



SUNDAY SCHOOL SIMPLIFIED

**THE GOSPEL
ACCORDING
— TO THE —
WOMEN**

Vol. 02

A SIX LESSON PACKET

A LETTER FROM THE CANDLER FOUNDRY

Dear Friend,

Throughout Scripture, women proclaim God's good news through their words, their courage, and their lives. They pray with honesty, preserve life in the face of violence, challenge injustice, demand recognition, offer hospitality, and bear witness to God's healing and provision.

The Gospel According to the Women invites us to spend time with six of these stories - Hannah, the two daughters of Mark 5, Shiphrah and Puah, the daughters of Zelophehad, Tamar, and the widow of Zarephath. Each offers a distinct witness to the character and work of God. Together, they remind us that God hears our cries, cares for us in our vulnerability, restores life, and works through human courage to bring justice and hope into the world.

We have designed these lessons to be easy-to-use and adaptable to different settings. You can study on your own or gather with a group, and with or without a discussion leader.

We're glad you are here. May these women's stories deepen your understanding of Scripture and help you hear God's good news in a new way.

Grace and peace,

THE CANDLER FOUNDRY

IN THIS PACKET

1 Hannah

1 SAMUEL 1

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5 Tamar

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6 The Widow of Zarephath

1 KINGS 17

THE RHYTHM OF EACH LESSON

1

Open with prayer.

2

Read the passage out loud as a group.

3

Watch the provided 3 Minute Bible video.

4

Talk through the questions.

5

Close with prayer.

LESSON ONE

HANNAH

1 Samuel 1:1–20

OPENING PRAYER

Gracious God, quiet our minds as we read the story of Hannah. Open our ears to hear what the Holy Spirit is saying to us through these ancient words. Show us what this story reveals about you, and the lives you call us to lead. In the name of your Son Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

READ THE SCRIPTURE

1 Samuel 1:1–20

New Revised Standard Version, Updated Edition

[Read at Bible Gateway \(NRSVUE\)](#) — or scan the code



WATCH THE 3 MINUTE BIBLE

Grace: The Story of Hannah

3 Minute Bible video

vimeo.com/1214331973

[Scan the code, or type the link above](#)



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1 How does the narrator describe Hannah's relationship with her family, including her husband Elkanah and his other wife Peninnah? To what extent does Hannah's childless state inform those relationships?

2 With no male offspring to support her, Hannah faced a potentially ruinous eventuality of becoming a childless widow – one of the most vulnerable members of society. Further, in the patriarchal setting of this narrative, Hannah's prestige was tied to her fertility. How does this context inform Hannah's prayers and concerns?

3 Hannah vows to give away the very son she is begging for back to God. In practice, this meant her son would not be raised at home by Hannah. Why do you think Hannah made this promise, and what do you make of it?

4 As the video explains, Hannah's infertility was understood as God's withholding of pregnancy, such that the "cure" for it was prayer. Indeed, God hears Hannah's prayer – she eventually bears five more children (1 Sam. 2:21). How have Hannah's social prospects changed as a result of her childbearing? What is the narrator communicating about the nature of God's concern for our real-world problems?

5 Hannah prays "out of [her] great anxiety and vexation" – she's so distressed that the priest Eli mistakenly believes her to be drunk. When you are in real grief, what does your own praying tend to look like?

CLOSING PRAYER

Loving God, you are the one who meets us exactly where we are – in our longing, grief, and hope. Give us the courage to bring our whole selves before you. Give us compassion for ourselves and for others. In the name of your Son Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

LESSON TWO

THE TWO DAUGHTERS

Mark 5:21–43

OPENING PRAYER

God of compassion, still our hearts as we hear the stories of these two daughters. Help us sit with the fear, suffering, faith, and hope. Through the Holy Spirit, show us what this passage reveals about your healing love and the life you call us to share. In the name of your Son Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

READ THE SCRIPTURE

Mark 5:21–43

New Revised Standard Version, Updated Edition

[Read at Bible Gateway \(NRSVUE\)](#) — or scan the code



WATCH THE 3 MINUTE BIBLE

What is a Markan sandwich?

3 Minute Bible video

vimeo.com/1210281687

[Scan the code, or type the link above](#)



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 Mark is famously sparse with words, telling the reader only the necessary information without much descriptive detail. Take a few minutes and imagine the details that Mark omitted. What sights, smells, and sounds do you imagine as you read? What tones of voice were used by each person as they spoke?
- 2 What context does Mark give about the bleeding woman? Aside from her physical condition, how does Mark indicate the other ways she suffers?
- 3 Being on the social fringes as she was, the bleeding woman was especially bold in struggling through the crowd to touch Jesus. What emotions do you imagine she feels as she reaches for Jesus's cloak?
- 4 Jesus gives life to both the woman and the girl, but in very different contexts. What does restoration and healing look like for each of them?
- 5 The bleeding woman's lowly social status contrasts with that of Jairus – a prominent synagogue leader. Even so, he begs at Jesus's feet. In what ways does this narrative show Jesus's power to overcome boundaries – including social boundaries and death itself?
- 6 How does this narrative reveal a Jesus who is divine but also tender and human?

