

Biblical Women

Exploring Their Stories with Girls

Janet Claussen

Voices:
Nurturing the
Spirituality of Girls

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To my father, John Kohler, whose passion for his faith has given me roots and wings.

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Introduction

“You are made in the image of God.” That simple statement is the heart of spirituality—a profound statement about who we are and who we are becoming. There is no more important mantra for adults to communicate as they parent, teach, minister, and pray with young people.

The journey to adulthood has always been a time of transition. Those who walk with adolescents know that the journey is also unique for each person. In fact, recent studies confirm the age-old intuitive sense that girls and boys experience life in ways that are unique to their gender. If gender differences affect physical, emotional, and psychological development, then certainly, spirituality is shaped as well by feminine or masculine perspectives.

For girls in this country at the turn of the millennium, opportunities for equality are greater than for girls in any previous generation. Still, psychologists, educators, ministers, and parents know that the risks and issues that confront young females seem rooted in a different reality than those that face young males. Brought up in the crucible of a media world, girls continue to receive messages that beauty and body are more important than mind and spirit. Told that they can do anything, they too often engage in behaviors that endanger them more than empower them. In the interest of “being nice,” they abdicate their voice to males, exhibiting a dramatic drop in self-esteem in their adolescent years.

Girls experience life in terms of relationships. While their male counterparts charge headlong into separation and independence, young women, by nature and nurture, seem predisposed to connectedness and intimacy. Psychologists like Carol Gilligan (*In a Different Voice*) and Mary Pipher (*Reviving Ophelia*) have brought attention to the life of girls, spawning an entire genre of literature aimed at addressing the phenomenon of the female adolescent experience. Addressing young women’s psychosocial world is a good beginning, but few experts in the field of girls’ development have ventured into the realm of spirituality.

Spirituality is about relationship—relationship with the One who created us. It is about loving and living out a call to become the kind of person God created us to be. Girls need to hear this message, embrace it, and live it. They need guidance to challenge a culture that contradicts their sacredness; they need adults who will listen to

them, relate with them, and walk with them, reminding them of their destiny, reminding them, “You are made in the image of God.”

“Herstory” of the Voices Series

The Voices Series is one step toward the realization of the dream of a national team of female educators, youth ministers, parents, and mentors who have a special concern for the spirituality of girls. They envisioned a multifaceted initiative that would bring together the energy of the girls’ movement and the wisdom of women’s spirituality. Their dream was a convergence of the work of psychologists Mary Pipher and Carol Gilligan with the work of Catholic writers like Maria Harris and Elizabeth Johnson. As a result of listening sessions with girls from around the country, the team identified the need for resources for adults who work with girls in Catholic school and parish settings. One response to that need is the Voices series, a result of Saint Mary’s Press’s ongoing commitment to touching the hearts of teens by providing gender-specific resources for them and for those who work with them.

Overview of the Voices Series

The Voices series consists of six manuals that present strategies to use with adolescent girls in schools, parishes, and single-gender settings. The authors and consultants in the series have extensive experience working with girls in both coed and single-gender situations. The manuals they have produced are different from one another in content and focus, yet all share the same purpose: to help girls embrace the true meaning of the phrase “created in the image of God,” a profound statement about who they are and who they are becoming. This manual, *Biblical Women: Exploring Their Stories with Girls*, is one of the results; the other manuals in the series are as follows:

- *Awakening: Challenging the Culture with Girls* offers a variety of activities to help girls critique the culture for both its negative and its positive influences.
- *Retreats: Deepening the Spirituality of Girls* presents seven retreats on themes such as friendship, media, and childhood myths. Also included is a retreat for mothers and daughters.
- *Prayer: Celebrating and Reflecting with Girls* provides ideas for community prayer services and suggestions for enriching girls’ personal prayer life.
- *Church Women: Probing History with Girls* outlines strategies for discovering the richness of women’s contributions to the life of the church.
- *Seeking: Doing Theology with Girls* offers methods for exploring and discussing theological and moral issues from the perspective of women.

Where and When to Use the Voices Series

The Voices resource manuals can be used in a variety of settings, though they are intended for use with girls in single-gender groups. The rationale for meeting in single-gender settings is particularly compelling for young women. Numerous studies indicate that girls are much more likely to speak up, express their opinion, and be genuinely heard in “just girl” groups. Some topics related to growing up and finding one’s way in society are difficult for females to discuss in the presence of males. Imparting the particular wisdom of women to girls, and of men to boys, is a time-honored practice that can be highly effective when used occasionally in educational, church, and social institutions.

