin kings.

Proverbs 31:2-3

O my son, O son of my womb, O son of my vows, do not waste your strength on women, on those who ruin kings.

I encourage you to take some time to read 2 Samuel 12-20 of all the trouble David got into because of what he did to Bathsheba—pain, heartache, murder, wasted time and strength and resources of God's Kingdom. Think of your own lives today

and walk in integrity.

But there is another bit of advice I think is even more relevant and likely to come from the mouth of Bathsheba, a woman trying to make her way in a man's world where she had no power, no voice, no respect, no guarantee of justice—Proverbs 31:8-9.

Proverbs 31:8-9

Speak up for those who cannot
speak for themselves;
ensure justice for those being
crushed.
Yes, speak up for the poor and
helpless,
and see that they get justice.

Proverbs 31:8-9

Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves; ensure justice for those being crushed. Yes, speak up for the poor and helpless, and see that they get justice.

God can use anything in your life to accomplish his plans. He can use your mistakes, your fears, your trauma, your sin. God could even use an affair or a sexual

assault to accomplish His plans. That doesn't mean we should go looking for these things. Certainly not. Who wants the pain and suffering and darkness and death that come from these evils?

No, we don't go looking for them, but sometime these evils come and find us. And if something like this has found you, I want you to know that God loves you. God cares about you. He knows the whole story. And even if it feels like the world doesn't understand or care or seek justice for you:

GOD KNOWS.

GOD CARES.

GOD UNDERSTANDS.

AND GOD WILL BRING JUSTICE as only God can.

And Jesus, the great, great, great... grandson of beautiful Bathsheba is the answer. He is the One who:

SAVES,

FORGIVES,

RECONCILES,

HEALS,

And in the end will MAKE ALL THINGS RIGHT!

He is the One who was born in a manger, but He is also the One we wait for who will come again to judge the living and the dead and make all things new. Amen.



Session 4 Leader's Guide

Greeting – Welcome participants, make announcements, and handout material for the next class.

Opening Prayer – Thank God for the chance to study together and pray for wisdom.

Read and Discuss 2 Samuel 11

Questions

1. How would you feel if someone did what David did to Bathsheba to your granddaughter?
2. Why do you think God wanted Bathsheba's story in the Bible and her name included in Jesus' lineage? Why wouldn't this just be swept under the rug?
3. What questions do you have about Bathsheba and this story?
4. How would you feel if you were Bathsheba and everyone found out about this incident?
How would it make you feel if you were a willing party to the affair?
How would it make you feel if you were an unwilling party (you were forced)?
How would you feel if you were one of the women in our modern times who have been through a very public sex scandal?
5. How does what you're learning about Bathsheba's story affect the way you think of people today who go through an affair or a sexual assault?
6. How have you seen God work through some of the incredibly painful, embarrassing, and/or most difficult experiences in your life?

Close with Intercessory Prayer

Allow the class to share any praises or concerns they have. Make a prayer list to keep track of them. Close the class by praying over the praises and concerns the class named.

Mary, Mother of Jesus – Matthew 1:16-25



Introduction

Of the 40 generations of men in Jesus family tree listed in Matthew 1:1-16, only five women are named. It's amazing any women are named at all, since the patriarchal custom of the biblical writers was to omit women. So, the fact that these five particular women are named is a clue there's something very special about them and we need to pay close attention. And yet, these five heroines of our faith are not famous for the things you would

think. Every one of their situations was scandalous in some way or another.

Tamar was impregnated by her father-in-law. Yet she was also wise and cunning. She sensed God's hand at work in the family of Judah's and was willing to do anything to be part of it.

Rahab was a Canaanite prostitute who grasped her chance to break free from sin and destruction by professing her faith in God and joining His holy people.

Ruth was a destitute foreign refugee who clung to God and His people and found redemption.

Bathsheba had an affair with the king and lost her child, but she became a queen who advocates for the oppressed and powerless.

Today, we will consider the best-known of the five women in Jesus' genealogy—Mary, the mother of Jesus.

Matthew 1:16-25

Jacob was the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary.

Mary gave birth to Jesus, who is called the Messiah.

¹⁷ All those listed above include fourteen generations from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the Babylonian exile, and fourteen from the Babylonian exile to the Messiah.