CLOSING PRAYER

God of love, you call each of us as your beloved children. No person is beyond your notice or care. Help us to follow in the way of Jesus, having tender hearts and compassion for our neighbors. In the name of your Son Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

LESSON THREE

SHIPHRAH & PUAH

Exodus 1:8–22

OPENING PRAYER

God of courage, quiet our hearts as we hear the story of Shiphrah and Puah. Open our eyes to the choices they made in the face of fear and power. Through the Holy Spirit, help us discern what is right and trust that you have equipped us to act with wisdom and faith. In the name of your Son Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

READ THE SCRIPTURE

Exodus 1:8–22

New Revised Standard Version, Updated Edition

[Read at Bible Gateway \(NRSVUE\)](#) — or scan the code



WATCH THE 3 MINUTE BIBLE

Background to the Exodus

3 Minute Bible video

vimeo.com/1214331923

[Scan the code, or type the link above](#)



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1 The story never tells us how Shiprah and Puah initially responded to Pharaoh's command. The narrative doesn't tell us how they deliberated between themselves or formed a plan. Using your imagination, help fill in these narrative gaps. What might the women have said to Pharaoh and one another? To the other midwives in their community, and to expectant Hebrew mothers?

2 Scholars debate whether Shiprah and Puah were Hebrew midwives or non-Hebrew midwives who served Hebrew women. How does the story change if they were protecting people outside their own community? What risks did they face for their defiance? What might have led them to take that risk?

3 Pharaoh orders the midwives to kill the boys but lets the girls live, apparently assuming that girls pose no threat to him. Yet women repeatedly defeat his plan. What does Pharaoh fail to understand about where true power resides?

4 Shiprah and Puah receive no instructions from God – there's no burning bush, no voice from above – and yet they obey God's will. What does this tell us about our human capacity to discern God's call in our lives, even when it seems God hasn't spoken?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (CONT.)

- 5 Looking back, it's easy for us to see Pharaoh's command as evil, and the midwives' acts as faithful disobedience. In our own lives, it's often harder to discern where we are called to disobey on moral or ethical grounds. Have you ever faced a choice between your conscience and following an authority? How did you respond?

CLOSING PRAYER

Faithful God, you give us courage to choose what is right, even when it comes at a cost. Give us wisdom to recognize injustice, strength to resist it, and trust that even small acts of faithfulness can help bring life and hope. In the name of your Son Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

LESSON FOUR

DAUGHTERS OF ZELOPHEHAD

Numbers 26:52–56; 27:1–11

OPENING PRAYER

Gracious God, gather our attention as we turn to Scripture. We ask that you deepen our understanding of who you are and how you call us to live together. By your Spirit, give us curiosity, wisdom, and openness to hear something new. In the name of your Son Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

READ THE SCRIPTURE

Numbers 26:52–56; 27:1–11

New Revised Standard Version, Updated Edition

[Read at Bible Gateway \(NRSVUE\)](#) — or scan the code



WATCH THE 3 MINUTE BIBLE

The Daughters of Zelophehad

3 Minute Bible video

vimeo.com/1214332026

[Scan the code, or type the link above](#)



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 As shown in the reading, the Israelites intended to allocate the promised land among the various families. Allocating the land equitably was essential, as families relied heavily on food their own land produced. Land was passed patrilineally, meaning through male heirs. Keeping this in mind, what's at stake for the daughters in the wake of their father's death, and how are they now uniquely vulnerable?
- 2 How does the narrator build dramatic tension as the daughters approach Moses? What makes their legal claim, and the manner in which they present it, particularly bold?
- 3 How is the issue at hand relevant beyond the daughters themselves? How does the outcome affect their descendants? How does it affect other men without sons, and their daughters? How does it affect the community at large?
- 4 What is Moses's role in resolving the question the daughters pose? Who actually owns and controls the land and determines its use, and ultimately creates the laws?
- 5 As modern readers, how does the outcome of this story inform our responsibility to care for the land and the vulnerable members of our communities? How does the narrative suggest that fulfilling these responsibilities is a matter of being faithful and obedient to God?