Unless you are on the staff of an all-girls school, finding opportunities for single-gender gatherings can be a challenge; consider these suggestions:

- Offer gender-specific electives within a school or parish catechetical setting.
- Work with Scout groups, which are already gender specific.
- Form “just girl” groups that meet beyond the typical school day or parish youth night.
- Establish weekly or monthly sessions within the school or parish schedule, at which girls and boys discuss related topics separately. Subsequent discussion with both groups together can lead to greater understanding between the sexes.
- Create mother-daughter or mentor-mentee discussion groups.
- Organize diocesan days for “just girls” or “just boys,” or both.
- Arrange retreats and youth rallies that have gender-specific components or workshops.

Who Might Use the Voices Series

The six resource manuals in the Voices series may be used by coordinators of youth ministry, directors of religious education, teachers in Catholic schools, campus ministers, youth ministers in parish settings, Girl Scout and Camp Fire leaders, parents, mentors, and other adults who work with girls ages ten through nineteen. Flexible enough for single-sex groups in any setting, the manuals’ ideas are designed to engage girls in both headwork and heart work, challenging them to think while nurturing their spirit.

Overview of This Manual

The strategies in *Biblical Women: Exploring Their Stories with Girls* are designed to help girls discover new perspectives about the familiar stories and hidden stories of our biblical sisters. Foundational to this manual is the appendix, “Voices of Biblical Women,” which tells the stories of over seventy women in first-person narrative. True to the biblical texts, these narratives also provide interpretative material. Each of the seven chapters in the manual incorporates the appendix to familiarize the girls with

the stories of biblical women. Chapter 1 introduces Scripture study from the perspective of women. The remaining six chapters focus on particular women, using a thematic approach.

Scriptural Hermeneutics

Inspired by God, the Bible is a collection of books written by men. The stories evolved out of oral traditions, and decisions about what became the canon, the accepted word of God, were made by men in ages and cultures many centuries removed from our own. Those men could not have escaped the influence of their own culture any more than we can escape the influence of ours today. Additionally, the hermeneutics, or interpretation of Scripture, has until recently been the purview of men. Understandably, the stories that we have heard have placed men and their relationship with God at the center of our religious understanding. “Most of the images and metaphors are masculine, the history recorded is the account of men’s exploits, as reported by men to be read by men” (Regina A. Coll, *Christianity and Feminism in Conversation*, p. 133).

In the last half of the twentieth century, as women were permitted to study theology and the Scriptures on a scholarly level, theologians began to look at the Scriptures through the lens of women’s experience. They began to search for clues to new insights about relationships between men and women and God. What they discovered were the stories of women ignored, forgotten, or understood only from a male perspective. When they changed lenses, they learned that God’s intention for humanity did not place women in a role secondary to that of men, and that Jesus modeled a way of being that respected and affirmed women and that treated women and men as equals. Nothing in the Gospels indicates that Jesus supported anything less than the full participation of women in the Reign of God. In fact, the Bible begins with the story of males and females being created together in God’s own image, and ends with the Book of Revelation proclaiming that all believers will reign together with Christ.

Though both male and female theologians are participating in this new kind of hermeneutics, it is women who have led the way. In the late nineteenth century, Elizabeth Cady Stanton challenged the ideological basis for women’s subordination in the Bible when she wrote her own version of the Scriptures called *The Women’s Bible*. More recently, scholars like Phyllis Trible and Letty M. Russell have been instrumental in the work of feminist interpretation of the Bible, and theologians Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Elizabeth Johnson, and Sandra M. Schneiders are a few of the many Catholic voices that have forged new understandings of God’s word.

It is vitally important to bring this Good News to the next generation. Imagine hearing the word of God for the first time with a clearer vision in which both women and men are full participants in salvation history.

How to Use This Manual

You may present the material in this manual in its entirety, or you may select pieces to supplement your regular curriculum in a school or religious education program. This

manual may also serve as the basis of an ongoing Bible study program for girls or women.

Thematic Activities

Each chapter contains several fully developed activities, most of which are designed for a time frame of 30 to 60 minutes. Chapters 2 through 7 contain two sections of thematic activities. The first thematic section focuses on the stories of the biblical women themselves, engaging the girls in creative ways of reading the texts and discovering details, interpretation, and commentary. The second thematic section offers material for making the stories relevant to issues of girls and women today.

Many of the activities include variations to support the learning process—ideas for doing further research, extending the activity, or modifying the procedure. These provide good follow-up for the thematic activities and allow for age-appropriate assimilation of the material. They might incorporate multigenerational interaction, service options, and social action.

Journal Reflection Activities

Journal reflection activities present questions that you may pose for the girls to think about, write about, or discuss. You may want to ask the girls each to keep a journal, and offer the reflection questions for individual writing.

Prayer Activities

Each chapter provides one or more prayer activities. Some of these are complete prayer services, others are simply prayers that you may use in any way you choose.

Resource Materials

All the chapters mention additional resources that address the people or themes covered. Resources published by Saint Mary’s Press may be ordered from the press’s Web site, www.smp.org, or by calling 800-533-8095.