¹⁸ This is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Joseph, to whom she was engaged, was a righteous man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement quietly.

²⁰ As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. "Joseph, son of David," the angel said, "do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. ²¹ And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

²² All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord's message through his prophet:

²³ “Look! The virgin will conceive a child!

She will give birth to a son,
and they will call him Immanuel,
which means ‘God is with us.’”

²⁴ When Joseph woke up, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded and took Mary as his wife. ²⁵ But he did not have sexual relations with her until her son was born. And Joseph named him Jesus.



Joseph

Joseph is not Jesus' biological father. However, the Gospel of Matthew spends 16 verses telling us Jesus' lineage *through Joseph*. What does that say? One thing it says is Joseph adopted Jesus as his very own son. Joseph treated Jesus as his flesh and blood and there was no distinction in his heart or mind that Jesus wasn't his actual son, even though the relationship wasn't biological. How many

have known this special adoptive love that treats one as a son and daughter by choice? Think about it: most people do not get to choose their parents. You are born and your biological father and mother are who they are, like it or not. And parents are compelled by the laws of nature to love their biological children. On the other hand, adoption is an actual choice. An adoptive parent chooses to accept and love their adopted child. Nature does not require it. And it is a very special kind of love when someone chooses to adopt a child who is not their biological son or daughter. The same could be true for stepparents who chose to love their stepchildren as their very own.

It is worth noting here the situation into which Jesus was to be born. Jesus, the most important man who ever lived, who is the Son of God, was born in need of adoption. He grew up in the home of a father who was not related *by blood*. Mary was his mother, but Joseph was under no obligation whatsoever to accept Jesus. Yet Joseph chose to adopt God's Only Begotten Son as his own.

But what of Mary? Who is she?



Mary, the Mother of Jesus

Mary has been famous to Christians for 2,000 years. She is so integral to our faith she is named in the Apostles' Creed, "*We believe in Jesus Christ... who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary...*" Some people admire Mary so much they treat her like a goddess, even praying to her. Who is this fascinating mother?

The Bible does not focus on Mary. After the stories of Jesus' conception and birth, Mary is only mentioned 12 more times. Mary is there in the background throughout the story of the New Testament, but never as the focus. The focus is always on Christ—the Son of God, the Savior of the world. Even so, Mary is there at the birth, she is there in the midst of Jesus' ministry (struggling to understand like the rest of us). She is there at the cross as her son dies, at the tomb when he rose from the grave, and she continues to help lead the church with the Disciples in the Book of Acts after Christ ascended to heaven.

There is absolutely no description in the Bible of what Mary looked like or how she dressed. In our world today, we are very focused on how women look, what clothes and makeup they wear, hairstyles, body image, etc. However, the Bible mentions nothing about Mary's appearance. That tells us these physical things were not important. Maybe they shouldn't be as important to us either. From God's perspective (the perspective that really matters) true beauty has nothing to do with physical appearance or fashion. The true beauty of a woman comes from the way she responds to God.

Mary would have been a young girl when the angel Gabriel came to her—probably only about 12 or 13 years old, because that was the age most first century girls were offered for marriage in Galilee. Mary was engaged, so we know she was of age. What do you think of when you think of Mary? You might think of a young woman just out of college between the ages of 20-30 years old because that's the typical age women get married in our culture. However, in the first century AD, it would be almost unheard of for a Jewish person to wait until the 20s or 30s to marry (maybe a second or third marriage after being widowed, but not a first marriage or having a first child).

Mary was engaged to Joseph. She was an ordinary girl looking forward to an ordinary marriage and an ordinary life, but the angel's extraordinary visit changed her life forever. Mary was afraid and troubled by Gabriel. She never expected the incredible news she would have a child or that her son would be the Messiah. Although she couldn't comprehend how she would conceive the Savior, she responded to God with belief and obedience.

Although it was a huge honor to be chosen by God, her calling would demand great suffering. Just as there is pain in childbirth and motherhood, there would be much pain in the privilege of being the mother of the Messiah. Mary was a willing servant. She trusted God and she obeyed His call.