CLOSING PRAYER

Steadfast God, you hear the voices of those who ask to be seen and treated justly. Give us courage to speak, humility to listen, and wisdom to change what causes harm. Help us care for the gifts you have entrusted to us. In the name of your Son Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

LESSON FIVE

TAMAR

Genesis 38:6–26

OPENING PRAYER

God of love, open our hearts and minds as we turn to the tangled story of Tamar. We ask that you meet us in what is uncomfortable and teach us where you are at work. Through the Holy Spirit, give us compassion to hear this passage well. In the name of your Son Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

READ THE SCRIPTURE

Genesis 38:6–26

New Revised Standard Version, Updated Edition

[Read at Bible Gateway \(NRSVUE\)](#) — or scan the code



WATCH THE 3 MINUTE BIBLE

Tamar: Righteousness When the System Fails

3 Minute Bible video

vimeo.com/1214332107

[Scan the code, or type the link above](#)



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1** In the social setting of this story, childless widows were among the community's most vulnerable members, as male offspring helped ensure a woman's security. How do these factors help us, as modern readers, understand the strange and disturbing aspects of this story? What motivates Tamar, and what is she fighting for?

- 2** Who are the villains and protagonists in this story? Is the narrator inviting us to perceive Tamar's behavior as problematic, heroic, or both? What aspects of the narrative prompt your responses?

- 3** A recurring Old Testament motif is the courageous underdog who defeats a more powerful opponent using trickery. (Bonus points if you can think of any other examples!) What narrative clues establish Judah as powerful in this story? Why are stories of trickery so resonant across time?

- 4** Onan's behavior so displeased God that God "put him to death." Remembering the context from question 1, why was Onan's behavior so displeasing? (See Deut. 25:5–10 for additional context.) What does God's judgment of Onan suggest about God's concern for Tamar, and for the socially vulnerable more generally?

- 5** Do you feel comfortable finding theological meaning in biblical stories that are troublesome to our modern eyes and ears? Have you ever found "good news" in a biblical text that you initially found challenging?

CLOSING PRAYER

God of mercy, you are faithful to us when things get messy and complicated. Send us out with courage, knowing that you are at work in all of the unfinished places of our lives. Help us to remain faithful to you and each other. In the name of your Son Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

LESSON SIX

THE WIDOW OF ZAREPHATH

1 Kings 17:1–24

OPENING PRAYER

God of provision, you provide for us in our places of scarcity and fear. As we turn to Scripture, help us notice your everlasting faithfulness as you work through unlikely people. In the name of your Son Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

READ THE SCRIPTURE

1 Kings 17:1–24

New Revised Standard Version, Updated Edition

[Read at Bible Gateway \(NRSVUE\)](#) — or scan the code



WATCH THE 3 MINUTE BIBLE

The Widow of Zarephath

3 Minute Bible video

vimeo.com/1219007254

[Scan the code, or type the link above](#)



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- In verse 9, God says, “I have commanded a widow there to feed you,” even as the widow seems unaware of any command from God. Compare this with
- 1** God’s statement about commanding the ravens in verse 4. What do these two passages suggest about how God works through creation? Can we participate in God’s purposes without realizing it?
 - 2** Elijah, one of the most prominent figures in the Old Testament, is called to speak God's word to kings. Yet God chooses a widow, someone with little social power and almost no food, to sustain him. What do you make of God placing Elijah's survival in her hands?
 - 3** God sends Elijah outside Israel to Zarephath – a center of Baal worship. The widow who lives there is a foreigner, yet she demonstrates faith in Israel's God. What might it mean that Elijah experiences God's power and provision through a foreigner? How does the narrator weigh the importance of faith against ethnic identity? What lessons might the original Israelite readers have been meant to learn from this passage?
 - 4** As Dr. Arnold explains in the video, extending hospitality was a source of honor in ancient Israel. God could have provided for Elijah without involving the widow. Instead, God instructs Elijah to enter the widow's home, where she becomes his host. How does this address the widow's own social needs?
 - 5** Have you ever needed to rely on someone more vulnerable, or less powerful, than you for help or hospitality? How can giving or accepting hospitality be an act of grace?

CLOSING PRAYER

Generous God, you are gracious in providing for us when our jars are empty. You work through our neighbors and strangers alike. Help us to notice your goodness, welcome the stranger, and trust in your provision. In the name of your Son Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Extra viewing, artwork, and reading for classes that want to go deeper.

What is khanun?

Lesson 1 · Hannah · 3 Minute Bible

vimeo.com/1221254097

[Scan the code, or type the link above](#)



Hannah before Eli the High Priest

Lesson 1 · Hannah · Malnazar · Getty Museum (Google Art Project)

[Scan the code to view the artwork](#)



The Infant Samuel Brought by Hannah to Eli

Lesson 1 · Hannah · Gerbrand van den Eeckhout · Ashmolean Museum

[Scan the code to view the artwork](#)



Mark's Secret Messiah

Lesson 2 · Two Daughters · 3 Minute Bible

vimeo.com/1210281410

[Scan the code, or type the link above](#)



What is pistis?