Notes

Space is provided for you to jot down ideas, reminders, and additional resources as you use the chapter materials.

Handouts and Resources

All the necessary handouts and resources for a chapter are found at the end of the chapter.

Appendix

A comprehensive appendix presents summaries of the stories of over seventy women from the Bible. The summaries are told in the first person and conclude with cites to the Bible passages that inspired them. These summaries are used in activities throughout the manual.

The Bible and This Manual

Many of the activities in this manual suggest or require that the girls refer to a Bible, and some activities point the girls to passages that are found only in Catholic editions of the Scriptures. If possible, arrange to have a Catholic Bible for each girl. Check out *The Catholic Youth Bible*, from Saint Mary's Press. The *CYB* is designed to help young people pray, study, and live the Bible.

How to Get Started

Know the Material

Read each chapter or activity before you facilitate it, and use it creatively to meet the needs of your group of girls. In particular, look for ways to make the material most accessible for the girls' ages and for the size of the group. All the suggestions in this manual can be used with girls ages fourteen to nineteen. Some material is also appropriate for younger girls. Most of the activities in this manual are designed for groups of twenty to thirty young people, but can easily be adapted for any size group.

Know the Young People

When you have a wide variety of ages together, keep in mind the following differences between young adolescents and older teens:

- Young adolescents think in concrete terms and may not yet be capable of considering some topics abstractly.
- Young adolescents generally need more physical movement than older teens do. You can address that need through simple activities such as forming small groups for discussion and moving to different sides of the room to indicate the answer to a yes-or-no question.
- When they are working in small groups, young adolescents do better with an adult or older teen leading them. Groups of older teens can often be left alone for discussions.
- Older teens can usually handle open-ended assignments, but young adolescents respond better to writing exercises and discussions if they are led. For example, a junior in high school can be expected to write a letter to God about a certain topic on a blank sheet of notebook paper, whereas a sixth grader will be more focused with sentence-starters to guide different parts of the letter.

Create a Welcoming Environment

When possible, adapt the physical space to allow for open discussion and sharing. Consider moving chairs into a circle or inviting everyone to sit on the floor, at times. Groups that meet regularly may want to create a sacred space for ritual, using candles, fabric, music, favorite statues, sculptures, and images. Encourage the girls to be involved in creating that space and keeping it special.

Create a Safe Environment

When involving mothers, mentors, and other adults, provide written guidelines and even training in group leadership to help them understand the process and dynamics of the group. Consider the following guidelines for any adults who work with the group:

- To hear girls at the level necessary for meaningful interaction, adults need first to listen to themselves and to remember their own adolescence (Patricia H. Davis, *Beyond Nice*, p. 119).
- Girls need adults who will listen to them and affirm them even when their questions and actions seem uncomfortably challenging, and adults who will allow themselves to be questioned at deep levels (p. 120).
- Girls need confidentiality in any group that engages them in deep thinking, feeling, and sharing. Yet, they and the adults who lead them also need to know when to go beyond the resources of the group to seek help.
- Girls need adults who will help them be countercultural in ways that bring animation and love to their life, their community, and their world (p. 121).
- To help girls recognize and nurture their own relationship with God, communities of faith need to listen to and learn from them and take them seriously, with engaged hearts, minds, and souls (p. 121).

General Resources

Print—Primary

Winter, Miriam Therese. *WomanWisdom: A Feminist Lectionary and Psalter, Women of the Hebrew Scriptures, Part 1*, 1991; *WomanWitness: A Feminist Lectionary and Psalter, Women of the Hebrew Scriptures, Part 2*, 1992; *WomanWord: A Feminist Lectionary and Psalter, Women of the New Testament*, 1990. New York: Crossroad Publishing Co. This series is a complete anthology of stories and celebrations for every woman in the Bible, named and unnamed. Its three excellent reference books present context and lectionary readings that bring together the pieces of each woman's story found in the biblical texts. *WomanWitness* contains a helpful index of all the women in the three volumes.

Print—Secondary

Coffey, Kathy. *Hidden Women of the Gospels*. New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 1996.

Figuroa, Lynn. *Women Shaping Church History*. Orlando, FL: Harcourt Religion Publishers, 2001. One of the few books that address adolescent girls themselves, this begins with an introduction and three chapters that focus on the status and stories of biblical women and girls.

Meehan, Bridget Mary. *Praying with Women of the Bible*. Liguori, MO: Liguori/Triumph, 1998. This spirituality book highlights the stories of twenty women of the Bible along with discussion questions, prayer experiences, and reflections.

Nunnally-Cox, Janice. *Foremothers: Women of the Bible*. San Francisco: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1981. This text retells the stories of a number of women from the Old and New Testaments. It is out of print, but used copies may be available from Amazon.com.