The angel told Mary in Luke 1:28 that she was highly favored by God. This means Mary was given a large portion of grace or "undeserved favor" from God. Even with God's favor, Mary would still suffer much. Though she has come to be highly honored as the mother of the Savior, she would first know disgrace as an unwed mother. She almost lost her fiancé and risked being stoned to death (the penalty for pregnancy out of wedlock in her time). Her precious child would grow up to be rejected and cruelly murdered in his thirties. Mary's submission to God's plan would cost her dearly, but she was *willing* to be God's servant. Mary was a woman of rare faith and obedience.

Romans 3:23 – “All have sinned and fallen short of God’s glory.”

2 Corinthians 5:21 – “For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ.”



Misunderstandings

We are deeply in debt to Mary. Her willing obedience to God brought the Savior into our world. It's no wonder that people for thousands of years have sought to honor Mary, the mother of the Messiah. Unfortunately, there is something in human nature that leads people to idolize and worship those we especially admire.

Some venerate Mary as divine. They even say Mary—like Jesus—never sinned (a doctrine known as The Immaculate Conception). The Bible never says Mary was without sin. To the contrary, the Bible tells us in Romans 3:23, “All have sinned and fallen short of God’s glory.” Every person who ever lived has sinned at some point—including Mary. Furthermore, we see that Mary struggled to understand Jesus’ ministry just like his Disciples. At one point in the Gospels, Mary shows up along with her other sons and attempts to take Jesus home with her because they thought he was crazy (Mark 3:21, 31). She didn't understand. You see, Mary was not perfect. She was a sinner in need of God’s grace and salvation just like you and me. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, “For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ.” It is through Jesus Christ that Mary is saved—just like you and me.



Conclusion

What do you see when you think of Mary? You may be tempted to picture the perfect women portrayed in the porcelain nativity scene sculpted by an artist. Is that the real Mary? Is that who you think you need to emulate?

I urge you not to turn Mary into some mythical figure. Let her be the real girl she was in the Gospel. The real story is much

more compelling than the myth. Mary was young, poor, and female in a time when women were not highly regarded. She was a real mother who faced real challenges. She had no special powers or abilities that you don't have. All she had was a willing and obedient heart. God saw her faith and obedience and He helped her succeed. You don't have to be perfect for God to choose you or help you—you just need to be willing and obey.

Mary was like so many mothers. She was there in the background the whole time nurturing, supporting, and encouraging. She had too much to do and never enough time to do it. She wasn't a super mom; she was just a regular person depending on God to help her through. She was not the central character in the story, but that's OK. She never needed the focus to be on

her. To the contrary, she must have recognized as she came to understand more fully who her son was that the focus should always be on him instead of her. Jesus is Lord, not Mary. Jesus is the Savior, not Mary. Jesus is the one who takes away our sins, who answers our prayers, who directs our path.

I think it would disturb Mary if we spent too much time honoring her. She would say, “Why are you giving me all this attention? Don’t look at me! Don’t worship me! I’m just a person like you. Please! Please, look at my Son over there! Isn’t *he* wonderful?” Oh, that we all had that attitude. This life is not about us! It is about Christ! “Turn your eyes upon Jesus! Look full in his wonderful face and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace!”

And Mary’s life encourages us to be the best we can be—not because she was perfect, but—because she was just an ordinary girl. You don’t have to be perfect or even special to make a difference. Mary was just an ordinary young girl who was willing to be the mother God wanted her to be. Are you willing to obey God’s plan for your life? Do you trust God to take what you have to offer and use it for the glory of His Kingdom? That’s the story of Mary, the mother of Jesus.

Session 5 Leader's Guide

Greeting – Welcome participants, make announcements, and handout material for the next class.

Opening Prayer – Thank God for the chance to study together and pray for wisdom.

Read and Discuss Matthew 1:16-25

Questions

1. What do you think of when you think of Mary?
2. What is the most fascinating thing to you about Mary?
3. How well have you obeyed God's plan for your life so far? What are some things you've done well? How are some ways you could have done better?
4. What are some ways God has used what you have to offer for the glory of His Kingdom? Anything that surprised you?
5. What is something you learned or enjoyed most about this 5-week lesson series?

Close with Intercessory Prayer

Allow the class to share any praises or concerns they have. Make a prayer list to keep track of them. Close the class by praying over the praises and concerns the class named.