Lesson 2 · Two Daughters · 3 Minute Bible

vimeo.com/1219313246

[Scan the code, or type the link above](#)



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES (CONT.)

The Woman with an Issue of Blood

Lesson 2 · Two Daughters · James Tissot · Brooklyn Museum

[Scan the code to view the artwork](#)



The Daughter of Jairus

Lesson 2 · Two Daughters · James Tissot · Brooklyn Museum

[Scan the code to view the artwork](#)



Healing of the Daughter of Jairus

Lesson 2 · Two Daughters · JESUS MAFA · Vanderbilt (ACT)

[Scan the code to view the artwork](#)



What is Torah?

Lesson 3 · Shiphrah & Puah · 3 Minute Bible
vimeo.com/1219255056

[Scan the code, or type the link above](#)



Pharaoh and the Midwives

Lesson 3 · Shiphrah & Puah · James Tissot · The Jewish Museum, NY

[Scan the code to view the artwork](#)



Infancy of Moses (Shiphrah, Puah, Jochebed, Miriam & Pharaoh)

Lesson 3 · Shiphrah & Puah · Dura-Europos Synagogue · Vanderbilt (ACT)

[Scan the code to view the artwork](#)



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES (CONT.)

What is mishpat?

Lesson 4 · Zelophehad · 3 Minute Bible

vimeo.com/1219343599

[Scan the code, or type the link above](#)



The Daughters of Zelophehad

Lesson 4 · Zelophehad · after F. R. Pickersgill · Dalziels' Bible Gall

[Scan the code to view the artwork](#)



Are Old Testament figures meant to be models of faithfulness

Lesson 5 · Tamar · 3 Minute Bible

vimeo.com/1219254921

[Scan the code, or type the link above](#)



Judah and Tamar

Lesson 5 · Tamar · Ferdinand Bol · Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

[Scan the code to view the artwork](#)



Judah and Tamar

Lesson 5 · Tamar · Pieter Lastman · The Met

[Scan the code to view the artwork](#)



Rahab Hides the Spies

Lesson 5 · Tamar · Another trickster narrative · Joshua 2 (NRSVUE)

[Open at Bible Gateway — or scan the code](#)



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES (CONT.)

Abram and Sarai before Pharaoh

Lesson 5 · Tamar · Another trickster narrative · Genesis 12:10–20 (NRS)

[Open at Bible Gateway](#) — or scan the code



Orphan, widow, stranger

Lesson 6 · The Widow · 3 Minute Bible

vimeo.com/1219255238

[Scan the code, or type the link above](#)



Elijah and the Widow of Zarephath

Lesson 6 · The Widow · North Netherlands stained glass · Cleveland Mus

[Scan the code to view the artwork](#)



Elijah and the Widow's Son

Lesson 6 · The Widow · after Ford Madox Brown · Dalziels' Bible Galler

[Scan the code to view the artwork](#)



The Prophet Elijah and the Widow of Zarephath

Lesson 6 · The Widow · Cornelis van Poelenburch · National Gallery of

[Scan the code to view the artwork](#)



Jesus Recalls the Widow of Zarephath

Lesson 6 · The Widow · Luke 4:25–26 · Jesus names her in his Nazareth

[Open at Bible Gateway](#) — or scan the code



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES (CONT.)

RECOMMENDED READING

Scholarly commentaries for every lesson in this packet.

Women's Bible Commentary, Third Edition (Revised and Updated)

Ed. Carol A. Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe & Jacqueline E. Lapsley · Westminster John Knox

ISBN 978-0-664-23707-3

[Amazon](#)

[Bookshop.org](#)

Theological Bible Commentary

Ed. Gail R. O'Day & David L. Petersen · Westminster John Knox

ISBN 978-0-664-22711-1

[Amazon](#)

The New Testament in Color: A Multiethnic Bible Commentary

Ed. Esau McCaulley, Janette H. Ok, Osvaldo Padilla & Amy L. B. Peeler · IVP Academic

ISBN 978-0-8308-1409-1

[Amazon](#)

[Bookshop.org](#)

The Old Testament: A Historical and Literary Introduction to the Hebrew Scriptures

Michael D. Coogan & Cynthia R. Chapman · Oxford University Press

ISBN 978-0-19-776817-4

[Amazon](#)

[Bookshop.org](#)

The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation

Luke Timothy Johnson & Todd C. Penner · Fortress Press

ISBN 978-0-8006-6361-2

[Amazon](#)

[Bookshop.org](#)



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making the best of biblical scholarship accessible to everyone.*

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