Internet

www.greatwomen.org. National Women's Hall of Fame. 315-568-8060. This site includes an extensive collection of short biographies of women who have made significant contributions in numerous fields, from science to religion.

www.nwhp.org. National Women's History Project. 707-636-2888. This site and its sponsoring organization are dedicated to recognizing the accomplishments of women by providing information and educational material and programs.

www.textweek.com. The Text This Week. This site offers a concordance of visual art that depicts biblical women by name.

Your Comments or Suggestions

Saint Mary's Press wants to know your reactions to the strategies in the Voices series. We are also interested in new strategies for use with adolescent girls. If you have a comment or suggestion, please write the editor, Laurie Delgatto, at 702 Terrace Heights, Winona, MN 55987-1320; call the editor at our toll-free number, 800-533-8095; or e-mail the editor at ldelgatto@smp.org. Your ideas will help improve future editions of these manuals.



Hearing the Voices of Biblical Women

Overview

This chapter presents the basics of biblical scholarship from the perspectives of both traditional scholars and recent women scholars. Because biblical storytelling and interpretation have generally been the responsibility of men, the stories of women in the Scriptures may speak to us in new ways when considered from women's points of view. Although we females in Western society enjoy greater equality and privilege than our biblical sisters, it is important for us to hear about the wisdom of the ages, spoken and modeled by those who have gone before us. The activities in this chapter explore the culture and status of women during biblical times, and introduce the stories and names of our scriptural foremothers.

Thematic Activities

Understanding the Study of the Scriptures

Share the following background in your own words:

- ☉ Catholic scholars believe that the Bible is divine because it reveals to us not only God but also God's plan. However, it is also a human work that reflects the knowledge, culture, and biases of its authors. It is through the authors' words that the Bible reveals God's nature, God's saving work in the world (often called salvation history), and God's purpose for humanity (Brian Singer-Towns, ed., *The Catholic Youth Bible*, in the section "How to Read and Study the Bible"). Because the biblical word has passed through filters and frameworks of cultures, it reflects the social, political, and theological conditions of various voices living at various times. The Bible is not solely God's perspective, but also that of priests, prophets, and ordinary people, especially those who prepared its texts and whose perspectives are essentially male (Miriam Therese Winter, *WomanWisdom*, p. ix).

- ☉ Today, women theologians and scholars are studying the Scriptures with different lenses and filters. They are resurrecting the stories of women and asking questions about those women’s lives and contributions to salvation history. Most of all, they are attempting to see God’s saving plan through the eyes of women, with the underlying principle that women are created in the image of God, in equality with men.

The Oral Tradition of the Bible

Focusing on the stories of Creation is a good way to understand the oral tradition of the Bible.

1. Call a volunteer to relate briefly what she knows about how the world and human beings were created. Make concise notes of her account on the board, or have someone else do so. Ask the rest of the girls if they have anything to add to her account, and include their responses in the notes.
2. Divide everyone into small groups of four or five. Assign half the groups to read Gen. 1:1—2:4, and the other half to read Gen. 2:5–25. Ask each group to outline the events of its Creation narrative, paying special attention to the way that God created human beings.
3. Invite the girls to return to the large group and report what they learned about Creation from the story that they read. Note key features of the two accounts on the board, lining up the stories in parallel columns. Follow up with questions like these:
 - ☉ Which story relates God’s creation of the world in seven days?
 - ☉ Which story emphasizes the goodness of all creation?
 - ☉ Which story tells that God created humans in God’s image?
 - ☉ In which story does God create man and woman together?
 - ☉ How does the second story differ from the first in its portrayal of the creation of the world and the creation of human beings?
 - ☉ Which story is most familiar to you?
 - ☉ Is it important to hear both stories? Why or why not?
 - ☉ Why are the stories so different?
 - ☉ What does each story imply about the relationship between men and women?
4. Depending on how much the group knows about biblical scholarship, use one or all of the following options to explain the mythic genre of the Creation stories. Include these points when you present the option or options:
 - ☉ Some people believe that the events of the stories happened exactly as they are related, that we are to take them literally. Catholics and most Protestants, however, believe that the stories were created to help explain the origins of the world.
 - ☉ “Genesis was written not as . . . science . . . but as symbolic stories, sometimes called mythic stories, that convey great moral and spiritual truths” (Brian Singer-Towns, ed., *The Catholic Youth Bible*, in the article “Literary Genres,” near Genesis 1.1—2.4).

- ☉ There is at work in the universe a higher power or force, whom we name God, who created all things good, in harmony with one another, including human beings, male and female, who are made in God’s image.
- *Option 1.* To explain the differences in the Genesis stories, take four pieces of yarn, cord, or ribbon, in four different colors, and tie them together at one end. On the board, write the colors of the yarn, and next to each color, assign a different one of these four writers of the Scriptures: Y (the Yahwist), E (the Eloist), P (the Priest), and D (the Deuteronomist). Explain that the dominant theory held by Jewish, Protestant, and Catholic scholars is that the first five books of the Bible (the Pentateuch) are actually the combined work of these four sources. The stories that came to be in the Bible are actually blended together. To illustrate this point, weave the four colored pieces of yarn together. Comment that as a result, what we hear or remember looks like a braid, and that this explanation accounts for the differences we find in the Genesis stories.
 - *Option 2.* To illustrate the oral tradition of the Scriptures, the fact that its stories were told for thousands of years before they were written down, use a modified game of telephone. Whisper to one girl a fairly complex sentence that has no particular meaning for the girls, and ask that girl to whisper it to the next, and so on, until the sentence has gone around the entire group. Insist that each girl whisper the sentence only once and not repeat any part of it. Then ask the last girl to relay what she heard, which will probably be different from the original.

Try the game again, but this time, give the first girl a message with some precise meaning for the group—for example, “If we get this message right, there will be no homework tonight” or “Tickets for the upcoming [name a popular group] concert go on sale tomorrow at 4:00 p.m.” Allow the girls to repeat the message to the receiver if necessary. Point out that this version of the game shows how the essentials of a meaningful story get transmitted even if the details change.

(This option is adapted from Christine Schmertz Navarro et al., *Teaching Activities Manual for “The Catholic Youth Bible,”* p. 28.)
 - *Option 3.* To show how people experience things differently, tell the group that they are going to play reporters who are covering the details of a recent school or community event. Choose an event in which at least some of the girls played different roles, and invite several of those girls to act as interview subjects for the reporters. For example, if there was a big basketball game last night, ask for someone who played in the game, someone who watched from the stands, someone who was a cheerleader, and someone who was a scorekeeper. Send the subjects out of the room, and then call them back one at a time to give a 2-minute account of the event. Direct the reporters to take notes. After all the volunteers have told their stories, compare the reporters’ different accounts. Point out that people who were at the same event or experience can have many different perspectives, and that people who hear accounts of that event or experience can also have many perspectives.
 - *Option 4.* To illustrate how gender affects perspective, choose a recent sporting or community or school event, and have the girls interview an equal number of boys and girls about it. See if there are any noticeable differences. Or ask the girls to

interview their fathers and mothers or their grandfathers and grandmothers, about a significant family event, such as the couple's own wedding, the birth of a child, or a memorable Thanksgiving dinner. See if the men report the event differently than the women, and discuss any surprises the girls find in the storytelling.

5. Make the following points in your own words:
 - ☉ Many biblical scholars today are studying the Scriptures from different perspectives, including the perspective of women. These scholars are not changing the stories, but rediscovering them and retelling them with different emphases. It is sometimes helpful to use imagination to fill in details that we don't know or to get inside the minds of biblical women to discover their true voices; however, it is also important to stay true to the biblical texts.

Journal Reflection

- ☉ How do you think the world would have been different if the second story of Creation had never been included in the Bible?
- ☉ Read the story of Adam and Eve in Genesis, chapter 3. Retell the story in your own words from Eve's perspective.

Facts of Life for Biblical Women

Preparation

- It will be helpful to have a dictionary of the Bible, a concordance, or another resource with an index of biblical names. One good resource is *Dictionary of the Bible*, by John L. McKenzie (New York: Simon and Schuster, Touchstone, 1995).
 - Gather markers in two colors, one of each color for every three to five girls.
1. If the group is large, divide it into smaller groups of three to five. Provide a large sheet of newsprint and two different-colored markers for each group. Ask for one volunteer who has a watch that displays seconds, to be timekeeper for everyone.

2. Tell the girls that they have exactly 3½ minutes to brainstorm in their small groups, listing as many people from the Bible as they remember. The timekeeper can signal the beginning and end of the time period in any way she chooses.

When time is called, invite each group to come forward and post its list for everyone to see. Count to see which group has the most legitimate names. Cross out any names that are not in the Bible, referencing the *Dictionary of the Bible*, a concordance, or another resource. Ask each group to now count how many of its names are male and how many female, and to write the numbers on their newsprint using different-colored markers (designate one color for the number of male names, the other color for the number of female names).

3. On a clean sheet of newsprint or on the board, make a master list of all the female names from the groups' lists. Place a check mark next to any woman's name that is mentioned more than once.

4. On a final clean sheet of newsprint or on the board, make a Top 10 list of familiar biblical women. Then tally the numbers of male and female names found by all the groups, and write the two totals on a clean sheet of newsprint or on the board. If the male names are greater in number, ask the girls questions like these:

- ☉ In Bible history, why are men more familiar than women?
- ☉ Is that also true in world history?
- ☉ What about literature, music, and art? Can you name as many famous women as men in those fields?

Also, pose questions like these:

- ☉ The status of women has changed more in the last hundred years than in all the centuries of humankind that preceded them. In what ways has it changed?
- ☉ What can women do today that they could not do back in biblical times?

5. Using the girls' ideas as a springboard, make the following points about the lifestyles of biblical women:

- ☉ Biblical women were valued for their beauty and their ability to bear children, especially male heirs. If a woman was unable to conceive, her status in the community was reduced.
- ☉ "The woman's primary responsibility was to respect and obey her husband" (Regina A. Coll, *Christianity and Feminism in Conversation*, p. 140).
- ☉ Women were considered unclean during menstruation, after sexual intercourse, and after childbirth. During those periods, men could not touch women or objects that had been touched by women. Men were considered unclean after sexual intercourse. Ritual purification was necessary before unclean men or women could participate in the religious practices of the community.
- ☉ Male children were considered more valuable than female children. If a woman gave birth to a boy, she had to undergo seven days of ritual purification. If she gave birth to a girl, she was considered doubly unclean and required fourteen days of purification (Lev. 12:2,5).
- ☉ Females had no property rights. A woman could not own or inherit land or other property. Sons and brothers inherited from the father.
- ☉ Females were in fact considered property. Consider the last of the Ten Commandments: "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor" (Exod. 20:17). This statute covers the crime of rape, which was a sin not against the woman but against the master, husband, father, or son who owned her.
- ☉ Because women were considered the property of their father or another male, girls were often bartered away in a system of arranged marriages. Girls generally moved from the rule of their father to the rule of their husband.

- ☉ Women not only had secondary status compared with men but also often were not included in population figures. For example, the feeding of the four thousand described in the Gospel of Matthew (15:38) did not count women and children.
- ☉ Men had the right to divorce their wife for anything from burning dinner to committing adultery. Women were not allowed to divorce their husband (Christine Schenk, “Celebrating the Inclusive Jesus”).
- ☉ Without a father, husband, or son, a woman would find it difficult, if not impossible, to survive. In fact, engaging in prostitution was one of the few ways that widows and unmarried women without an extended family could support themselves.
- ☉ A woman’s roles and power were relegated to the private, family sphere. There, she could attain respect and exert influence. Often, she was the dominant figure in a marriage.
- ☉ In many parts of the world today, rules and restrictions like these still exist.

6. Ask the girls to think of ways some of these rules and restrictions continue to impact women in the Western world. Some examples: women traditionally take the name of their husband when they marry; fathers “give away” their daughters in marriage ceremonies; and home mortgages, credit cards, and memberships in organizations are often in the name of the husband.

Journal Reflection

- ☉ Imagine that you are living in biblical times. Using the first person, write a diary entry for a typical day in your imaginary life.

Listening to Their Voices

You can use the appendix, “Voices of Biblical Women,” to introduce women and girls in the Scriptures. That resource provides a short, colloquial, first-person narrative of every woman or girl mentioned in this manual, plus others mentioned in the Scriptures. Consider these options for using it:

- *Option 1.* Make a copy of the appendix. Cut the vignettes apart and place them in a basket or container. Ask the girls to sit in a circle. Give each girl the opportunity to draw one story from the basket, keeping it folded or facedown. When all the participants have a narrative, tell them to read their own silently and then make a choice to keep it, put it back in the basket and draw another one, or trade it for someone else’s. When the group is finished exchanging the slips, go around the circle and have everyone read theirs out loud. You might instruct the girls not to reveal the name of their subject, and invite everyone to guess the subject’s identity after each reading. If you use this variation, caution the girls to keep quiet if they know the subject’s identity because the narrative is one they read and rejected.
- *Option 2.* Make a copy of the appendix, then delete the names of the women. Cut the stories apart, and direct the girls each to draw one and read it silently. Give everyone the option of keeping their story, drawing a different story, or trading their

story for someone else’s. Once the girls have all settled on a narrative that interests them, instruct them to study it and determine the identity of the woman described. Invite the girls to share their conclusions.

- *Option 3.* Use option 1 or 2, or another method, to distribute and introduce the women’s stories. Once the girls each know the identity of their woman, encourage them to find out more about her. Provide Bibles and additional print resources about women in the Bible, and also encourage the girls to explore Internet and video resources (see the “General Resources” section in the introduction to this manual for some suggestions). The results could take the form of individual research projects or collaborative projects for small groups.

Variation 1. Hold a fashion show featuring biblical woman. Invite the girls to come dressed in clothing representative of selected women and to tell the women’s stories in the women’s voices. If this activity is successful, consider bringing the fashion show to other groups in the school or parish, including other classes, Girl Scout troops, and women’s clubs or organizations. You might use the show as a fundraiser.

For a fee, a group of women will provide costumes, scripts, and suggestions for music, food, programs, and stage sets to help you host a celebration of biblical women. For more information about their Celebration of Biblical Women program, contact Presbyterian Kirk of the Hills at thekirk@artelco.com or 501-884-3304.

Variation 2. Encourage groups of girls to present a dramatic dialogue in which several women tell their stories to one another.

Variation 3. Use a show-and-tell format: Ask each girl to bring in an object that represents the woman she selected and to explain how it relates to the story of the woman.

Variation 4. Create or use a timeline of the Bible. The timeline on pages 1542 to 1545 of *The Catholic Youth Bible*, edited by Brian Singer-Towns (Winona, MN: Saint Mary’s Press, 2000), is a good sample. Refer to biblical commentaries and other sources to pinpoint the times in which individual women lived, and use self-stick notes to place the women’s names in their appropriate places on the timeline.

Variation 5. Design a PowerPoint or slide presentation that tells more about each woman or about groups of women. Use graphics, clip art, and other artwork to illustrate the text.

Variation 6. Use a library or the Internet to find music, paintings, sculptures, and other artwork about each woman. This may be possible only for some of the more famous women, such as Mary of Nazareth, Ruth and Naomi, Judith, and Mary of Magdala. Urge the girls to critique the artwork based on what they have discovered about the subject’s story. Check out The Text This Week’s art concordance at www.textweek.com for resources.

Variation 7. Instruct the girls each to create a children’s book that tells the story of their woman. Show the girls children’s books about people in the Bible as examples. Discuss why few women are featured in existing Bible storybooks and series.

Variation 8. Help the girls design a game like *Trivial Pursuit* or *Jeopardy*, using little-known facts about women in the Bible. Categories could include barren women, arranged marriages, women in Jesus’ life, powerful women, forgotten women, sisters, and women who weren’t believed.

Variation 9. Use the appendix as a study guide, quizzing or testing the group after completing activities in this chapter or in the other chapters of this manual.

Variation 10. Distribute handout 1, “‘Forgotten Women of the Old Testament’ Crossword Puzzle,” and handout 2, “‘Who Is This Woman?’ Scrambled-Word Puzzle.” Direct the girls to complete the handouts individually or in pairs or groups. When they are done, provide and discuss the correct answers.

Handout 1 answer key

| Across | Down |
|---------------|--------------|
| 2. Bilbah | 1. Tamar |
| 3. Jochebed | 2. Bathsheba |
| 6. Zipporah | 4. Dinah |
| 7. Asenath | 5. Keturah |
| 8. Michal | 6. Zilpah |
| 10. Hagar | 8. Merab |
| 11. Esther | 9. Leah |
| 12. Jezebel | |

Handout 2 answer key

| | |
|-------------|---------------|
| 1. Tamar | 15. Ruth |
| 2. Dinah | 16. Martha |
| 3. Hagar | 17. Mary |
| 4. Jezebel | 18. Miriam |
| 5. Judith | 19. Bathsheba |
| 6. Zipporah | 20. Michal |
| 7. Leah | 21. Elizabeth |
| 8. Rachel | 22. Shiphrah |
| 9. Esther | 23. Puah |
| 10. Anna | 24. Priscilla |
| 11. Lydia | 25. Phoebe |
| 12. Tabitha | 26. Eve |
| 13. Salome | 27. Rebekah |
| 14. Naomi | 28. Sarah |

Prayer: “Broken Silence”

O women whose voices have never been heard:

.....

We grieve for the wisdom which has been lost.

O women whose wisdom has not been heeded:

We desire that our time will be different and

We commit ourselves now to listen.

We will turn again to search out the scriptures.

We will look for the clues of your lives in the margins of history’s pages.

We will seek out your words in secret places.

We will dig for your treasure hidden deep in the dark.

For we know our need of your wisdom.

We yearn for the restoration of what has been lost.

Our time is hungry for your forgotten stories,

For the ancient art of women’s wisdom

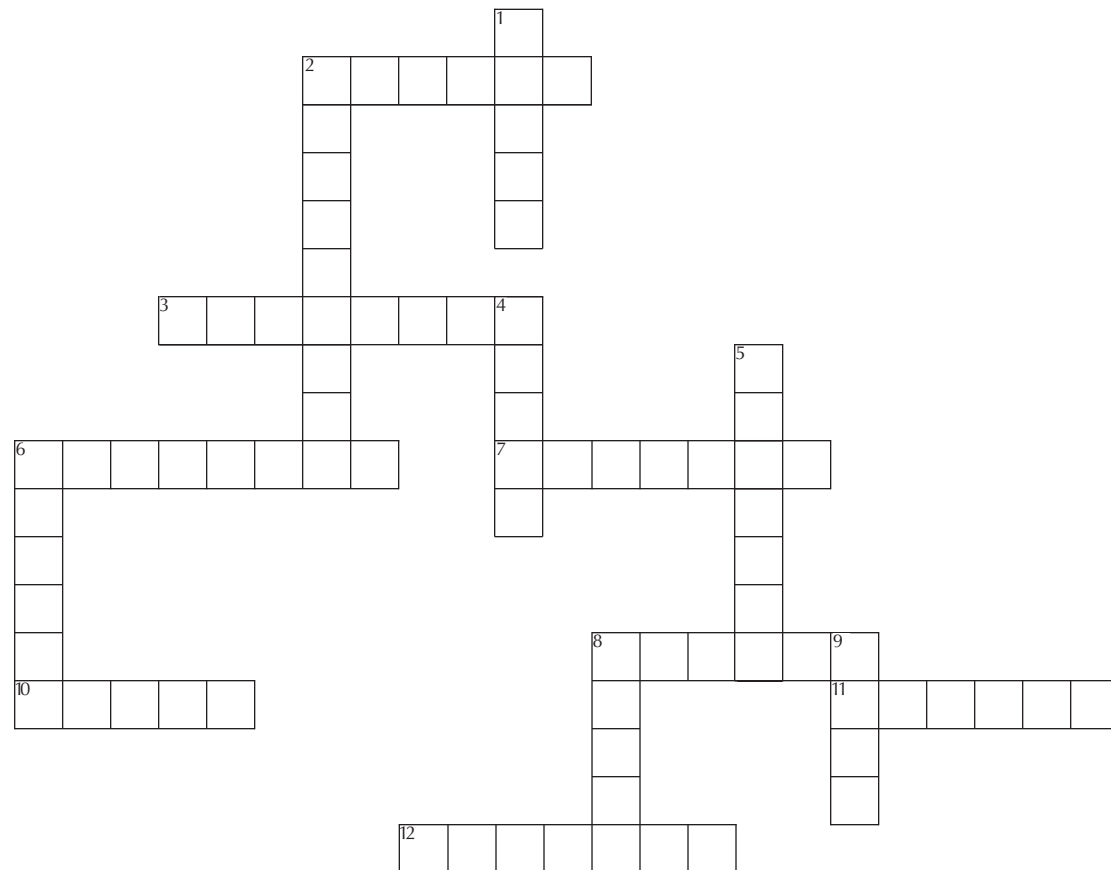
Which will heal our hurt and may yet save our world.

(Nicola Slee)

Notes

Use this space to jot ideas, reminders, and additional resources.

“Forgotten Women of the Old Testament” Crossword Puzzle



Across

- 2. Rachel’s maid (Genesis 30:4)
- 3. Moses’ mother (Exodus 6:20)
- 6. Moses’ wife (Exodus 2:21)
- 7. the mother of Joseph’s sons Manasseh and Ephraim (Genesis 41:50–52)
- 8. David’s first wife (1 Samuel 18:27)
- 10. Sarai’s slave girl (Genesis 16:1)
- 11. the queen of Persia who delivered the Jewish people (the Old Testament book that follows Judith)
- 12. a Sidonian princess and Ahab’s wife (1 Kings 16:31)

Down

- 1. Judah’s daughter-in-law (Genesis 38:6)
- 2. Solomon’s mother (2 Samuel 12:24)
- 4. Leah and Jacob’s daughter (Genesis 34:1)
- 5. Abraham’s second wife (Genesis 25:1)
- 6. Leah’s maid (Genesis 30:9)
- 8. Saul’s oldest daughter (1 Samuel 18:17)
- 9. Laban’s oldest daughter (Genesis 29:16)

“Who Is This Woman?” Scrambled-Word Puzzle

Unscramble the names of biblical women below. If you know a woman’s story, write a short statement by her unscrambled name.

| Scrambled names | Unscrambled names | Life stories |
|-----------------------|-------------------|--------------|
| 1. t m r a a | _____ | |
| 2. h a n d i | _____ | |
| 3. a a r g h | _____ | |
| 4. l e e e z b j | _____ | |
| 5. u d t h i j | _____ | |
| 6. h z a i p r o p | _____ | |
| 7. h a l e | _____ | |
| 8. r l e a c h | _____ | |
| 9. r e s e h t | _____ | |
| 10. n n a a | _____ | |
| 11. a i y d l | _____ | |
| 12. i t b h a t a | _____ | |
| 13. e o a m s l | _____ | |
| 14. i o n a m | _____ | |
| 15. h r t u | _____ | |
| 16. m r h a a t | _____ | |
| 17. a y m r | _____ | |
| 18. m a i i r m | _____ | |
| 19. b h a a b h s e t | _____ | |
| 20. l i c h a m | _____ | |
| 21. h e a i e l z b t | _____ | |
| 22. h h h i p r a s | _____ | |
| 23. h u a p | _____ | |
| 24. c l a l i p s r i | _____ | |
| 25. h e e b o p | _____ | |
| 26. e e v | _____ | |
| 27. h e b e r k a | _____ | |
| 28. r a s h a | _____ | |